

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

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Abstract

This study examines the roles, status, rights, responsibilities, and contributions of women in Islam and Christianity from theological, scriptural, historical, and sociocultural perspectives. Women have made significant contributions to the religious, social, educational, economic and political development of both religious traditions. However, their roles and status have been shaped not only by sacred texts and theological interpretations but also by historical experiences, cultural practices, legal systems, and changing social conditions. In Christianity, biblical accounts present women as active participants in God's redemptive mission, exemplified by Mary, Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Lydia. Nevertheless, diverse Christian traditions have developed different understandings of women's participation in church leadership, pastoral ministry, marriage, education, and ecclesiastical decision-making. In Islam, women are recognised as believers and important participants in family, educational, economic, and community life, while the Qur'an affirms their spiritual accountability and dignity. Islamic jurisprudence further addresses matters such as marriage, inheritance, modesty, family responsibilities, and social relationships, although interpretations and practices vary across Muslim societies. The study comparatively explores these perspectives, with particular attention to women's roles within the family, religious institutions, and wider society, as well as their opportunities and limitations in leadership, education, economic activities, and religious participation. It identifies areas of convergence and divergence in the rights, responsibilities, treatment, and contributions of women in both traditions. The study argues that a balanced understanding of women's roles requires careful consideration of the interaction between scripture, theology, historical development, culture, and contemporary social realities. Ultimately, the comparative analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how Islam and Christianity have shaped, interpreted, and negotiated women's dignity, responsibilities, participation, and agency in contemporary society.

Keywords: Women in Islam; Women in Christianity; Gender and Religion; Women's Rights; Comparative Religious Studies.

Introduction

Islam and Christianity Monotheistic religions teach that Man and Woman were created by God who is Omniscient, Omnipotent, Eternal, Omnipresent. However, the perception about the status and role of woman varies as recorded their sacred text of the Bible and the Qur'an. It is on this note the focus of this paper is on the comparative study of the role and status of women in Christianity and Islam.

Women have played significant and complex roles in both Islam and Christianity, contributing to the religious, social, economic, educational, and political development of their respective communities. Both religions emerged within historical contexts in which prevailing cultural traditions influenced women's social status, responsibilities, and opportunities. Consequently, teachings concerning women in Islam and Christianity have often been interpreted through the lenses of sacred texts, theological traditions, cultural practices, and historical circumstances. A comparative study of women in these two religious traditions, therefore, provides an important basis for understanding their shared values as well as their distinctive perspectives on women's dignity, responsibilities, rights, and contributions to family, religious institutions, and society.

In Christianity, women are presented in the Bible as active participants in God's redemptive mission, including disciples, supporters of Jesus' ministry, witnesses to the resurrection, and contributors to the growth of the early church. Figures such as Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene; Priscilla; Phoebe; and Lydia illustrate diverse dimensions of women's participation in the Christian faith and ministry. However, Christian traditions have developed different interpretations of women's roles in church leadership, family life, education, and wider society. These differences have resulted in varying practices concerning women's ordination, pastoral leadership, marriage, ministry, and participation in ecclesiastical decision-making. Similarly, in Islam, women occupy important roles as believers, wives, mothers, educators, property owners, community members, and participants in social and economic life. The Qur'an affirms the spiritual accountability and dignity of both men and women, while Islamic jurisprudence establishes principles relating to marriage, inheritance, modesty, family responsibilities, and social relationships. Nevertheless, interpretations and practices concerning women differ considerably across Muslim societies because religious teachings interact with diverse cultural, historical, legal, and contemporary social contexts.

The study seeks to explore the theological and scriptural perspectives on the role and status of women in Islam and Christianity and to compare the roles and responsibilities assigned to women within the family, religious institutions, and broader society in both traditions. It further examines the opportunities and limitations experienced by women in areas such as leadership, education, economic activities, and religious participation. In addition, the study seeks to identify the similarities and differences in the rights, responsibilities, treatment, and contributions of women within Islam and Christianity. Through this comparative analysis, the study aims to provide a balanced understanding of how both religious traditions perceive and shape women's roles in contemporary society, while recognising the influence of scriptural interpretation, theological development, historical experience, cultural practices, and changing social conditions.

Conceptual Terminology

Christianity

Christianity is a monotheistic religion centred on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whom Christians confess as the Son of God and Saviour of humanity. Its faith and practices are primarily grounded in the Bible, comprising the Old and New Testaments. They are expressed through beliefs concerning God, creation, sin, salvation, grace, the church, and eternal life. Christianity encompasses diverse traditions, including Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and numerous Protestant denominations, each with distinctive theological and ecclesiastical practices. Recent scholarship continues to emphasise that Christianity is not a static or culturally uniform tradition but a global and diverse faith whose theological expressions develop within particular historical and cultural contexts. Claassens (2024), for example, highlights the importance of contemporary biblical interpretation in addressing questions of gender, identity, and social justice.

Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion based on belief in Allah as the one God and in Muhammad as His final Prophet. Its foundational Scripture is the Qur'an, while the Sunnah and Hadith provide important sources for understanding the teachings and example of the Prophet Muhammad. Islam encompasses a comprehensive way of life that encompasses faith, worship, morality, family relationships, social responsibilities, and principles governing individual and communal conduct. Contemporary scholars emphasise that Islam should not be reduced to a single cultural or political expression because Muslim communities have developed diverse interpretations and practices across different historical and geographical contexts. Belhaj (2023) observes that Islam may be examined as a religion, a system of rituals and norms, a theological tradition, a civilisation, and a set of social practices, thereby demonstrating the complexity of defining the tradition.

Theological and Scriptural Perspectives on Women in Islam and Christianity

1. Christianity

The theological understanding of women in Christianity begins with the biblical teaching that both male and female are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). It provides a fundamental theological basis for the dignity, spiritual worth, and moral agency of women. In the New Testament, women are portrayed as active participants in the ministry of Jesus and the mission of the early church. Mary participated in the incarnation narrative, Mary Magdalene became a witness to the resurrection, and women were among Jesus' disciples and supporters (Luke 8:1–3; John 20:11–18). Paul's declaration that "there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) has become an important text in contemporary discussions of gender equality in Christianity.

At the same time, passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 have historically been interpreted as restricting women's teaching and leadership roles. Consequently, Christian theology has developed different approaches, particularly egalitarian, complementarian, and feminist interpretations, concerning women's authority in the church and family. Recent scholarship by Nelson (2024) argues, drawing on the examples of Deborah and Priscilla, that Scripture provides significant models for women exercising leadership when called and equipped by God.

Scripturally, therefore, the position of women in Christianity must be understood through the broader biblical narrative rather than through isolated passages. Women such as Deborah, Ruth, Esther, Priscilla, Phoebe, Lydia, and Junia demonstrate diverse forms of female agency, leadership, ministry, and service. Phoebe, for instance, is described as a *diakonos* and benefactor of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1–2), while Priscilla participated in instructing Apollos in Christian doctrine (Acts 18:24–26).

Contemporary biblical scholarship increasingly pays attention to the historical context, literary setting, and theological purpose of passages traditionally used to limit women's participation. Resane (2024) argues that selective readings of 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 can contribute to the marginalisation of women and calls for more inclusive hermeneutical approaches. Similarly, Chukwuedo (2024), examining the debate over women's ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria, demonstrates how egalitarian, complementarian, and liberation-theological approaches produce different interpretations of Pauline texts. Thus, Christian perspectives on women involve an ongoing theological conversation concerning creation, equality, discipleship, ministry, authority, family, leadership, and the appropriate interpretation of biblical texts.

2. Islam

Unlike Christianity, understanding the role and status of women in Islam is a herculean task. The reason being that while some Qur'anic passages have equal role and status with men some Qur'anic passages and some statement made by the Holy Prophet Muhammad relegate women to the background. The underlisted statements affirmed the aforementioned assertion.

The Theological perspective of women in Islam is fundamentally connected to the Qur'anic understanding of human creation, spiritual accountability, dignity, and responsibility before Allah. The Qur'an presents men and women as originating from a common human nature (Qur'an 4:1) and repeatedly addresses both as morally responsible believers. Qur'an 33:55, for example, explicitly identifies believing men and believing women together in relation to faith, obedience, righteousness, patience, charity, fasting and remembrance of God. Similarly, Qur'an 9:71 describes men and women as allies who encourage one another toward what is right and discourage what is wrong.

These passages have provided an important theological foundation for contemporary Muslim discussions of women's spiritual equality and social participation. Afsaruddin (2023) observes that modern Muslim scholars have increasingly revisited Qur'anic passages concerning gender, challenging interpretations shaped by patriarchal assumptions in certain classical exegetical traditions. Afidah (2023) likewise argues that the Qur'an and Hadith contain principles of fairness and human dignity that are relevant to contemporary discussions of women's empowerment and participation in both domestic and public spheres.

From a scriptural perspective, the Qur'an presents several women as significant figures within its theological narratives. Maryam (Mary), for example, receives exceptional recognition as a woman chosen and honoured by Allah (Qur'an 3:42). At same time, the Queen of Sheba is presented as a politically significant and discerning ruler in Qur'an 27:20-44. On the other hand, Islam Teaches that women are inherently inferior to men. "Women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable, but men have a degree over them" P. 133. This

was reiterated by Mohammad when he talked with a group of women “I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you” (P Hadith 2:5411). A woman, thus being a lesser creature, has fewer rights and privileges in Muslim society, especially in apportioning inheritance “To the Male, a portion equal to that of two females” (Surah 4:11). In judicial proceedings, a woman’s testimony is given one-half the value and credibility as that of a man “Get two witnesses out of your own men, and if these are not two men, then a man and two women shall you choose for witnesses (Surah 2:282) p134. Some women willingly hide their bodies in burqa as an act of modesty and faithfulness to Islam p136. Women are considered possessions in any Orthodox Islamic region. “fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and Sons heaped up boards of gold and silver” (Surah 3:14). The wife is considered the husband’s sex object “your wives are as a tilth (field to be plowed) unto you, so approach your tilth when and how you will” (Surah 2:223) p137.

The Qur’an stresses that the woman is responsible to submit in public in both gaze and dress: “Ann say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty, that they should not display their beauty and ornaments what appear thereof, that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty (Surah 24:31) p137-138.

