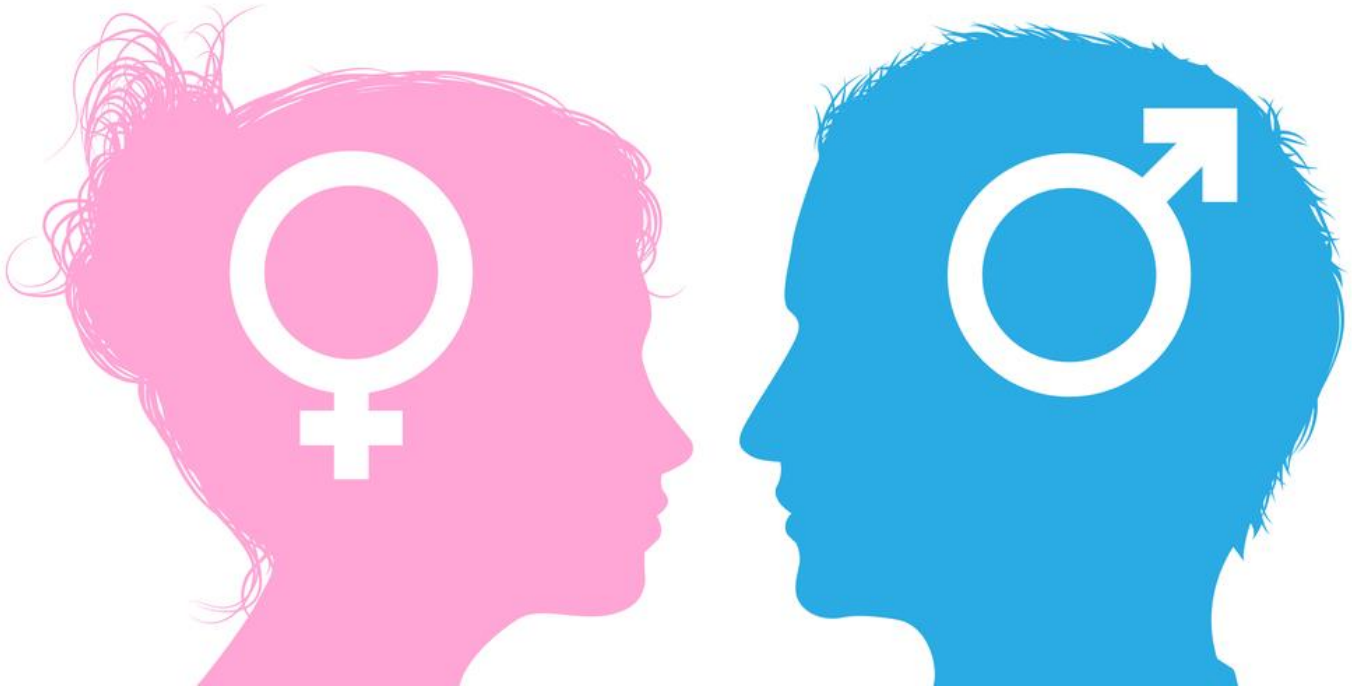


Development of Christian **Thought:** ***Gender, Society and Theology***



Summer Homework Task

Name: _____

Teacher: Miss Hamilton

Contents

Section 1:

The effects of changing views of gender and gender roles on Christian thought and practice, including:

- Christian teaching on the roles of men and women in the family and society
- Christian responses to contemporary secular views about the roles of men and women in the family and society

Section 2:

- The reinterpretation of God by feminist theologians, including:
- The teaching of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly on gender and its implications for the Christian idea of God

Section 1: Learning Intentions

Key Knowledge A01

Including reference to:

- Christian teaching on the roles of men and women in the family and society
 - Ephesians 5:22–33
 - Mulieris Dignitatem 18–19
- Christian responses to contemporary secular views about the roles of men and women in the family and society.
- The ways in which Christians have adapted and challenged changing attitudes to family and gender, including issues of:
 - motherhood/parenthood
 - different types of family

Key Skills (A02)

Learners should have the opportunity to discuss issues related to Christian responses to changing views of gender and gender roles, including:

- whether or not official Christian teaching should resist current secular views of gender
- whether or not secular views of gender equality have undermined Christian gender roles
- whether or not motherhood is liberating or restricting
- whether or not the idea of family is entirely culturally determined

Key Vocabulary

<i>Mulieris Dignitatem</i>	An Apostolic Letter written in 1988 by John Paul II entitled the 'Dignity of Women'
Gender	The state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones).
Society	The aggregate of people living together in a more or less ordered community
<i>Amoris Laetitia</i>	Translates as the 'The Joy of Love'. An Apostolic Exhortation written by Pope Francis in 2016
Sexual Identity	Sexual identity is how one thinks of oneself in terms of to whom one is romantically or sexually attracted.
Motherhood	The state of being a mother
Theokotos	Greek term meaning 'God bearer'. Roman Catholics use this term when referring to the Virgin Mary.
Letter to the Ephesians	The Epistle to the Ephesians, also called the Letter to the Ephesians and often shortened to Ephesians was written by St Paul and is the tenth book of the New Testament.
Cohabitation	Living together without being married
Conservative Protestants	Branch of Christianity that largely believes biblical theology is timeless and should resist secular changes in society
Liberal Protestants	Branch of Christianity that largely interpret the Bible as a sourcebook of experiences rather than direct revelation. They accept many secular insights regarding gender and equality

Gender and Society

Christian Teaching on the Roles of Men and Women in the Family and Society

Much of the Catholic teaching about the role of women and men is expressed in the 1988 Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* [The Dignity of Women]. In this document Pope John Paul II explains the Church's views on the nature and roles of men and women. It is a challenging letter, especially in current times where gender roles, and even the very idea of gender itself, have been questioned and explored in the idea of gender fluidity, transgenderism and gender neutrality.



In *Mulieris Dignitatem* John Paul expresses the traditional Christian idea that men and women are equal but that they have different roles to play in the Church and in society generally.

In the background is the belief that men and women are different in essence, and that this difference is intended from the very beginning of creation. In the first part of the letter the Pope says,

It is a question of understanding the reason for and the consequences of the Creator's decision that the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man. It is only by beginning from these bases, which make it possible to understand the greatness of the dignity and vocation of women that one is able to speak of their active presence in the Church and in society.

Here the Pope says that both men and women are persons/human beings, and he wants to argue that women have a special and dignified place in the Church and in God's plans, but this dignity as a woman can only be really exist if indeed there is a category called 'woman'. The Church argues that being a man and being a woman are real, created types.

This challenges those views which argue that being a man or being a woman is merely cultural – that, men and women are, in some sense, identical in essence. Many modern thinkers say that, although there are obvious anatomical differences between men and women, they are fundamentally the same and that, therefore, they can have the identical roles in society and the Church.

The Pope's teaching also challenges those who say that there are those who exist above or apart from gender (the genderless) or those who say that they are fluid between genders. This is obviously controversial in today's understanding – many feel that gender is too fixed and that that means that being a man or being woman is somehow imprisoning or a barrier to self-expression.

As we have seen, the Church thinks that sexual identity is created, and is a gift from God. However, the Church also believes that although the basic categories (male and female) are a part of creation (and, in one sense, fixed) there is still room for manoeuvre in the specific roles that are taken up:

It is true that we cannot separate the masculine and the feminine from God's work of creation, which is prior to all our decisions and experiences, and where biological elements exist which are impossible to ignore. But it is also true that masculinity and femininity are not rigid categories. *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016)

Despite this the Church wants to assert that men and women are different not just anatomically but in who they are. In *Mulieris Dignitatem* the Pope warns against the danger of what he calls the 'masculinization' of women which is the denial that women are called to different roles within God's plan of creation:

In the name of liberation from male 'domination', women must not appropriate for themselves male characteristics contrary to their own female 'originality'. There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not 'reach fulfilment', but instead will deform and lose what constitutes their vital essence.

