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### Women Reshaping Religion

For hundreds of years it has been socially accepted that men are more dominant and, therefore, hold higher positions in many religions. This occurrence throughout various religions is derived from the religions specific scripture and how men and women are portrayed within it. Specifically, in Judaism and Christianity and referring to the Old Testament, men and women are seen equal in God's eyes, however, men are portrayed as the only ones who hold the highest positions within each religion, such as rabbi or priest. Throughout the development of both Christianity and Judaism, men have always held the utmost position in the church or synagogue. More recently, feminist movements have encouraged women to fight for their rights to hold these same positions. Not all branches of Judaism and Christianity have allowed this drastic sway from tradition, however, it has become a more common trend within the past decade. The worldwide movement of equality for women has reshaped Judaism and Christianity in that women can be rabbis, ordained pastors, and are socially accepted as equals to men.

Two human creation stories exist in Judaism; one where men and women are made equal in God's image, and one where Eve is a secondary creation to Adam, being created from one of his rib bones (Amore, Oxtoby, Hussain, Segal, 162). The second creation story is the most widely known in Judaism, and additionally promotes the idea that men are superior to women. Traditionally, only men were rabbis because based on the

creation stories, women are expected to behave modestly. Holding a religious leadership position would suggest that the woman is not behaving modestly, swaying from traditional practices in early Judaism. However, within the past four decades, many women have been ordained. Reform Jews ordained their first female rabbi in 1972, Conservative Jews did so in 1985, and most recently, Orthodox Jews ordained their first female rabbi in 2009 (Brekus). While the ordination of females in Reform and Conservative Judaism were generally initially accepted, Orthodox Jews did not accept this change with open arms. In March of 2009, Rabbi Avi Weiss, the head of an Orthodox synagogue in New York ordained the first female rabbi in the United States, which in turn caused the general community to be outraged (Brekus). For decades, women participated in lower positions within the ministry, which were essential to the thriving church or synagogue community. Orthodox Judaism is the strictest branch of Judaism, as they hold traditional practices and beliefs sacred. Agudath Israel of America, a Haredi Jewish communal organization in the United States, referred to the ordination of the first female as “a radical and dangerous departure from Jewish tradition” and did not consider it to be Orthodox (Brekus). It is with the rise in womanly power that has encouraged religious women to seek higher leadership positions while following their passions.

Similar to Judaism, the Roman Catholic branch of Christianity does not socially accept women as ordained priests. However, other branches of Christianity have successfully ordained female pastors, with the help of the rise in feminism. Women have always played a role in the church, particularly as nuns. Nuns have the power to run a parish just as a priest would, but are not able to celebrate Mass or administer the sacraments (Brekus). According to the book of Genesis, “equal” means that even though men and

women differ physically, they are both still loved equally in God's eyes (Wiranto). Additionally, Paul in Corinthians states, "For as women came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God." (Wiranto). Both of these quotes from the Bible suggest that man and woman were created equally, so why are only men allowed to hold religious leadership roles? Similar to the second account of human creation in Judaism, Eve was created after Adam, and, therefore, is also seen as socially lesser than him. It is because of society's misconception about the roles of men and women over the years that have essentially become a norm. As the rise of feminist movements have become more prevalent, a shift in awareness for equality has become a popular topic in society. Reformation towards total democracy, especially in the United States, has allowed women to make inequality a political topic as well. By making this political, it raises awareness to the disadvantages at life that women face. With branches of Christianity ordaining women, gender equality in religion is becoming more prevalent. This prevalence raises concern of whether or not ordaining women is an act that should be continued in the future.

Due to many religions that currently do not ordain women, mainline Protestant clergy women are focused on determining the good and bad, or perceived positive and negative aspects, about ordaining women. As of the year 2000, twenty one percent of women were Disciples of Christ clergy, seventeen percent made up the Presbyterian clergy, and twelve percent of women were a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Olson). A large involvement in the church has been the support system for the withstanding of every priest and his church throughout history. In Christianity, women have been recognized as followers of Jesus Christ, but were not given the same oppor-

tunity as men to guide a community spiritually until the nineteenth century. With feminist movements becoming more popular and widespread, the ordination of women into the church certainly raises controversy. The positives of ordaining women into the church is that they have an equal opportunity to help to guide others to the same spiritual level that they are at, as well as fully dedicate themselves to the church. In addition, women holding elite positions can be role models for other young women, and could potentially offer more constructive advice if someone encountered a problem in life with friends or in society because of their experience going through the same things. Even in today's society, women face issues such as pregnancy, rape, and feeling lesser in society, even if they have worked their way up society's ladder. While a man can offer advice to the woman seeking help, a woman confiding in another woman may be more comforting and reassuring. On a social and political level, it would raise awareness of gender equality and promote more religions worldwide to move towards allowing women to fully participate in their religions as well. This is also seen in Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Judaism, where women have been ordained as rabbis and lead synagogue worship (Amore, Oxtoby, Hussain, Segal, 143). Additionally in Judaism, women have begun to study the Torah, which until recently has only been available for men to do (Amore, Oxtoby, Hussain, Segal, 143). Christianity and Judaism are being reshaped as women become more involved in higher positions in both religions. Although the slight transformation has positives surrounding gender equality, it also poses negative controversy, as it is also seen as breaking tradition.

There is no doubt that throughout history, men have been visualized as more superior than women, primarily due to their strength and ability to lead a large group of

people. It is believed in both Christianity and Judaism that when humans were created, Adam was more superior than Eve, one example being that in Judaism, it is said that Eve is made from one of Adam's rib bones. Traditionally, men had always been the leaders of a church whether it is a pastor, priest, or even the Pope. Women have held important roles, such as nuns, however, they do not have the power to administer the sacraments. Some negative arguments that arise with the ordination of women are the straying from tradition itself. For hundreds of years, it has always been men that hold the highest position in the church. In Judaism, as well, it has always been men that have become rabbis. The concern is that with women holding positions of pastor and rabbi, viewpoints about the development of the religion and politics will change. Women have traditionally held household duties as their jobs, and are typically seen as more compassionate than men. Orthodox Jews and Catholics for example reject the idea of ordaining women, as they are extremely strict on restoring and retaining the original ways of their religion. Overall, the negative concerns arise within politics, society, and preserving tradition in Christianity and Judaism.

In conclusion, the reshaping of religions such as Christianity and Judaism has occurred due to the rise of feminist movements who fight for gender equality. Presently, ordained women hold elite positions such as rabbi and pastor, and this is an ongoing development throughout America, as well as worldwide. Although not all branches of Christianity and Judaism have participated in the movement towards religious gender equality, there are still large strides made within the past few decades. The argument for this equality is that in God's eyes, women and men are seen equally. Granted, the Bible explains events such as Eve being made from Adam and Jesus having twelve men as dis-

principles, but the discrimination towards women was never explicitly stated in any text. The progress made toward gender equality continues to advance, especially in America with general equality being a nationwide goal. Gender equality in religion has begun to reshape religions inevitably due to a developing and constantly changing society that we live in.

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