Protocols before prayer, a man is considered unclean if he touches a woman (even his wife) before prayer: O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with the mind befogged until ye can understand all that you say; nor in a state of ceremonial impurity...until after washing your whole body if you are ill or on a journey...or you have been in contact with women. And if you find no water, then take for yourself clean sand or earth and rub...your faces and hands: for Allah doth blot and sins and forgive then again and again (Surah 4:43) p138.

When the Prophet was asked, what right does the woman have with the man? He replied, “He should feed her if he eats, cloth her when he dresses, and avoid disfiguring her or beating her excessively or abandoning her except at home (hath 7:62-71) p138-139 (Caner, Ergum Mehmet and Emir Fethi Caner.)

These accounts have become important resources for contemporary Muslim scholars examining female agency, leadership, spirituality, and moral responsibility. Abugideiri (2023) reexamines Qur’anic representations of Mary, Bilqīs, and Zulaykha and argues that these narratives can contribute to a theological understanding of women that does not reduce their identity to conventional gender stereotypes.

Contemporary Qur’anic hermeneutics also debates passages such as Qur’an 4:34 concerning male authority and family responsibility. Afsaruddin (2023) identifies a continuing tension between hierarchical and egalitarian readings of such passages and argues for a holistic reading of the Qur’an centred on justice and human dignity. El Omari (2024) similarly advocates a gender-sensitive Qur’anic interpretation that takes the historical, cultural, and interreligious dimensions seriously. Consequently, Islamic theological perspectives on women cannot be separated from debates concerning Qur’anic interpretation, Hadith, jurisprudence, culture, family responsibilities, leadership, and the distinction between foundational revelation and historically developed interpretations.

Roles and Responsibilities of Women in Christianity and Islam

The roles of women in Christianity and Islam should be examined through three interconnected spheres: the family, religious institutions, and wider society. Although both traditions affirm women's moral and spiritual significance, the interpretation and application of their teachings vary across denominations, schools of thought, cultures, and historical periods.

A. Christianity

1. Women as Wives and Mothers in the Family

Christianity gives considerable importance to women's roles within family life. Biblical teachings present marriage as a covenantal relationship involving love, faithfulness, mutual responsibility, and care. Ephesians 5:21–33, for example, places marriage within the wider principle of mutual responsibility, while Proverbs 31 portrays a woman who combines domestic responsibilities with economic activity, wisdom, management, and community influence. Mothers are also regarded as important agents of spiritual and moral formation. Timothy's faith, for example, is associated with the influence of his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). Contemporary Christian scholarship increasingly emphasises that motherhood should not be interpreted merely as domestic confinement but as a significant sphere of theological, educational, and social influence. Nelson (2024), while focusing primarily on leadership, demonstrates that biblical women such as Deborah and Priscilla provide models for understanding women's broader agency and responsibility.

2. Women as Caregivers and Builders of Christian Families

Women traditionally occupy important caregiving, nurturing, and relational roles in Christian families. They contribute to the moral education of children, the maintenance of family relationships, hospitality, and the transmission of Christian values. However, contemporary Christian perspectives increasingly recognise that family responsibility should not be automatically equated with women's exclusive responsibility. The biblical emphasis on love, service, sacrifice, and mutual submission provides a basis for understanding family responsibilities as shared obligations. Thus, Christian theology increasingly engages questions concerning how women can combine family responsibilities with education, employment, ministry, and public leadership without reducing their identity to any single role.

3. Women as Disciples and Participants in Religious Life

Women occupy an important place in Christian religious life. The Gospels identify women among Jesus' followers and supporters, while women were present among the disciples and became witnesses to the resurrection. Mary Magdalene is particularly significant because the Gospel narratives identify her as a witness to the risen Christ (John 20:11–18). Luke 8:1–3 also records women who supported Jesus and his ministry. These accounts demonstrate that women were not merely passive recipients of Christian teaching but active participants in the mission of Jesus. Recent scholarship continues to revisit these biblical examples as resources for understanding women's participation in contemporary Christian ministry.

4. Women in Church Leadership and Ministry

Christian traditions differ considerably regarding women's leadership in religious institutions. Some denominations ordain women as pastors, priests, bishops, theologians, and denominational leaders, while others restrict certain offices to men. The debate frequently centres on texts such as 1 Timothy

2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 on the one hand, and passages concerning women such as Deborah, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia on the other. Nelson (2024) argues that Deborah and Priscilla provide biblical templates for contemporary women's leadership and contends that women should be encouraged to lead where they are called and equipped by God. Thus, women's roles in Christian institutions include preaching, teaching, evangelism, administration, counselling, missionary work, worship leadership, theological education, and community ministry, although the extent of participation varies among traditions.

5. Women as Educators and Formators of Faith

Women have historically contributed substantially to Christian education. They serve as Sunday-school teachers, children's ministers, theological educators, missionaries, mentors, counsellors, and family faith educators. The examples of Priscilla instructing Apollos (Acts 18:24–26) and Lois and Eunice instructing Timothy demonstrate that teaching and spiritual formation are not exclusively male activities. In contemporary Christianity, women's participation in theological education has expanded considerably, although access to senior academic and ecclesiastical leadership remains uneven in some contexts.