Task: 'Men and Women are equal but different'. Outline what Pope John Paul II means by this statement

Gender and Sexual Identity

Here we must learn an important distinction to help us understand the Church's position – the difference between gender and biological sex. For many thinkers, gender is understood to be something that is wholly dependent on the society that is lived in and its expectations about what men and women should be like. For example, in ancient Sparta men were expected to be warriors. Men who did not live up to this gender expectation were seen as lacking proper masculinity. They were not regarded as 'real men'.



Most people would think that this expectation was purely a matter of society or a set of cultural gender expectations. Most people, nowadays, think that men are not made to fight one another in wars – it is not a natural or biological idea. In other words, we think that the idea of men being warriors is a purely cultural idea that can be changed and challenged. It is just a gender role.

Biological sex, as opposed to gender, is not socio-cultural according to the distinction. It is a thought to be matter of anatomy, rather than social expectation. It depends on whether you have male or female anatomical parts.

The Church's view is that the gender and biological sexual identity can be '*distinguished but not separated*'. In other words, there is *overlap* between the two categories, rather than the two being totally different categories with no influence on each other. The Church would agree that expecting men to be warriors is purely social, and something that is rightly rejected. So it would agree that this is a purely gender expectation, and one that should be challenged. But it would disagree that all gender expectations can be separated from the biological reality. In other words, your body and who you are cannot be separated.

It agrees that some gender expectations should be challenged. But it disagrees that all gender is separable from the kind of body you have. In other words, *your body is part of who you are*. The Church thinks we are bodily beings – made up of body and soul, and these two aspects are not totally separable.

Therefore, we have to decide which approach is the most acceptable:

1. **Gender** is socio-cultural – it is how society expects people to behave in their gender roles. For example, men might be expected to be warriors and authoritative while women are expected to be meek and obedient.

or

2. **Biological sexual identity** – men and women have different anatomies so men and women are created to be different.

Task: Answer the following questions:

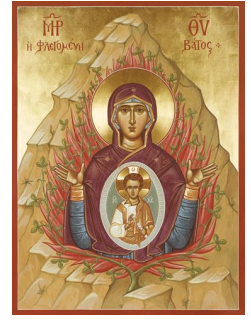
1. **Create the following table – add 3-5 words/roles/ideas that fit under the different gender terms**

Masculine	Feminine

2. **With reference to ancient Sparta, explain why many thinkers understand gender as something that is dependent on society.**
3. **The Church's view is that the gender and biological sexual identity can be '*distinguished but not separated*'. Explain what they mean by this.**
4. **Do you think gender is natural or socio-cultural? Explain your answer**

Motherhood

In order to establish the dignity and uniqueness of women, a lot of the Pope's letter looks at the example of Mary. In traditional Christianity Mary has a special title *Theokotos* (God-bearer). She has the unique privilege of nurturing in her womb, Jesus Christ, who is the Incarnate Lord. The Pope takes from this that motherhood is one of the special vocations or gifts for women. Women are made by God to nurture and give birth to others. In this they can be truly 'self-givers' for to give life to others is a great gift.

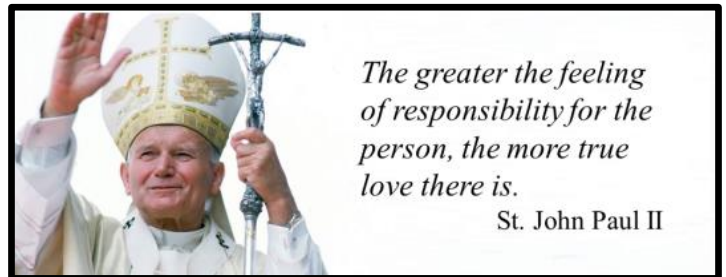


The woman's motherhood constitutes a special "part" in this shared parenthood, and the more demanding part. Parenthood - even though it belongs to both - is realised much more fully in the woman, especially in the prenatal period. It is the woman who "pays" directly for his shared generation, which literally absorbs the energies of her body and soul. It is necessary that the man be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes a special debt to the woman. No programme of "equal rights" between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account.

Although being a father is special, the Pope argues that motherhood is the more demanding role in a family since the woman has to sacrifice a lot more. She has nine months of nurturing and literally gives of her own body. (Even in modern times, pregnancy and birth carries a significant risk to the mother's life.) If we say that women's and men's roles are identical, the Church is concerned that this will detract from the special place that motherhood has in the generation of new life. It will also cease to recognise that in motherhood the woman has to give more, and to that extent, has to be more selfless:

Motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person: and this is precisely the woman's "part". In this openness, in conceiving and giving birth to a child, the woman "discovers herself through a sincere gift of self".

As we can see, one of John Paul's principal themes in his understanding of persons is this idea of **self-giving**. He thinks that persons, regardless of sexual identity, are defined by the relationships they have with others. No one can find fulfilment unless they become a gift to others. The Pope argues that being female gives one the possibility of being able to give oneself in a way that no man can, and this 'extra' gift of self-giving is part of what it means to be female.



St Thomas Aquinas agrees and says,

...mothers, who are those who love the most, seek to love more than to be loved. *Summa Theologiae*

Task: Answer the following questions

- 1. According to Pope John Paul in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, what does the example of Mary teach about the importance of motherhood?**
- 2. Why does the Pope argue that motherhood is a more demanding role?**
- 3. 'No one can find fulfilment unless they become a gift to others' – what does this mean?**

Virginity

The Pope argues that being a woman also has the option of remaining a virgin, and so not being open to being a (biological) mother. (Obviously the option of remaining a virgin is one that is open to both sexes.) For the Catholic Church the option of committing your life to one of chastity is seen as a kind of gift of the entire self to God, and being able in this relationship with God to be open to others.

By freely choosing virginity, women confirm themselves as persons, as being whom the Creator from the beginning has willed for their own sake. At the same time they realise the personal value of their own femininity by becoming "a sincere gift" for God

By the free choice of not being open to biological motherhood, women can affirm themselves in a different way than the option of openness to motherhood. In motherhood the woman is prepared to give of herself in giving new life. In virginity the woman is giving herself totally to God. Since this giving is a sincere gift the woman is not saying no to children, but a profound and heartfelt yes to God.

In choosing virginity the woman can still be a mother in an important and profound sense. Even though other people are not her biological children she can still be a mother to them in her relationship with them. Motherhood is not a purely biological reality – it can be chosen in virginity. That is why senior nuns are called *Mother* Superiors.

Different Roles in the Church

The Church believes that, although men and woman are equal, they have different roles to play in the Church. Women cannot act out the role of being a priest. If men and women really are in some sense different from each other, then, we can expect their roles in the Church to be different – different since it is based on real, created difference.

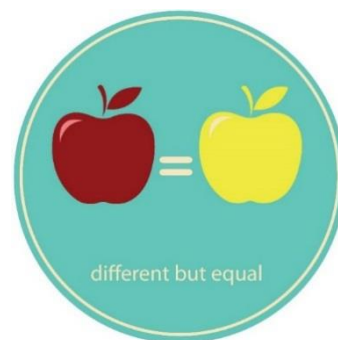
In the Church's view a valid marriage is one between a man and a woman since the two complement and complete each other. They are two sides or aspects of what it is to be human.

