



# Christianity And Feminism: Differences In Beliefs

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**Abstract:** Although nowadays, the role of religion in the world is lowering, Christianity remains one of the dominant and most influential system of beliefs. It is not only a religious conception but also a philosophy that impacts the minds of many, though some of them may not even know about this. The concept touches upon many aspects of life including the role of woman in the family, society, etc. That is why the problem being feminist or non- feminist is worth consideration. First of all it is necessary to mention that modern Christianity is represented by certain people who translate their views to the public and form the religion as a present – day system of values. For example, Catholic bishops officially state “the family is the most important institution in society because education, formation, and care for the human person, especially children, take place more in the family than anywhere else.” In this case, Christianity values families more than the will of the individual. Thus, the role in society and the interests of the formers are neglected. This is the contradictory to feminism as it is the ideology of the individual who may not be eager to build a family but can contribute to society in other ways. Another vivid example of how both concepts correlate is the writings of St. Basil the Great. In one of his lectures, he considers the question of what each person will say to the god at the end of his or her way. Discussing the issue thoroughly, the author does not define between men and women; he treats them equally. I believe in this respect, Christianity fits the concept of feminism. On the other hand, when mortal life is concerned, Christian ideologists tend to discriminate against women. For e.g., Tertullian openly tells female how to dress and behave. The same situation may be observed in early Christian works. According to the Acts of Peter, a young girl in the tines of the Apostles had no right to choose a husband or refuse one impressed by the parents.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Feminism, Religious, Catholic, ideology, Discrimination.

## What is Christianity?

Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is the world’s largest and most widespread religion with roughly 2.4 billion followers, comprising around 31.2% of the world population. Its adherents, known as Christion’s, are estimated to make up a majority of the population in 157 countries and territories. Christion’s believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, whose coming as the Messiah was prophesied in the Hebrew Bible and chronicled in the New Testament.

Christianity remains culturally diverse in its Western and Eastern branches, and doctrinally diverse concerning justification and the nature of salvation, ecclesiology, ordination and Christology. The creeds of various Christion denominations generally hold in common Jesus as the Son of God – the Logos incarnated- who

ministered, suffered, and died on a cross, but rose from the dead for the salvation of humankind; and referred to us the gospel, meaning the “good news”. The four canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John describe Jesus’s life and teachings, with the Old Testament as the gospels’ respected background.

Christianity began in the 1<sup>st</sup> century after the birth of Jesus as a Judaic sect with Hellenistic influence, in the Roman province of Judea. The disciples of Jesus spread their faith around the Eastern Mediterranean area, despite significant persecution. The inclusion of Gentiles led Christianity to slowly separate from Judaism. Emperor Constantine I decriminalized Christianity in the Roman Empire by the Edict of Milan, later convening the Council of Nicaea where Early Christianity was consolidated into what would become the state religion of the Roman Empire. The Church of the East and Oriental Orthodoxy both split over differences in Christology, while the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church separated in the East-West Schism. Protestantism split into numerous denominations from the Catholic Church in the Reformation era. Following the Age of Discovery, Christianity expanded throughout the world via missionary work, extensive trade, and colonialism. Christianity played a prominent role in the development of Western civilization, particularly in Europe from late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

### **What is Feminism?**

Feminism is a range of sociopolitical movements and ideologies that aim to define and establish the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes. Feminism holds the position that societies prioritize the male point of view and that women are treated unjustly in these societies. Efforts to change this include fighting against gender stereotypes and improving educational, professional, and interpersonal opportunities and outcomes for women.

Originating in late 18<sup>th</sup>–century Europe, feminist movements have campaigned and continue to campaign for women’s rights including the right to vote, run for public office, work, earn equal pay, own property, receive education, enter into contracts, have equal rights within marriage, and maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to ensure access to contraception, legal abortion, and social integration; and to protect women and girls from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. Changes in female dress standards and acceptable physical activities for females have also been part of feminist movements.

Many scholars consider feminist campaigns to be a main force behind major historical societal changes for women’s rights, particularly in the West, where they are near-universally credited with achieving women’s suffrage, gender-neutral language, reproductive rights for women, and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Although feminist advocacy is, and has been, mainly focused on women’s rights, some argue for the inclusion of men’s liberation within its aims, because they believe that men are also harmed by traditional gender roles. Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women’s social roles and lived experiences. Feminist theorists have developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues concerning gender. Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have developed over the years, representing different viewpoints and political aims. Traditionally, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, first-wave liberal feminism, which sought political and legal equality through reforms within a liberal democratic framework, was contrasted with labor-based proletarian women’s movements that over time developed into socialist and Marxist feminism based on class struggle theory.

## Christianity and Feminism: Can they work together?

Following the furtherance of the feminist movement in a religious nation like Nigeria, there are myriads of rebuttals from both religions and irreligious people that converging Christianity and feminism might be a far reach, as they argue the Bible to be misogynistic and highly sexist.