6. Women as Economic and Professional Contributors

Christianity does not present women solely in domestic terms. Proverbs 31 portrays a woman who engages in trade, acquires property, manages resources, and contributes economically to her household. Lydia in Acts 16:14–15 is another example of a woman engaged in commerce and hospitality. Consequently, women's economic activity can be understood as compatible with Christian responsibility when exercised ethically and responsibly. Contemporary Christian discussions increasingly emphasise women's education, entrepreneurship, professional development, and economic empowerment as important dimensions of family and societal wellbeing.

7. Women as Contributors to Society and Community Development

Christian women have played important roles in education, healthcare, humanitarian work, missions, advocacy, social welfare, and community development. Women's missionary movements, religious organisations, schools, hospitals, and charitable institutions have historically provided significant services to communities. Their contributions extend beyond church activities to broader social transformation. Thus, Christian understandings of women increasingly recognise their capacity to exercise social responsibility and leadership in accordance with their gifts, calling, education, and professional competence.

B. Islam

1. Women as Wives and Mothers in the Family

Family responsibility occupies an important place in Islamic teachings concerning women. The Qur'an presents marriage as a relationship involving tranquillity, affection, and mercy (Qur'an 30:21), while Qur'an 2:228 recognises reciprocal rights and responsibilities within marital relationships. Motherhood is also highly valued within Islamic tradition. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that Muslim motherhood involves religious, emotional, educational, and social dimensions. Pappano (2023) examines how Islamic interpretations shape contemporary maternal

identities and household practices, showing that Muslim motherhood must be understood in relation to changing family structures and social realities rather than through a single universal model.

2. Women as Caregivers and Family Educators

Muslim women have traditionally played important roles in raising children and transmitting religious and moral values within the household. The family, therefore, serves as an important context for women's religious and educational responsibilities. Mothers contribute to the formation of children's character, religious identity, discipline, and social values. However, contemporary scholarship recognises that Muslim families are diverse and that women increasingly combine motherhood with education, employment, professional careers, and community engagement. Pappano (2023) specifically highlights the negotiation between motherhood, household responsibilities, religion, and modern lived realities.

3. Women as Believers and Participants in Religious Life

Islam recognises women as spiritually accountable believers. The Qur'an repeatedly addresses believing men and women together and associates both with faith, worship, righteousness, and moral responsibility (Qur'an 33:35; 9:71). Women, therefore, have responsibilities in prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, moral conduct, and religious learning, subject to specific jurisprudential provisions. The contemporary *Oxford Handbook of Islam and Women* gives considerable attention to Muslim women's devotional lives and participation in religious institutions, demonstrating that women's religious agency has existed throughout Islamic history.

4. Women as Transmitters of Religious Knowledge

Women have historically contributed to Islamic scholarship, particularly through the transmission of Hadith and religious knowledge. A notable example is Aisha, wife of the Prophet Muhammad, who became an important transmitter of Hadith and a source of religious and legal knowledge. Sayeed (2023) documents the significant role of Muslim women in transmitting religious knowledge, including Hadith, Islamic law, Qur'anic studies, and other fields of Islamic learning. She argues that women's involvement in knowledge transmission has implications not only for education but also for understanding women's mobility, agency, and empowerment in Islamic history.

5. Women and Religious Institutions

Women's participation in mosques and other Islamic institutions has varied across historical and cultural contexts. Women have participated in religious education, charitable activities, scholarship, devotional practices, and community organisation. Contemporary Muslim women also participate in religious activism and public Islamic discourse. The *Oxford Handbook of Islam and Women* specifically examines women's participation in mosques and their contestation of religious authority and public religious space. It demonstrates that the question of women's religious participation is not simply one of permission or prohibition but involves continuing debates about authority, tradition, jurisprudence, culture, and changing social conditions.

6. Women's Economic Roles and Property Rights

Islamic teachings recognise women as economic actors and provide for women's rights concerning property and inheritance. Qur'an 4:7 establishes women's entitlement to inheritance, while Islamic legal traditions recognise women's independent ownership of property. Women can engage in

legitimate economic activities, trade, employment, and entrepreneurship. Historical examples, including Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, demonstrate women's participation in commerce in the early Muslim community. Sonbol (2023), in the *Oxford Handbook of Islam and Women*, examines women as economic actors in the premodern Islamic world, demonstrating that Muslim women's economic participation has a significant historical foundation.

7. Women in Education and Intellectual Life

Women have historically participated in Islamic education and scholarship, although access to formal educational institutions has varied across societies and periods. Women transmitted Hadith, taught religious knowledge, produced literary works, and participated in intellectual communities. Sayeed (2023) emphasises that women's participation in the transmission of religious knowledge is an important part of Islamic educational history. In contemporary Muslim societies, women increasingly participate in universities, professional education, Islamic scholarship, and research, thereby expanding their contributions to both religious and secular knowledge.

8. Women as Social and Political Actors

Islamic history contains examples of women participating in charitable, intellectual, economic, and political activities. Contemporary Muslim women also participate in social movements, civil society, public administration, politics, and community development. The *Oxford Handbook of Islam and Women* includes studies of women as modern heads of state and of women's religious and social activism across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. This broad geographical evidence challenges the assumption that Muslim women have a single social experience and demonstrates the influence of culture, law, politics, and historical circumstances.