“In the sphere of what is human – of what is humanly personal – “masculinity” and “femininity” are distinct, yet at the same time they complete and explain each other.”

It is similar in the Church. Women are equal but different to men – they have different roles. Christ was a man, and maleness is a real created thing, and so only a man can preside at Eucharist since here he acts the role of Christ in giving the body and blood of Christ.

Catholic Teaching on the Role of Men and Women in a Nutshell

- Men and women are equal since they are both persons with free will made in the image of God.
- Men and woman have different roles to play in the Church and in society.
- Genders and biological sex are part of creation – masculinity and femininity are truly different and God-given. We cannot totally separate gender from biology.
- Giving of the self is part of how we can truly define ourselves.
- One role of women is to be mothers who express themselves as self-givers. A woman can give of herself to another in a unique way.
- Fatherhood is also self-giving but not to the same extent as motherhood.
- Women can freely decline the openness to being a (biological) mother by opting to be a virgin and so dedicating themselves totally to God (usually as a nun).
- In the Church men can be priests, but a woman may not. The Catholic Church says that this is not because of inequality between the sexes, but because they have different roles to play just as in a marriage men and women have different though complementary roles to play – one of fatherhood and the other of motherhood.



Task: Explode the following quote

“In the sphere of what is human – of what is humanly personal – “masculinity” and “femininity” are distinct, yet at the same time they complete and explain each other.”

The Letter of St Paul to the Ephesians 5: 21-33

This has been a very influential piece of scripture for the understanding of the role of the genders within the Church and in wider society.

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Ephesians 5: 21-33.

In this passage Paul compares the relationship between husband and wife to the relationship between Christ and the Church. The head of the Church is Christ and the head of the wife is the husband. Just as the Church must submit to Christ, so the wife should submit to the husband. The problem is that this passage seems to teach *inequality* between the sexes since it seems to put the husband in charge of the wife.

What does the Church have to say about this passage? It must be acknowledged that many traditional Christians have thought that this passage implies that the wife's role is to be the loved, but *obedient* one in a marriage. The old Anglican marriage vows that the bride made were:

I, (Bride), take thee, (Groom), to be my wedded Husband; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health; to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance...

There was no requirement for the man to promise to obey the wife. This seems unequal. However the man did have to make the following promise:

With this Ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly good I thee endow.

In exchange for obedience the man had to promise to give all his material wealth to the wife and to worship her, which seems to some to lessen the inequality.

However, far fewer people, in modern Christianity, think that the wife should promise to obey her husband. What is emphasised nowadays is that the marriage is a partnership of equals with the husband and wife *submitting to each other*. The idea is that the different sexes complement or complete each other in a partnership of self-giving and *mutual* submission. Each puts the other first rather than themselves.

This view of *Ephesians* is supported by Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* [The Joy of Love] where he says that the language of headship and submission is part of the 'cultural matrix' of the time. In other words, he thinks that the language of submission is part of the historical context rather than the kind of language we should use today about the relationship between men and women in marriage.

Ephesians 5: 21-33 in a Nutshell

- The passage says that the marriage relationship is like the relationship between Christ and the Church – just as Christ is head of the Church so the husband is head of the wife.

St Paul

Saint Paul is one of the most important and influential of all the saints. Many of his writings are contained in the Canon of the Bible and have influenced the growth and development of the Church since the first century.

St. Paul was originally known as Saul, and he was a Roman citizen and a Pharisee. He even presided over the persecutions of the early Christians and was present at the martyrdom of St. Stephen. However, Saul experienced a powerful vision that caused him to convert to Christianity while on the road to Damascus. He was duly baptized and took the name Paul.

- Many Christians have taken this at face value and said that the wife must promise to obey or submit to her husband.
- Most Christians nowadays think that the passage is about submission and self-giving to *each other* (since Christ gave his life for the Church). It is a partnership of complementary equals rather than one being in charge of the other.
- Pope Francis says that the language of submission and male headship is part of the language of the time, rather than something we should apply in the modern world.

Task: Answer the following questions:

1. Why does the following verse from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians cause controversy today:

²² *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.*

2. Outline the different Christian interpretations of this verse.

Christian Responses to Contemporary Secular Views on the Roles of Men and Women in Family and Society

The Christian view of the family and the role of men and women in society has been challenged by various modern views. Very many modern families are different to the 'ideal' that is promoted by the Church. We will look at various challenges to the Christian idea and how the Catholic Church has responded.

Cohabitation

There are many different types of family. In many families the man and woman live together and will have children, but are not married and some couples intend never to marry. This kind of living together is traditionally been called cohabitation.

In *Amoris Laetitia* [The Joy of Love] Pope Francis recognises the great difficulty many people have with the Christian ideal of married life and the family. We live in a complex and pressurized society, and are bombarded with many different views in the media and in society in general. He acknowledges that for many people the family can 'be a breeding ground of resentment and hatred' rather than a place of love and nurture.

However, the Church defends the ideal of marriage and the family since it thinks that the bond between man and woman in marriage is a gift given by God. It is not just a legal bond; it is something spiritual and deeper. The Pope worries that cohabitation is a symptom of people not being willing to commit, but wanting to keep their options open rather than have a marriage which has 'characteristics of exclusivity, indissolubility and openness to life.'

Pope Francis says,

"As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage... [If we did] we would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer."

Task: Answer the following questions

- 1. Define the term cohabitation**
- 2. Outline 3-5 reasons why people may prefer cohabitation to marriage**
- 3. What is Pope Francis' worry concerning cohabitation?**
- 4. Explode the quote above – what are the values that people gain from being married?**

Marital Break Up (Divorce)

Again, the Pope is keen to avoid judgement. Francis acknowledges that that is how many people see the Church – as a stern, moral judge telling everyone that they have fallen short. Instead of this he wants the Church to offer an alternative set of values and show how attractive they are rather than tell people that they are failing. To understand the Pope's ideas about break up we might ask the question, how difficult should it be to break up a marriage? The immediate thought might be that it should be as easy as possible. But what would that cost? Wouldn't marriage then be cheapened as if it could be tossed aside when the man and woman were tired of the arrangement?

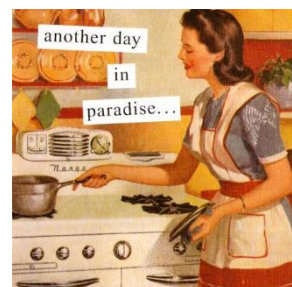
The modern western world is a consumerist society. We are used to having good service and to take back purchases that we do not like. But do we want the same kind of thing in marriage? Is marriage only a kind of purchase we make or should it be something deeper and more long lasting? If we were to think of relationships as something temporary (until someone better comes along), then, relationships would become like disposable purchases that we consume, get tired of and reject. It is this kind of disposable, consumerist relationship that the Church thinks marriage helps to protect us from. Instead of being temporary or disposable the Church thinks of marriage as indissoluble (lifelong).

Cohabitation and Break Up in a Nutshell

- Marriage is the ideal – it is indissoluble and sexually exclusive. The value of marriage lies in its deep and lasting, public commitment between a man and a woman where the two sexes can complement and fulfil each other.
- Cohabitation can be fulfilling and a place of love and mutual engagement, but in marriage commitment is publically shown and celebrated.
- The Church worries that easy break up and cohabitation are signs of a consumerist approach to relationships. The view seems to be that they should be easy to discard when they fail to meet expectations. But true relationships should not be like that.