While it might seem arduous to conflate Christianity and gender equality, I would love to begin with a historical perspective: the Bible did not invent patriarchy but it only expresses the prevalent states of male dominance in those time. Even though the Bible was written by men on inspiration from God, male dominance was largely sold through that ages, culture, which was highly patriarchal. If the bible were to be rewritten in our time, there'd be a distinctive difference in traditional gender nuances, as we humans have evolved and women's infusion in virtually every part of society is fast gaining a foothold.

A common religious fallacy that fosters male dominance is the idea that the biblical account of creation portrays women as an afterthought of God –created after men, hence, affirming that men are superior. If the sequence in creation bestowed an order of hierarchy, then wouldn't it be logical to main because God created them before man?

In fact, digging deeper into the creation story, the dazzling truth is that male and female were created at the same time. He created them male and female and he gave both gender the mandate of dominion, multiplication and leadership. So, it's rightfully expected of a woman to lead, take charge, and be on the frontline. That mandate was handed over to humanity (both male and female). There's a gap between these verse and the verse that talks about the formation of Adam and Eve, of which there are many stories, such as the account of Lilith. However, the salient point is that the first verse about the creation of human beings is cardinal to the furtherance of women's inclusion.

### Jesus Christ and His views on Gender:

On one occasion, a set of people wanted to stone an adulterous woman and reported her to Jesus. Jesus asked them to cast the stone if they were without sin and they disgracefully left. In introspection of what Christ said, I believe part of which His response implied was: "if any of you here haven't cheated on your wife, be the first to cast the stone". The Jewish law made provision for punishing an adulterous woman, but never maintained the same standard for an adulterous man. Male hypocrisy isn't alien, it's as old as time and Jesus frowned at it. He disregarded a law that was gender- biased because He understood that both genders should be held to the same standards.

More so, Jesus' relationship with women was a noble one-they were the greatest financiers of his ministry. The Bible especially shows His bond with Mary Magdalene, who was a prostitute, though some liberal theologians assessing Christian polemics have an argument that she wasn't a prostitute, and that was an agenda to discredit her relevance to Christianity. In fact, there are speculations about the Gospel of Mary written by her.

Taking this out of external source and theological polemics, it is clearly stated in the gospels that Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene- this was symbolic. She was the first to experience the sacrosanct event of His resurrection on which our gospel creed is built. He appeared first to a women in an age when the testimony of woman in an age it was not accepted. He exalted women hood- a woman, otherwise disqualified to take up actuate roles in the Church, was the first bearer of the gospel of good news. Jesus qualified women.

The Bible packs plain wisdom and guidance on how humans- male and female alike-are to be treated ; it implies that before the reign of Christ there must have been decision and superiority based on status, race, gender, among others. However, in Christ, there's no such: we all are equal in and before him. Feminism is

the advocacy for justice and equality for women and, contrary to religious benevolent sexist ideas, Christ frowns at gender decimation, and he is certainly pro-women.

## **Feminist questions of Christianity**

### **Why Should Feminists care about Christianity?**

Feminists should care about Christianity because it is simultaneously a religion with an egalitarian vision that has been and should continue to be liberating for women, and because it has been a major institution of patriarchy that remains a pervasive cultural force needing criticism. The first two waves of feminism demonstrated how various institutions of patriarchy promoted injustice and inequality especially for women, and they helped bring about position change in many of them. The work of criticizing the negative elements of Christianity while uncovering its positive legacy must continue today with third- wave feminist insights and strategies.

### **How has Christianity been a problem for women?**

Feminist criticism of Christianity looks at its history, its social and political influence, and its theology for the ways that it has harmed women. In fact, as is the case with several social institution Christianity has been both the problem and the solution in the lives of many women.

### **Has Christianity been oppressive only on the basis of Gender?**

One of the more shameful legacies of the Christian tradition has been its use as the ideological basis for the persecution of Jesus and Muslims. In addition, Christianity has provided religious justification for the careless misuse of the earth's natural resources. Each of these realities is taken seriously by third wave feminism, who are attuned not only to oppression on the basis of gender but also to justice throughout the global and multipath human community.

### **How has Christianity affected women's lives in a positive way?**

Christianity has provided both a set of beliefs, and a place that have been good for women individually and collectively. While the oppressive and sexist tendencies of the religion are well documented its empowering dimension is often overlooked by feminist critics. History, theology, and practice are instructive on this topic. Historically, Christians created a community that welcomed the marginalized and served the poor and the women, and this practice can be found resurging today.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, I believe that at some points, Christianity resembles feminism, but in the other way, it does not. The examples of above- mentioned modern and old Christian explanation demonstrate that religion was strongly influenced by historical circumstances. However, it bears the spirit of liberation (just as feminism does) and states that representatives of both sexes are equal before God and will be judged only by their deeds

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