9. Women's Rights and Responsibilities under Islamic Law

Islamic jurisprudence addresses women's rights and responsibilities in areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, property, and family relations. However, contemporary Muslim societies differ in how these principles are interpreted and incorporated into national laws. Siddiqui (2023) observes that reforms to Islamic family law have generated ongoing debates between traditional and reformist approaches, with Morocco and Malaysia as examples of different approaches to legal reform. The broader scholarship, therefore, distinguishes between the Qur'an and Sunnah as foundational sources and *fiqh* as historically developed human interpretations of Islamic law. The *Oxford Handbook* notes that classical legal formulations continue to influence contemporary understandings of women's rights and duties, while modern Muslim scholars increasingly revisit these interpretations.

Opportunities and Limitations for Women in Christianity and Islam

A comparative examination of women in Christianity and Islam shows that both traditions have provided theological and social resources through which women can exercise agency, acquire knowledge, participate economically, and contribute to religious communities. At the same time, women's actual opportunities have been influenced by scriptural interpretation, religious institutions, cultural traditions, legal systems, and gender expectations. Recent scholarship, therefore, distinguishes between the teachings of a religion and the ways those teachings have been interpreted and institutionalised in particular societies. Afsaruddin (2023), for example, emphasises

the considerable diversity of Muslim women's experiences, while contemporary Christian scholarship continues to reassess biblical texts and traditions concerning women's leadership and ministry.

A. Christianity

1. Opportunities for Women in Leadership

Christianity provides biblical examples of women exercising significant forms of leadership. Prophetess Deborah served as a judge and leader of Israel (Judges 4–5), Priscilla participated in the instruction of Apollos (Acts 18:24–26), Phoebe served the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1–2), and Junia is identified among the apostles (Romans 16:7). These examples have provided theological foundations for Christian traditions that support women's leadership in churches and society. Nelson (2024) particularly identifies Deborah and Priscilla as important biblical models for contemporary women's leadership. In many contemporary denominations, women serve as pastors, priests, bishops, theological educators, missionaries, administrators, and denominational executives. It represents a major expansion of women's opportunities compared with many historical Christian contexts.

2. Limitations in Christian Leadership

Despite these opportunities, women's leadership remains contested within Christianity. Some traditions interpret passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 as restricting women's authority to teach or exercise ecclesiastical leadership over men. Complementarian traditions consequently distinguish between the leadership roles available to men and women. In contrast, egalitarian traditions interpret such passages in their historical and cultural contexts and support women's full participation in church leadership. Chukwuedo (2024), examining the debate over women's ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria, demonstrates how competing interpretations of Pauline texts continue to influence women's access to ecclesiastical leadership. Resane (2024) similarly argues that selective interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14 have contributed to the marginalisation of women. Thus, women's leadership opportunities in Christianity vary substantially across denominations, theological traditions, and cultural contexts.

3. Opportunities for Women in Education

Christianity has historically encouraged literacy, Bible study, theological learning, and Christian education. Women have served as teachers, missionaries, Sunday-school educators, theologians, scholars, and administrators of Christian educational institutions. Contemporary Christian women increasingly have access to universities, seminaries, theological colleges, and professional education. Their educational advancement has also expanded their participation in ministry, scholarship, social work, and leadership. The growth of women's theological education has contributed to the emergence of female biblical scholars and theologians who are reassessing traditional interpretations of Scripture.

4. Limitations in Christian Education

Nevertheless, limitations have existed where cultural expectations or restrictive interpretations of women's roles have discouraged advanced education or theological leadership. In some communities, women may be encouraged to pursue education but discouraged from using their

qualifications in church leadership. Gender stereotypes can also influence the subjects women are encouraged to study and the professional positions they are expected to occupy. Consequently, educational access does not automatically guarantee equal opportunities for leadership or decision-making. Recent feminist biblical scholarship, including Claassens (2024), continues to challenge interpretive traditions that have contributed to women's marginalisation and advocates readings of Scripture attentive to women's experiences and agency.

5. Opportunities for Women in Economic Activities

Christianity does not prohibit women from productive economic activity. The Proverbs 31 woman engages in commerce, purchases property, manages household resources, and conducts business (Proverbs 31:10–31). Lydia was a businesswoman dealing in purple cloth before becoming associated with the Christian community at Philippi (Acts 16:14–15). These biblical examples demonstrate that women's economic contributions can coexist with religious commitment and family responsibilities. Contemporary Christian women participate in business, entrepreneurship, professional employment, agriculture, banking, education, healthcare, technology, and other economic sectors. Churches and Christian organisations also increasingly support women's economic empowerment through skills acquisition, microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and vocational education.

6. Limitations in Economic Activities

Women may nevertheless encounter economic limitations arising from cultural expectations, unequal access to resources, gender discrimination, unequal pay, limited access to capital, and the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities. In some Christian communities, traditional understandings of women's primary responsibility as wives and mothers can constrain their economic participation. The problem is therefore not necessarily derived directly from Christian doctrine but may arise from the interaction between religious beliefs and patriarchal cultural structures. Contemporary Christian approaches to women's empowerment increasingly emphasise that family responsibilities and economic participation can be complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

7. Opportunities for Women in Religious Participation

Women have numerous opportunities to participate in Christian religious life. They serve as worship leaders, choir members, prayer leaders, evangelists, missionaries, counsellors, teachers, children's ministers, youth workers, administrators, and members of church committees. The New Testament provides several examples of women supporting Christian mission and ministry. Four women who followed and supported Jesus (Luke 8:1–3), the women who witnessed the resurrection, and women associated with house churches in the Pauline communities illustrate their active participation. Contemporary Christian churches increasingly recognise these contributions as essential to congregational life and mission.