Gender

As we have seen, many distinguish between gender and biological sex. Using this distinction, some have argued that gender identity is not a given biological fact, but something we can *choose* for ourselves in some way. Others argue slightly differently saying that gender is *not* a matter of choice, but some men find themselves, through no choice of their own, in a female body and some women find themselves trapped in a male body. This means that some people opt to change sexual identity feeling that they have been placed in the wrong body. This may involve surgery so that bodies are changed so they match the biological sex the person feels they always were.



This is obviously a very difficult and controversial area, and it is impossible to do justice to all the sides in the debate. This booklet will describe the basic Catholic response to some of these ideas.

The Church agrees that many people have difficulty with what society expects men and woman to be like – their stereotypical gender roles. This can be entirely justified. If we have a female who wants to be a rugby player in a society where women are expected to be meek and gentle, she is right to feel aggrieved and restricted. Societal expectations can be restricting and people can feel trapped by what is expected of them. Should this sense of confinement extend to surgical intervention to change the biological reality? Here the Church has difficulty since, as we have seen, it thinks that the two sexes are God-given realities. Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* worries that to feel trapped by the physical reality of your sexual identity is not to value a God-given gift. We are created beings – to seek to change what is given by God is to try to take on the role of Creator:

Beyond the understandable difficulties which individuals may experience, the young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created, for 'thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation... An appreciation of our body as male or female is also necessary for our own self-awareness in an encounter with others different from ourselves. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment.'

The Church is suspicious of the idea of sexual identity being something that may need surgical intervention believing that to seek to change biological identity is to not value what is a gift. In other words, to choose to intervene surgically to change sex is to go against the biological reality that God gives as a loving, creator God. Young people should be taught to value and cherish their bodies rather than see them as a kind of enemy. As we have seen, *the Church thinks that body and soul (who you fundamentally are) cannot be separated. You are a bodily being.*

This view of the body as a gift fits in with the general teachings of the Church. The Church has always taught that the material world is a good thing. It is not an enemy to be defeated or something unimportant. Remember that the Christianity believes in *bodily* resurrection, not the discarding or rejecting of the body. To view the body, therefore, as a mere cloak or kind of clothing that can be changed or discarded is to not view the body as a gift.

Gender and the Church in a Nutshell

- To protest when gender roles are restrictive and confining is entirely justified. Men and women are created equal.
- The Church views the body as a gift from God. To seek to intervene surgically and change the biological reality is to take over God's role as creator.
- The Church believes in bodily resurrection. The body is good.
- Our bodies are an important part of who we are. We are bodily beings. People ought to be taught to value and cherish their bodies, not hate them.

Assessment: Men and women are equal but different. Discuss (40 marks)

Success Criteria

- The Catholic Church and Conservative Protestants believe that God created man and women in his image and his likeness
- This means that men and women are equal, however, due to the nature of their creation they are different (*hence the statement 'Men and women are equal but different'*)
- Many secular thinkers and liberal Christians argue that gender is socio-cultural – it is how society expects people to behave in their gender roles. For example, men might be expected to be warriors and authoritative while women are expected to be meek and obedient.
- The Catholic/Conservative approach is in favour of biological sexual identity – men and women have different anatomies so men and women are created to be different.

Arguments suggesting men and women are equal but different:

- In *Mulieris Dignitatem* John Paul II expresses the traditional Christian idea that men and women are equal but that they have different roles to play.
- The Catholic Church in *Mulieris Dignitatem* says that Mary has a special title *Theokotos* (God-bearer). The Pope takes from this that motherhood is one of the special vocations or gifts for women.
- **Pope John Paul II** argues that being female gives one the possibility of being able to give oneself in a way that no man can, and this 'extra' gift of self-giving is part of what it means to be female.
- The Church believes that, although men and woman are equal, they have different roles to play in the Church. **"In the sphere of what is human – of what is humanly personal – "masculinity" and "femininity" are distinct, yet at the same time they complete and explain each other."**
- **Conservative Protestants** also look to the Bible, in particular St Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This letter outlines that God ordained that men and women would have different gender roles

Arguments suggesting men and women are entirely equal:

- In 1992, the **General Synod of the Church of England** passed a vote to ordain women as priests. Many people think that men and women should have the opportunity to be ordained as priests.
- **Liberal Protestants** are inspired by the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God. Jesus seemed to argue to a more inclusive, non-hierarchical and non-judgemental society. Jesus aimed his teaching at the marginalised including women and those on the fringes of society.
- Liberals appeal to the teaching of St Paul who said: **"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 is clear biblical evidence that Jesus himself wanted equality in gender roles.
- **Catharina Halkes** argues that secular views of equality for women should be accepted.

Extended Reading – Complete a close reading of Theology of Gender Equality: Australian Anglican Communion

How to do a close reading:

Read with a pencil or highlighter in hand, and annotate the text. "Annotating" means underlining or highlighting key words and phrases—anything that strikes you as surprising or significant, or that raises questions—as well as making notes in the margins.

Being Human is a Birth-Right

To be human is a birth-right for each and every girl and boy, man and woman. And He has made all nations of men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth (Act 17:26 NKJV). This transcends all cultures and contexts and is to be affirmed. Thus each person has the same and equal privilege to live in dignity and to be treated with respect. This birth-right for all culminates in the glorious scene in Revelation when John saw a large crowd with more people than could be counted. They were from every race, tribe, nation, and language, and they stood before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev 7:9).

Created in God's Image and Likeness

Adam and Eve were created in God's image and likeness. God said, "Now we will make humans, and they will be like us. So God created humans to be like himself; he made male and female. (Gen 1:26, 27) It was after God created the Man and the Woman that He looked at what He had made and declared all of it was very good (Gen 1: 31 -Thus male and female were created equal and different and this pleased God.

Incarnation Affirms our Common Humanity

In Christ both the Logos (Word) and Sophia (Wisdom) became human. "The Word became a human being and lived here with us" (John 1:14). Christ lived, ate, drank, slept, mourned and suffered together with those He came to serve. Incarnation is the divine affirmation of the common and shared humanity of female and male.

The Gospel Affirms Human Equality

Human dignity and equality is restored through the Gospel. Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a man or a woman. (Gal 3:28), Hence in the Christian community all human beings are equal and precious to God. Differences in sex, race, class, disability, age or religion do not negate this equality in Christ.

Abundant life (Gutpela sindaun)

Jesus declared his mission was to bring abundant life to humanity. I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest (John 10:10). He demonstrated the inclusiveness of His mission by inviting all into his kingdom - the wealthy Matthew and the poor widow, the little children and respected Nicodemus, the foreign Syrophoenician woman and the Galilean fishermen - all were invited to this abundant life. The Christian church is called to extend this invitation to all.

God's Kingdom as Servanthood

God's Kingdom involves a transformed world where women, men, boys and girls live and relate to one another in the ways that God intends. In contrast to Foreign kings [who] order their people around (Luke 22:25) Jesus said "I have been with you as a servant" (Luke 22:27) and modelled this Kingdom principle. The most important one of you should be like the least important, and your leader should be like a servant (Luke 22:26). Serving others restores their dignity and allows them to fully participate in the Kingdom. Serving has the power to transform cultural, institutional and structural injustices.