8. Limitations in Religious Participation

The principal limitation concerns the extent of women's authority within religious institutions. Some churches permit women to participate extensively but restrict them from ordination, preaching, eldership, episcopal office, or certain decision-making positions. Consequently, women

may constitute a majority of church members and volunteers while remaining underrepresented in senior leadership. It creates an important distinction between participation and authority. Contemporary scholarship, such as Nelson (2024) and Resane (2024), demonstrates that the question continues to generate significant theological debate.

B. Islam

1. Opportunities for Women in Leadership

Islamic history contains examples of women exercising intellectual, economic, social, and political influence. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid was a successful merchant, while Aisha bint Abi Bakr became an important transmitter of Hadith and a source of religious knowledge. The Qur'anic explanation of the Queen of Sheba (Qur'an 27:20–44) is also frequently discussed in relation to female political leadership. Contemporary Muslim women serve as academics, politicians, entrepreneurs, activists, educators, lawyers, religious scholars, and community leaders. Afsaruddin (2023) emphasises the diversity of Muslim women's leadership experiences and the importance of distinguishing religious principles from historically specific social practices.

2. Limitations in Islamic Leadership

Women's leadership in Islam remains subject to significant debate. Interpretations of Qur'an 4:34 concerning *qiwamah* (often associated with male responsibility or authority within the family) have been particularly influential in discussions about gender hierarchy. Traditional interpretations may support differentiated gender responsibilities, while contemporary Muslim scholars have offered alternative readings emphasising justice, mutual responsibility, and changing social circumstances. In addition, women's access to senior political and religious leadership varies significantly between Muslim-majority societies. These differences demonstrate that the interaction between Qur'anic interpretation, Hadith, fiqh, culture, and contemporary law shapes Islamic approaches to female leadership. Afsaruddin (2023) documents these competing approaches within contemporary Islamic thought.

3. Opportunities for Women in Education

Education has an important place in Islamic tradition. Muslim women have historically participated in the transmission of Hadith and other religious sciences. Aisha, for example, became an influential authority on religious, legal, and social questions. Sayeed (2023) demonstrates that women played important roles as transmitters of Islamic knowledge and argues that their participation represents a significant dimension of Islamic intellectual history. In contemporary Muslim societies, women increasingly attend schools, universities, seminaries, professional institutions, and research centres. Female scholars now contribute to Qur'anic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith studies, education, medicine, science, law, and other disciplines.

4. Limitations in Islamic Education

Educational opportunities for Muslim women nevertheless differ considerably across societies. Cultural expectations, poverty, early marriage, restrictive policies, insecurity, and unequal access to educational institutions can limit women's educational advancement in some contexts. It is important, however, not to attribute all such restrictions directly to Islam. Afsaruddin (2023) demonstrates the diversity of Muslim women's experiences and the importance of distinguishing

Islamic teachings from cultural and political practices. Contemporary Muslim reformers frequently invoke Islamic principles concerning knowledge and human dignity to advocate expanded educational opportunities for women.

5. Opportunities for Women in Economic Activities

Islam recognises women as holders of property and economic rights. Qur'an 4:7 provides women with an inheritance entitlement, while Qur'an 4:32 recognises that women have a share in what they earn. Islamic legal traditions also recognise women's independent ownership of property. The example of Khadijah demonstrates that women could participate actively in commerce in the early Muslim community. Sonbol (2023) examines women's economic roles in Islamic history and shows that Muslim women participated in property ownership, commerce, charitable activities, and other economic functions. Today, Muslim women participate in entrepreneurship, professional employment, agriculture, banking, education, medicine, technology, and other sectors.

6. Limitations in Economic Activities

Despite these opportunities, women in some Muslim societies experience restrictions resulting from family expectations, gender norms, labour-market inequalities, limited access to finance, and legal or cultural barriers. Women's economic participation may also be affected by expectations concerning childcare and household responsibilities. The extent of these limitations varies considerably between countries and communities. Consequently, contemporary discussions increasingly distinguish between Islamic principles regarding women's economic rights and the social practices that may limit their practical realisation.

7. Opportunities for Women in Religious Participation

Women are recognised as full participants in Islamic religious obligations. The Qur'an repeatedly addresses believing men and women together in matters of faith, worship, charity, morality, and accountability (Qur'an 33:35; 9:71). Women participate in prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, Qur'anic study, charity, religious education, and community activities. Historically, women also transmitted Hadith and taught religious knowledge. Sayeed (2023) provides substantial evidence of women's involvement in the transmission of Islamic learning, challenging the assumption that Islamic religious knowledge has always been an exclusively male domain.