Mutuality in Christian Relationships and Marriage

Mutuality in relationships characterizes the kingdom of God. Honour Christ and put others first (Eph 5:21). This mutuality in relationships also characterizes Christian marriage. The twofold instruction of Paul regarding marriage affirms this mutuality. A wife should put her husband first, as she does the Lord (Eph 5:22) is balanced by a husband should love his wife as much as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25). This mutuality is also reflected in the sexual relationship in marriage. Paul declares a wife belongs to her husband instead of to herself, and a husband belongs to his wife instead of to himself (1Cor 7:4). Both husband and wife submit to each other as unto the Lord. Submission affirms valuing each other as total human beings.

The Gifting by the Holy Spirit is Inclusive

The Spirit gives Christian believers both fruit and gifts for the work of ministry. The fruit, God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful (Gal 5:22) and the gifts, when he went up to the highest place, he . . . gave gifts to people (Eph 4:8) are inclusive. There is one God who is the Father of all people. Not only is God above all others, but he works by using all of us, and he lives in all of us (Eph 4:6). The New Testament declares that these gifts are given to both male and female. Peter quoted the Old Testament Prophet, "I will give my Spirit to everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams. In those days I will give my Spirit to my servants, both men and women, and they will prophesy (Act 2:17, 18). The inclusiveness in the gifting by the Spirit recognizes that all are blessed with distinct yet equally important fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

Empowering the disempowered

Through Jesus' radical compassion and challenge to traditions and practices that excluded the vulnerable and most marginalized, He exemplified and lived out the principles and values of the Kingdom of God. (Among these were women and children and those deemed unclean because of disability or illness). It is within the very essence of God's ministry through the Christian community to continue to seek out and strive to empower the least and most vulnerable in society. "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me" (Mat 25:40).

Sex and Gender Roles

There are roles that are biologically sex specific to a woman and roles that are biologically sex specific to a man. These roles have to do with, but not confined to, procreation through sexual intercourse. Gender roles are assigned by society and/or culture to a woman and to a man. Thus, it is people who construct cultures and gender roles. It is also people who must change cultures that dehumanize and deny certain groups of people their God-given humanity, dignity and equality. It is important to recognize that women, men, girls and boys are equal, yet different in their make-up.

Section 2: Learning Intentions

Key Knowledge A01

Ruether's discussion of the maleness of Christ and its implications for salvation including:

- Jesus' challenge to the male warrior-messiah expectation
- God as the female wisdom principle
- Jesus as the incarnation of wisdom

Daly's claim that 'if God is male then the male is God' and its implications for Christianity, including:

- Christianity's 'Unholy Trinity' of rape, genocide and war
- spirituality experienced through nature

Key Skills (A02)

Learners should have the opportunity to discuss issues related to God, gender and feminist theology, including:

- A comparison of Ruether's and Daly's feminist theologies
 - sexism and patriarchy in Christianity, as it has developed in the mainstream Churches
- whether or not Christianity is essentially sexist
- whether or not a male saviour can save women
- whether or not only women can develop a genuine spirituality
- whether or not the Christian God can be presented in female terms

Key Vocabulary

Feminism	The advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes
Salvation	Deliverance from sin and its consequences
Messiah	The promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus regarded by Christians as the Messiah of the Hebrew prophecies and the saviour of humankind.
Rosemary Radford Ruether	Roman Catholic feminist liberation theologian
Mary Daly	A former Roman Catholic theologian who proposed a radical feminism that said women must abandon Christianity
Incarnation	Literally translates as 'made flesh'
Unholy Trinity	Male dominated Christian imagery has led to an unholy trinity of rape, genocide and war
Patriarchal	Relating to or denoting a system of society or government controlled by men
Sexism	Prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex
<i>Sophia</i>	Greek term meaning 'wisdom'
Logos	Christology, the Logos is a name or title of Jesus Christ, seen as the pre-existent second person of the Trinity. It means 'Word'

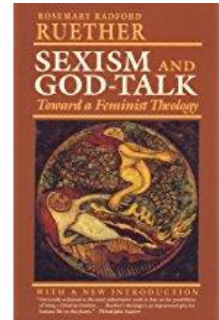
Gender and Theology

What is Feminism?

Feminists believe that the treatment of women in society and in the Church is unfair since women are treated as subordinate or inferior to men. They point out that often societies are **patriarchal** – men hold most of the powerful positions. Feminists argue that men have used their power so that society is organised in order that they can keep those positions of power. Feminist Christians argue that Christianity, as traditionally understood and interpreted by the Church, continues to treat women as second class citizens by seeing them as being destined for motherhood and other domestic roles, rather than public positions of power like the priesthood.

Feminist Reinterpretations of God: Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether is a feminist thinker and Catholic theologian. She wrote a very influential book in 1983 called ***Sexism and God-Talk***. In this book she challenges the idea that the maleness of Jesus is basic to how we should understand him. As we shall see, she argues that there are more female directions in the interpretation of Christ which have been ignored or marginalized by the Church.



Jesus' Challenge to the Male Warrior-Messiah Expectation

Ruether explains that the normal Hebrew view of the expected Messiah was of a warrior king who would deliver the Hebrew people from slavery and oppression. According to this view, there would be a great battle where the warrior Messiah would defeat the enemies of justice and reign over all the Earth for the rest of time. This kind of Messiah was meant to be like King David who was a great leader, warrior and fighter. He fought Israel's enemies and defeated and humiliated them. Since the idea of a warrior is primarily associated with male gender roles, it strengthened the view that the Messiah had to be male. In other words, people automatically expected a male Messiah; his maleness was thought to be a necessary part of the Messiah's identity.

Ruether points out that Jesus was not the expected type of Messiah. His ways were not the ways of the warrior. The virtues and lifestyle he preached and encouraged were far away from the stereotypical warrior. Instead of the values of war, he preached the virtues of forgiveness, non-violence, patience, and humility. Instead of winning on the battlefield as a glorious warrior, he dies on the Cross. Self-sacrifice replaces martial victory. Love and forgiveness are seen as more important than the defeat and humiliation of the enemy.

Jesus, then, challenges the Warrior-Messiah expectation. The brash, masculine image of the conquering martial hero is rejected and other virtues are put in place instead. This is part of Ruether's claim that Jesus' maleness is not necessary. In other words, the Second Person of the Trinity does not have to be incarnated as male. Using this idea Ruether argues that the Catholic Church should allow female ordination. After all, if the founder of the faith did not have to be male, then, why should its priests?

Ruether, also, argues that Jesus is presented in the Bible as being on the side of the marginalized and oppressed. Jesus is often with the poor and the downtrodden rather than with the rich and successful. Again, this emphasis on the lowly and the oppressed seems far away from the stereotypical male image of the powerful warrior.

Task – Complete the following activities:

- 1. Create the following table and outline the differences between the Jewish Messiah and Jesus as Messiah**

Jewish Messiah	Jesus as Messiah

- 2. Outline why Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that Jesus' maleness is not necessary**

God as the Female Wisdom Principle and Jesus as the Incarnation of Wisdom

God is wise and in the Old Testament God's wisdom is often personified. When this happens, the Wisdom of God is described and treated as a female. (The Greek word for wisdom is *Sophia*.) In other words, instead of male language to talk about God, we find female language. God is 'feminized' rather than being seen as a man. This female language for God is especially clear in Proverbs 8:

Does not wisdom call out?

Does not understanding raise her voice?

² At the highest point along the way,
where the paths meet, she takes her stand;

³ beside the gate leading into the city,
at the entrance, she cries aloud:

⁴ "To you, O people, I call out;
I raise my voice to all mankind."



As can be seen, God's Wisdom is personified as female. Ruether concludes from this that the male image of God (as father, as King, as Warrior...etc) should not be seen as defining who God is. God can be seen as female as well as male. Femininity, Ruether argues, has as much right to be seen as an aspect of God's identity as maleness. If this is true and there are female 'aspects' to God, then, we have further evidence that Jesus' maleness is not a necessary part of his identity.

In Christian thought, Jesus is believed to be the incarnation of God. In John's Gospel he is understood to be the Word or **Logos** of God, which is the Second Person of the Trinity. The **Logos** of God is often identified in Christian thought with Wisdom, which is personified as female in the Bible. In other words, Ruether argues that, although Jesus was biologically a male, he was the incarnation of the female Wisdom principle of God. This partly explains why he was the kind of person he was – a person who rejected the stereotype of the male warrior, and instead was on the side of women and the oppressed. Jesus, also, often criticized the religious authorities in Israel, and of course, all of the rabbis would have been men.

Unfortunately, argues Ruether, most Christian thought throughout history has side-lined or ignored these kinds of idea about the femininity of God and Jesus and has instead employed male images (Father and Son). This constant use of male images fixes in everyone's minds the picture of God being exclusively male. It also makes everyone think that Jesus' biological maleness was a necessary part of his identity since he must be the incarnation of a 'male' God. Ruether calls the process of seeing Jesus as necessarily male, the 'patriarchalization of Christology'.

The figure of divine wisdom in Proverbs 8...is theologically identical to what the New Testament describes as the Logos, or "Son" of God. Because Christianity chooses the male symbol for this idea [Son]...the unwarranted idea develops that there is a necessary ontological connection between the maleness of Jesus' historical person and the maleness of the Logos as the male offspring and disclosure of a male God. The female figure of divine wisdom is displaced from the orthodox Trinity...

Task: Write out the above quote in full. Around the quote answer the following questions:

- 1. God's wisdom is personified in the Old Testament – what does this mean?**
- 2. How does the verse from Proverbs 8 support the idea of a feminine God?**
- 3. How does the term Logos in the Gospel of John support the argument for God's femininity?**
- 4. How has Christianity side-lined or ignored ideas of a feminine God?**
- 5. What does Ruether mean by the phrase 'patriarchalization of Christology'?**

Ruether wants Christians to move away from the constant and repeated use of male images in our talk and imagery concerning God. She thinks it results in a religious sexism – the belief that God is really male and so being a human male is to be closer to God. Femininity is then seen as somehow lower than maleness. She believes that one of the main results of this male bias in our talk about God is the idea that only men can be priests. Ruether quotes from the 1976 Vatican declaration against the ordination of women which says **“there must be a physical resemblance between priest and Christ.”** She thinks that such a declaration is absurd. She says that the **“possession of male genitalia”** cannot be **“the essential prerequisite for representing Christ.”** As we have seen, she shows that there are female images in Scripture for God’s wisdom, and argues that Jesus is the incarnation of this feminine principle. Since Jesus did not have to be biologically male we should not exclude woman from ordination.



Task – Outline what Ruether means by the following phrase:

“The possession of male genitalia cannot be the essential prerequisite for representing Christ.

Ruether’s Ideas in a Nutshell

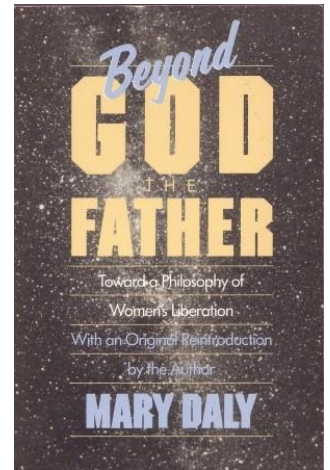
- Jesus did not conform to the expectation of a male warrior Messiah figure. Instead his life and preaching was directed at the oppressed and he is presented as being on the side of women.
- God’s Wisdom (*Sophia*) is personified as female in the Bible and other religious texts.
- Jesus is the incarnation of the *Logos* (the Second Person of the Trinity) which is theologically equivalent to Wisdom – a female image of God. This means that Jesus does not have to be male. God could have been incarnated in a female body.
- The constant use of male imagery in our talk and understanding of God results in sexism. We are likely to unconsciously think that maleness is superior and God-like and femaleness is inferior and further from God.
- Women should be allowed to be priests because Jesus did not have to be male. Men and women are, therefore, truly equal. Furthermore Jesus was the incarnation of Wisdom – the *female* Wisdom principle.

Stretch and Challenge:

Research Rosemary Radford Ruether and add 5-7 pieces of important information about her to the box below:

Feminist Reinterpretations of God: Mary Daly

Mary Daly (1928-2010) was a radical feminist philosopher and theologian. In 1973 her most famous book ***Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*** was published. In the book she argues that much of Christianity is deeply and inherently sexist. She argues that Christian images and language about God are male dominated and serve the interests of patriarchy. She concludes that we must go beyond or transcend Christianity and replace it with a religious language and set of images which can help to free women from the violence of male-domination.



“If God is Male then the Male is God”

Our language about God is male dominated language. We habitually use the male pronouns: ‘He’, ‘Him’, and ‘His.’ When we talk about God we also use male imagery: *He* is the *King*. *He* is the *Lord*. He is traditionally seen as ‘Our *Father* in Heaven’. Jesus is the *Son* of the *Father*. Daly argues that this continual celebration of male imagery in our talk about God influences society to assume that men are superior to women and this in turn results in violence and oppression towards women. Daly opens her book with this paragraph:

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven...has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for oppression of women appear right and fitting.

If God in ‘his’ heaven is a father ruling ‘his’ people, then it is the ‘nature’ of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe to be male-dominated.

Daly sums up this argument with the sentence: ‘**If God is male then the male is God**’. In other words, if we think of God as male we assume that to be male is vastly superior to being female. We think then that men have the right to rule over women. We think women’s role is to serve and obey the god-like male. The notion that Christianity asserts that the incarnation of God was a male only serves to make the sexism even worse:

‘The idea of a uniquely male saviour may be seen as one more legitimisation of male superiority.

The ‘Unholy Trinity’: Rape, Genocide and War

Daly thinks that male-dominated Christian imagery has violent results. She thinks it is responsible for what she calls the ‘Unholy Trinity’ of rape, genocide and war.

Daly thinks that a male-dominated society promotes what she calls a phallic (penis-centred) morality where values such as competition, rivalry, aggression, sexual virility, and ruthlessness are celebrated amongst men. Women, in contrast, are encouraged to be meek, sacrificial, obedient and of service to others. These contrasting kinds of mind set or ethic have horrible and violent consequences – to be specific, such values result in war and rape and genocide. Men fight men in war and men rape women in war. Daly presents lots of very disturbing evidence that war and the rape of women go together. A culture where men rule and their sexual prowess is celebrated and where women are meant to be second class citizens is exactly the kind of environment where women are seen as mere sexual objects.

Task: Answer the following questions

- 1) Why does Mary Daly think that Christianity is inherently sexist?**
- 2) Outline the different male terms used about God**
- 3) Describe what Daly means by the quote: “If God is Male then the Male is God”**
- 4) Explain what Daly means by the expression ‘phallic morality’**
- 5) Do you think Daly is correct in her understanding of the ‘Unholy Trinity’?**

Daly explains that this kind of phallic morality is seen in the Old Testament. After a battle Moses is angry with his commanders for not being ruthless enough:

¹⁷ Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him. ¹⁸ But all the young girls who have not known a man by sleeping with him, keep alive for yourselves. Numbers 31

In *Deuteronomy* 21 the Israelites are told that when they defeat an enemy they can choose wives from the defeated women:

When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God hands them over to you and you take them captive, ¹¹ suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to marry, ¹² and so you bring her home to your house: she shall shave her head, pare her nails, ¹³ discard her captive's garb, and shall remain in your house a full month, mourning for her father and mother; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. ¹⁴ But if you are not satisfied with her, you shall let her go free and not sell her for money. You must not treat her as a slave, since you have dishonoured her.