8. Limitations in Religious Participation

Differences in jurisprudential interpretation and local custom can nevertheless constrain women's religious participation. Questions concerning women's mosque attendance, preaching, religious authority, leadership of mixed congregational prayer, and participation in formal religious institutions remain subjects of debate among Muslim scholars. Women may have extensive opportunities for religious learning and community service while having limited access to formal positions of religious authority. Contemporary scholarship increasingly examines these questions through gender-sensitive Qur'anic interpretation. El Omari (2024), for instance, advocates an interreligious and gender-sensitive approach to Qur'anic hermeneutics that takes historical and interpretive contexts seriously.

Comparative Analysis of the Rights, Responsibilities, Treatment, and Contributions of Women in Islam and Christianity

A comparative analysis of women in Islam and Christianity requires attention to rights, responsibilities, treatment, and contributions, while distinguishing between sacred texts, theological interpretations, religious institutions, and cultural practices. Both Christianity and Islam recognise women as morally responsible persons and important members of family and religious communities, but they organise gender roles through different theological and legal frameworks. Recent scholarship also cautions against treating either tradition as homogeneous. Zurlo (2024), for example, demonstrates substantial variation in women's membership, participation, and leadership across World Christianity, while contemporary Islamic scholarship similarly identifies significant differences in women's experiences across interpretations, jurisprudence, culture, and national contexts.

1. Rights of Women

Christianity

Christian theology grounds the dignity of women in the biblical teaching that both male and female are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). The New Testament further emphasises the spiritual unity of believers in Christ: “there is neither male nor female” in relation to salvation and membership in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Women, therefore, possess spiritual, moral, and human dignity and are entitled to participate in the Christian community. Biblical examples such as Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, Phoebe, Lydia, and Junia demonstrate that women exercised important responsibilities within early Christianity. Recent scholarship continues to challenge interpretations that have restricted women's participation. Alawode (2024), examining Christian missions in Northern Nigeria, argues that patriarchal structures can limit women's participation in leadership and ministry even though Christian theology contains resources for equality and inclusion.

Islam

Islam similarly recognises women as morally accountable believers and establishes rights regarding marriage, inheritance, property, and economic activity. Qur'an 4:7, for example, recognises women's entitlement to inheritance, while Qur'an 4:32 recognises women's share in what they earn. Women are also explicitly included among those who receive spiritual reward for faith and righteous conduct (Qur'an 33:35). Recent research continues to examine how these rights are understood in contemporary Islamic jurisprudence. Čustović (2025) notes that contemporary debates about women's rights in Islam frequently centre on the relationship between Qur'anic and Sharia principles, human rights, and women's participation in interpreting religious law. Thus, an important distinction must be made between rights derived from Islamic sources and the extent to which particular societies implement those rights.

2. Responsibilities of Women

Christianity

Christianity assigns women important responsibilities within the family, church, and society. Within the family, women have traditionally been associated with marriage, motherhood, child-rearing, moral formation, and household care. Scripture, however, also presents women as teachers, missionaries, benefactors, businesspersons, and leaders. Proverbs 31 portrays a woman who manages property, engages in commerce, and contributes substantially to household welfare.

Lydia's commercial activities (Acts 16:14–15) similarly demonstrate that economic responsibility was not necessarily incompatible with Christian faith. In the church, women have responsibilities in teaching, evangelism, worship, prayer, discipleship, administration, and service, although traditions differ concerning ordained authority.

Islam

Islam places significant responsibilities on women within family and community life, including marriage, motherhood, child formation, maintenance of family relationships, religious observance, and moral conduct. At the same time, women are responsible believers who participate in worship, charity, education, economic activity, and community development. The Qur'an describes believing men and women as allies who encourage righteousness and discourage wrongdoing (Qur'an 9:71). Contemporary Muslim scholarship increasingly emphasises reciprocity and shared moral responsibility rather than reducing women exclusively to domestic roles. Saifullin, Okan, and Akimkhanov (2025) observe that women's responsibilities and opportunities in Muslim societies are shaped by the interplay among religious interpretations, social norms, and institutional structures.

3. Treatment of Women

Christianity

The treatment of women in Christianity has varied considerably throughout history. The teachings and actions of Jesus provide important examples of women being treated as persons of spiritual value and moral agency. Jesus interacted publicly with women, taught them, accepted their support, and entrusted women with significant testimony concerning his resurrection. Nevertheless, Christian societies have sometimes developed patriarchal structures that restricted women's education, property rights, ecclesiastical authority, and public leadership. Contemporary research, therefore, distinguishes between Christian theological ideals and historically conditioned Christian practices. Zurlo (2024) demonstrates that women remain highly significant in global Christianity in terms of membership and participation, while gender disparities continue in leadership.

Islam

The treatment of women in Muslim societies has likewise varied across historical periods, cultures, legal systems, and theological interpretations. Islamic sources provide women with specific rights in family and property matters, but their application has not been uniform. Recent research emphasises that cultural practices should not be automatically equated with Islamic teachings. Farah, Nizam, and Krit (2025), examining contemporary female Qur'anic interpreters, argue that patriarchal socio-historical contexts shaped some traditional interpretations and that contemporary female scholars are rereading Qur'anic teachings concerning justice, dignity, and gender relations. This demonstrates the continuing debate between traditional interpretations and gender-sensitive approaches within Islam.