It is clear that the morality being promoted here is one where women are seen as property and as sexual resources for men to use. Daly argues that religion is a major support for this kind of phallic morality – its repeated use of male images for God promotes the view that men are superior to women.

Spirituality Experienced Through Nature Religions

Daly argues that only a very radical revolution against Christianity can stop male violence towards women. First God has to be 'castrated' – that is, our language about God has to be radically changed so we entirely avoid any kind of male bias. Indeed, she argues for that to happen we have to transcend/abandon Christianity altogether. It is too inherently male dominated for many reasons. Some of these are:



- 1) In Christianity women are blamed for the fall.**
- 2) The main idea in Christianity is of God becoming Man. Christianity insists that God was incarnated into a male body. Surely, says Daly, this is the very epitome of sexist ideology!**

It is not enough then to just reform the Church – women must stand against the Church, and form an 'Antichurch' which is also 'Antichrist'. Only by such a revolution and a rejection of traditional Christianity can the structures of patriarchy be destroyed.

She recommends a return to ancient pagan nature religions which centred on the female and Mother Nature as the essence of true spirituality. These kinds of religion (which Christianity replaced in many cultures) had female deities as their centre. Daly wants a return to these ancient Goddess/Mother Nature religions since she believes that it is not enough for men and women to be equal. Men must learn to be silent and listen to women. Justice demands that any future society and religion must be constructed on female terms.

Mary Daly's Ideas in a Nutshell

- Christian language about God is sexist. God is presented through sexist language, which implies that maleness is better than femaleness.
- Sexist language is part of a phallocentric morality where male values are celebrated and women are expected to be meek and obedient.
- Phallocentric morality results in the Unholy Trinity of War, Rape and Genocide.
- Christianity is sexist since it assumes God is male, He was incarnated as male and women are blamed for sin and the fall.
- The only solution is the celebration of women, a rejection of Christianity, and the submission of men in a female-centred Goddess religion which worships Mother Nature.

Assessment: 'Christianity should adopt a female understanding of God' Discuss (40 marks)

Success Criteria

- Feminists believe that the treatment of women in society and in the Church is unfair since women are treated as subordinate or inferior to men.
- They argue that Christianity has been dominated by a patriarchal view of society (male dominated). This is because God is traditionally spoken of as a male figure and Jesus (God made man) was male.
- Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly both agree that Christianity is essentially sexist due to the male understanding of God.
- Radford argues that Christianity can adopt a female understanding of God.
- Daly has a far more radical approach. She believes women must stand against the Church and adopt a completely different approach to Christianity. She refers to this as the Anti-Church.

Arguments suggesting Christianity should adopt a female understanding of God:

- Radford argues that there are more female directions in the interpretation of Christ which have been ignored or marginalized by the Church.
- Ruether points out that Jesus was not the expected type of Messiah. His ways were not the ways of the warrior. Jesus, then, challenges the Warrior-Messiah expectation. The brash, masculine image of the conquering martial hero is rejected and other virtues are put in place instead.
- Ruether argues that the image of God is far more feminine than many people actually acknowledge. She refers to Proverbs 8 and the language that refers to God as wisdom which is personified as female. **"At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand."**
- Ruether argues that, although Jesus was biologically a male, he was the incarnation of the female Wisdom principle of God.

Arguments suggesting Christianity should not adopt a female understanding of God:

- Supporters of the Via Negativa (apophatic way) would argue that using feminine language to address God is a sexist and alienating as male language. They would argue that because God is infinite and exists transcendently we need to move away from language that anthropomorphises God (whether that be male or female).
- The Roman Catholic Church still does not ordain women to ministry. They argue that the priest acts '**in persona Christi**'. This means that as Jesus was a man then a priest should represent Jesus in the Mass.
- Mary Daly argues that it is not enough to just reform the Church – women must stand against the Church, and form an 'Antichurch' which is also 'Antichrist'. In simpler terms, we do not need Christianity to feminise God. Instead we need to change Christianity completely.
- Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that when Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380AD it actively promoted Jesus as a triumphal 'King' who would return to bring in his new kingdom. This shows that Christianity and God is inherently male dominated.

Extended Reading – Complete a close reading of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly

How to do a close reading:

Read with a pencil or highlighter in hand, and annotate the text. "Annotating" means underlining or highlighting key words and phrases—anything that strikes you as surprising or significant, or that raises questions—as well as making notes in the margins.

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether was born in 1936 in Minnesota. She has degrees in Philosophy, Ancient History, and Classics. She received her doctorate in 1965 and is currently professor at Claremont School of Theology. For many years Radford Ruether considered herself to be a Roman Catholic but opposed many of the Church's doctrines. She supports female **ordination**, **contraception** and is **pro-choice** in relation to abortion. Consequently, her views were judged heretical by many of the more conservative members of the clergy.

Her best known work is ***Sexism and God Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*** (1983, republished 2002) but she has written books on topics such as liberation theology and ecological issues as well. She believed that the role of feminist hermeneutics is to find a way for women to reclaim central Christian principles from patriarchy. In other words, feminist theologians have to find methods of extricating the valuable core of Christianity from its misogynistic history.

A Golden Thread

Ruether suggested that the Bible contains a '**golden thread**', that is, a consistent theme that runs throughout the texts. This thread, she said, is the theme of **liberation**; a '**prophetic-liberating tradition**'. It can be found in Old Testament stories like the Exodus in which God sided with the oppressed and liberated them. It is found again in Jesus' radical treatment of outcasts, his criticism of established religion and his message that people should treat others as they would like to be treated (the golden rule).

Ruether thought that this theme represented the **genuine authentic** word of God encapsulated within the Bible. Other aspects of the Bible are not the word of God; these come from human beings. Ruether was quite willing to admit that a lot of the Bible stories are misogynistic and she thought that many aspects of the Bible were irrefutably patriarchal. Once this central message has been identified, we can (according to Ruether) use it to evaluate the other Biblical stories. Those that do fit with this essential message can be viewed as authoritative. Those that do not can be rejected and assumed to derive from the reflections of the world view and prejudices of the writer.

Jesus (Christology)

For feminists, Jesus' maleness is a problem because it has been used to reinforce the view that men are closer to God, superior to women and the 'normative' pattern for humanity. In the Summa Theologica Aquinas said that '**because the male excels the female sex, Christ assumed a man's nature**.' Thus maleness has been assumed to be part of the **essence** of Christ (and thus part of the essence of God). As **Mary Daly** wrote '**when God is male, then male is God**'.

Ruether challenged this view and argued that maleness was **accidental** to Jesus. This would mean that God is not associated with maleness. We can relate this back to Ruether's previously stated criteria. To see maleness as being part of God's essence is not consistent with the '**golden thread**' (as it would not lead to the liberation of women) and it does not promote '**the full humanity of woman**' because it implies that she is less perfect than man. By saying that maleness is accidental to Jesus, Ruether was saying that God could become incarnate in either male or female form.

Ruether has argued that Christianity has always had within it a tradition of recognising that God does not literally have gender (gender is a physical thing and God is non-physical). There has also been a (minority) tradition of referring to God using female terminology. Consequently, Ruether proposed that reconstructing the language that Christians use about God was both necessary and desirable.

Evaluation

Ruether was aware that her approach left her open to criticism. She selected certain texts as authoritative over and above others. This is known as preaching a '**canon within a canon**' - i.e. trying to identify a set of especially authoritative texts within an already authoritative text. Ruether did not deny that she did this, however she argued that this is what Christians have always done. The Bible has never been treated as though everything it said was equally

authoritative. For example, historically the Genesis 2 creation story (in which woman is made out of man) has been treated as though it were more authoritative than Genesis 1 (in which man and woman are made together).

Mary Ann Tolbert (in a book called *Defining the Problem*) has challenged Ruether's view that the liberating-prophetic tradition found in the Old Testament and in Jesus' ministry can be used to support feminism. She points out that **the Old Testament prophets do not themselves speak about the liberation of women**. Ruether replied that the prophets themselves could not have spoken of the liberation of women because they were limited by their own world-view. However, is this response entirely convincing? If the prophets were speaking on God's behalf (which Ruether implied they were, given that their liberating message is the bit of the Bible that she thought was authentic) then surely they should not have been limited by their human world view.

Additional Notes:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Mary Daly

Mary Daly was born in 1928 into what she described as the 'Catholic ghetto' of an Irish American family. She gained a PhD in Religious Studies in 1953 and then continued her studies in Switzerland. During the 1960s she taught theology at Boston College Massachusetts. She retired in 2001 following a controversy caused by her refusal to admit male students to one of her courses (she argued that male presence would inhibit the free discussion among the women).

Daly's thought moves through distinct phases from the (comparatively) liberal Church and the Second Sex (1968) to her much more radical philosophy found in later books like Gyn/Ecology (1978).

The Church and the Second Sex (1968)

The Church and the Second Sex, Daly's first book, was a critique of the Roman Catholic Church detailing the ways in which it had oppressed women. However, it was not a *radical* book and compared to her later work seems very tame. Daly argued that Christianity presents an *illusion* of equality and idealises *theoretical* women but not actual women. She said that Christianity **'pretends to put woman on a pedestal but which in reality prevents her from genuine self-fulfillment and from active, adult-sized participation in society'**. The values expected of the ideal woman include submission and passivity; the virtues held by the ideal female role model - the Virgin Mary. These values do not help women lead authentic lives as autonomous beings.

Daly detailed the misogynistic teachings in the Bible to show that Christianity was anti-women. She used examples from Genesis 2-3 and 1 Corinthians 14 among others. Part of the problem for Daly is that **'God's representatives on earth: the pope, the bishop, the priest who says Mass, he who preaches, he before whom one kneels in the secrecy of the confessional-all these are men'**. Given the Church's attitude towards women she suggested that **'A woman's asking for equality in the church would be comparable to a black person's demanding equality in the Ku Klux Klan.'**

Beyond God the Father (1973)

Beyond God the Father was subtitled Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation represents a significantly more radical approach than that found in *The Church and the Second Sex*. Daly began (after setting out her aims and methodology) by explaining the problem:

If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.'

Beliefs become reflected in the way people live and when **'God is male the male is God'**. Daly acknowledged that 'sophisticated thinkers' have not taken the image literally, but she suggested that even people who intellectually accept that God is not actually male subconsciously view 'him' as such.

Daly wrote of **'castrating God'**. This can be done through language (e.g. by referring to God as 'she') but Daly thought that **'the most basic change has to take place in women - in our being and self-imagine'**. She goes on to suggest that people should have the courage to reject the idea of God as a being and see God as **Be-ing** instead. I.e. abandon God the noun and embrace God the verb. God becomes something that people do rather than something they believe in.

In the second chapter of the book Daly examined the story of **the Fall**. She recounted the way in which the story has entered the human consciousness and shaped views about women. She suggested that women have contributed to their own oppression by accepting feelings of guilt and subordination and she says that the first stage of salvation comes when women recognise this. Once women have realised they have to abolish the feeling that they are **'the other'**. They have to reject **false humility** which prevents them from aiming high or from challenging men. They should engage in **non-conformity** and reject patriarchal stereotypes and present alternative model of being instead.

Daly compared this back to the idea of the Fall. Women should fall from the way men want them to be, away from taught morality and into moral independence and freedom. She said that the Fall stands for **'women reach for knowledge and, finding it, share it with men so that together we can leave the delusory paradise of false consciousness and alienation.'** With this interpretation the Fall becomes, she argued, **'positive and healing'**.

In chapter three Daly turned her attention to the incarnation. Like many feminist theologians she finds Jesus' maleness problematic: **'The idea of a uniquely male saviour may be seen as one more legitimisation of male superiority.'** Like the story of the Fall, the incarnation continues to have a hold over people's minds long after they have failed to believe in the literal truth of the doctrine.

The question of whether Jesus himself was a feminist Daly thinks is ultimately irrelevant (**'Fine, wonderful. But even if he wasn't, I am.'**). She argues that women today should not have to look to the past to legitimise their views.

Furthermore, the idea of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin glorifies what Daly calls '**scapegoat psychology**'. Christianity idealises the qualities of a victim [as Nietzsche argued]. People in general, and - according to Daly - women in particular, are encouraged to be passive, self-sacrificing, meek etc.

In her fourth chapter (which Daly called the '**transvaluation of values**') she focused on the question of morality. She suggested that morality is **constructed** and constructed by men. Women need to say 'no' to the '**morality of victimisation**' and resist the role that men have created for them. Daly anticipated a 'female ethic' which was 'yet to be developed because women have yet to be free enough to think out our own experience'.

Daly suggested that what she calls the '**unholy trinity**' of rape, genocide and war naturally exist in a world in which '**phallogocentric power**' is celebrated. The sense of male entitlement leads to men doing whatever they want to get what they like. Christianity has failed because Christianity has generally reinforced rather than opposed male superiority.

Chapter five begins with Daly's argument that women have been '**wiped out of history**'. Women have not realised their existence as a '**sexual caste**' because they have been divided by things like religion. '**Protestants are persuaded that they do not have the same problems as Catholic women.**'

This antichurch stands in opposition to the traditional church as the '**bride of Christ**' (i.e. an obedient woman in relation to a dominant man). Daly considered, and rejected, the idea that women could restore Christianity through the creation of new forms, for example, **feminist liturgies**. She concluded that all attempts were futile because they were still done from within the patriarchal tradition and therefore, still contained aspects of it. Daly returned to a point she made earlier, feminism should not have to look to the past to legitimise itself. It has no need for vehicles of patriarchy such as Christianity (and the other patriarchal faiths). She suggests that women should explore instead what she terms the '**Old Religion**', the ideas associated with goddesses and witches.

Daly finished the chapter with the observation that **'it cannot be denied that many people, women and men, have achieved with the help of religion a kind of autonomy, charity and peace'**. However, she thinks that women have been failed by institutional religion and whilst individuals might have been helped by religion, patriarchal religions are not necessary for self-development.

Daly begins her final chapter with reference to Aristotle and an brief overview of the way different theologians have used or developed the idea of the **final cause**. For Daly, the final cause - the reason or purpose for existence - cannot be a fixed static idea. It certainly cannot be the Patriarchal God with the patriarchal concept of goodness. Rather, the final cause is **Be-ing 'a qualitative leap of courage in the face of patriarchy'**. It is a radical challenge to static ways of thinking.

Additional Notes:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 28 horizontal blue or grey lines spaced evenly apart, typical of notebook paper. The lines extend across the entire width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical lines, text, or other markings on the page.