4. Women's Contributions to Religious Life

Christianity

Women have made substantial contributions to Christianity through mission, evangelism, theological education, worship, pastoral ministry, charity, education, and social action. Biblical

women such as Priscilla, Phoebe, Lydia, and Mary Magdalene provide scriptural precedents for active participation. In contemporary Christianity, women constitute a major proportion of church membership and ministry participation worldwide. However, their numerical strength does not always correspond to representation in senior leadership. Zurlo (2024) specifically identifies a continuing gender gap between women's participation and leadership within World Christianity. Zulu-Mwiche (2025) similarly demonstrates that African women have contributed to shaping the faith, unity, mission, and institutional life of churches and ecumenical bodies.

Islam

Women have also made significant contributions to Islamic religious life. Aisha bint Abi Bakr, for example, became a major transmitter of Hadith and a source of religious knowledge. Muslim women have historically contributed to Qur'anic studies, Hadith transmission, education, charitable work, and community development. Contemporary women increasingly participate in Islamic scholarship and religious interpretation. Essop (2024), studying Muslim leadership in South Africa, reports significant advances in women's religious education and scholarship but also identifies their continued exclusion from some formal *ulama* leadership structures. This illustrates the distinction between women's religious participation and access to institutional religious authority.

5. Women's Economic Contributions

Christianity

Christianity recognises the value of women's economic contributions. Biblical examples such as the Proverbs 31 woman and Lydia demonstrate women's involvement in commerce, property management, and household economic welfare. Contemporary Christian women contribute to national and community development through entrepreneurship, professional employment, education, healthcare, agriculture, business, and social enterprises. Christian organisations increasingly promote women's economic empowerment through vocational training, microfinance, entrepreneurship, and education.

Islam

Islam provides explicit foundations for women's economic rights. Women can own property, inherit wealth, enter contracts, engage in business, and retain independent financial resources. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid remains an important historical example of a Muslim woman engaged in commerce. Recent comparative research by Abbas, Javed, and Shafique (2025) finds that Islamic and Christian traditions both contain principles supporting women's property and land rights. However, their legal and social implementation varies by context. Contemporary Islamic scholarship, therefore, increasingly examines not only women's formal economic rights but also their practical access to land, employment, finance, entrepreneurship, and decision-making.

6. Women's Leadership and Decision-Making

Leadership represents one of the clearest areas of both convergence and difference between Christianity and Islam. Christianity contains biblical examples of women exercising leadership, but interpretations of passages concerning male headship and women's authority have produced different denominational positions. Some churches ordain women to all levels of ministry, while

others restrict women from certain offices. Alawode (2024) identifies patriarchal structures as continuing barriers to women's leadership in some Christian mission contexts.

In Islam, women have exercised intellectual, economic, social, and political leadership, but formal religious authority remains contested in some Muslim contexts. Essop (2024) shows that Muslim women in South Africa have achieved significant educational and scholarly advancement while remaining underrepresented in *ulama* bodies. A 2026 study of religious leadership in Nigeria likewise reports a paradox in which women are central to congregational and community life while male-dominated institutional structures can restrict their access to executive religious authority.

Conclusion

The comparative examination of women in Islam and Christianity demonstrates that women have held significant and multifaceted roles in both traditions. They have contributed substantially to family life, religious development, education, economic activities, community building, and wider social transformation. Although both traditions emerged within patriarchal historical and cultural contexts, their sacred texts and religious traditions provide important foundations for understanding women's dignity, responsibilities, spiritual worth, and contributions to society. The study also reveals that the interpretation and application of these teachings have varied considerably across different periods, communities, and cultural contexts.

In Christianity, biblical narratives demonstrate that women were active participants in the ministry of Jesus and the development of the early Christian community. The examples of Mary, Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Lydia illustrate women's diverse contributions as disciples, witnesses, teachers, supporters, leaders, and co-workers in ministry. Nevertheless, differences in theological interpretation have produced diverse Christian positions concerning women's ordination, pastoral leadership, family responsibilities, and participation in church governance. Similarly, Islam recognises women as spiritually accountable members of the faith community and acknowledges their roles as wives, mothers, educators, property owners, and participants in social and economic life. However, interpretations of Islamic teachings on marriage, inheritance, modesty, leadership, and public participation have varied across Muslim societies due to differences in jurisprudence, culture, history, and social circumstances.

The comparison, therefore, shows both similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity. Both traditions affirm the importance of women in family and community life and recognise their moral and spiritual significance. At the same time, differences emerge particularly in the interpretation of leadership, authority, religious participation, family responsibilities, and certain legal rights. These differences should not be understood solely through contemporary cultural assumptions but should be examined within their respective scriptural, theological, historical, and cultural frameworks.

Ultimately, the study concludes that women's experiences in Islam and Christianity cannot be adequately understood through simplistic generalisations. There is considerable diversity within both traditions, and the lived experiences of women are shaped by the interplay among religious teachings, theological interpretations, cultural practices, legal structures, and changing social conditions. A balanced comparative approach, therefore, requires recognition of both the contributions and challenges experienced by women. Such an approach can promote informed

interreligious dialogue, mutual understanding, respect for human dignity, and constructive reflection on the continuing role of women in the family, religious institutions, and contemporary society.

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