RELIGION AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

“A woman must cover her head because she is not the likeness of God.”

(St. Ambrose)

Abstract: The development of monotheism as an essential idea of one God is, in principle, valued as a step of humankind towards an abstract way of thinking. This process had been developing under the strong jurisdiction of patriarchy, and the subordinate role of woman is thus visibly reflected in the core of major monotheistic religions – Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The topic of this paper deals with the position of woman in the world’s contemporary major monotheistic religions. The contradiction of this topic is reflected in the fact that women are subordinated in major monotheistic religions of the contemporary world and yet, it can be argued, with considerable certainty, that women are more religious beings than men, a theme which will also be elaborated.

Keywords: religion, women’s rights, equality, violence, misogyny.

The origins of misogyny in monotheistic teachings

Let us begin by trying to leave aside what in theological circles is called “verbal inspiration”, that is, the claim that the holy books are the direct record of the word of god, in the way that every verse, psalm or surah is an unalterable god’s claim and, as such, literally proclaimed and revealed. In this case, Talmud, Bible and Quran could be interpreted as historical records which belong to the religious, but also to the legal and literary traditions of certain peoples. Recorded in concrete historical situations and edited throughout the centuries that followed (Onfrey, 2005), they represent an image of societies and social relations of those times. Because they are found in holy scripts, they have been shifted to the mythological time and gained the necessary “divine legitimacy”. In this
way, the authority justifying the then status quo became unconditional, absolute, and divine. The holy books of monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, can also be understood as an “immortalised patriarchal ideology” (Radulović, 2003). “Monotheism did not invent patriarchy, it found patriarchy already operating in the society, and co-opted it, justifying it along the way: it is actually recorded in the then cultural tradition and by means of prophets, who are the sons of that culture, monotheism speaks a patriarchal language. Thus, the divine message, framed in an androcentric vision shared among the members of community to which it is directed, is expressed in male language. In this way, patriarchy is reshaped from an accidental historical state to an insurmountable model based on divine authority” (Longoni, 2006).

In general, we can conclude that all three monotheisms are, to a lesser or greater extent, characterised by exactly the same attitude towards a woman: she is not a subject in her own right and not worthy as much as man. She represents the Other, the reverse, made by and for bearing the first child. Whilst being the “second created” from the rib of Adam, she is the first in sin. Thus, there is a reason for her subordinate position – her culpability, as well as the original sin she initiated. In Onfrey’s (2005) words: it is a sexualisation of guilt. The “male” becomes a norm, a privileged element in a range of binary oppositions which had been established between these two poles. Thus, the source of female power needs to be dark inherited from whispering to the snake in the Garden of Eden. The women, therefore, even after the exile remains dangerous, secretive nightly, Moon-directed, an eternal source of desire, coax, evil thought, blood and life.

Although all three monotheistic proclamations contain both an egalitarian and non-egalitarian potential, the former, unfortunately, most often refers to the hopes invested in the transcendental, in equality before god’s judgement, while life and relations in this world are regulated in a well-known hierarchical key.

**Judaism**

Almost all Jewish religious laws expressly describe duties and rights of men, while the rights of women are only indirectly stipulated, often from the description of certain events in the Bible. While men had been going three times a day to pray in a synagogue, women remained at home and were obliged to go to the temple only three times a year: the first at the age of 12, celebrating the legal age, the second during the wedding, and the third marking the end of Torah’s annual reading cycle. Women were standing in a separate section of
temple and were not allowed to enter the male part of temple, while men were allowed to freely enter the women's section. Women could be present at the sacrifice offering and had the right to put their hand on the head of the sacrificed animal. However, women were obliged to offer a sacrifice after giving birth but were only allowed to enter the temple once they were “clean” – 40 days after the birth of a son and 80 days after the birth of a daughter. Worship in a Jewish synagogue could not be held in the presence of less than 10 men older than 13. The presence of women did not count.¹

The male-female relationship is illustratively described already in early-morning prayer by having different practices for the two genders. Namely, in his daily morning prayer, a Jewish man praises god for not creating him as a woman, while a woman praises god for having created her after his will. Only a rabbi can gather them in matrimony and its central function is reproductive. Polygamy with its particularities is the best example of this. Polygyny² is justified but not the polyandry³; divorce is consented to the husband by the simple delivery of a letter to a repudiated wife. Women are not allowed to study the Torah⁴, obligatory for men; nor are they allowed to take part in the minimal group of ten necessary for the prayer – *minyan* (the minimum is ten grown-up men older than 13); they are not eligible to carry out administrative and judicial duties; they are allowed to own but not to manage their own property, which is the duty of husband (Onfrey, 2005).⁵ In orthodox synagogues women do not take part in worship services and they are separated from men by a divider.

---


² Polygyny—polygamous marital relationship between one man and more than one woman.

³ Polyandry—polygamous marital community composed of one woman and more than one man. This type of family is primarily found in tribes following the mother line of kinship. It is conditioned by a matrilocally marriage, when men from time to time or always reside with their wife's family. Certain animal species can also be polyandric.

⁴ The Israelites used two names for Bible – Old Testament in this case – Torah and Tanakh. Torah or instruction is the name for the first five Biblical books, i.e., the five books of Moses. This name is also very often used for all books of Old Testament, as found in some writings such as Apostle Paul (Romans, 3:19). Still, Israelites used the name “Torah” specifically for Pentateuch, while they called the rest of the scriptures of the Old Testament “testimony” (Isaiah, 8:20) and divided them into prophets (Nevi’im) and scriptures (Kethuvim). The name “Tanakh” is acronym from Torah, Nevi’im, and Kethuvim.

⁵ See Onfrey, op. cit., p. 143.
Christianity

Along with the undoubted faith in one god, a parallel order of patriarchal social order was created with man as the undisputed ruler. Namely, if god was a man, it deductively follows that man stands beneath god, that is, that god stands above man and also that man stands above woman. Simultaneously, male superiority entailed authority over women. This is quite evident in the Epistle of St. Paul to Corinthians (1 Corinthians, 11. 7-10)6. Another, perhaps more obvious example of this distorted relationship between sexes is the example of the myth about Adam and Eve. This is certainly one of the most efficient means of propaganda in a long history of gender inequality. This myth places man at the centre of attention – god first creates him and only after does he create a woman from a man’s rib. Unlike evolution, where men and women are equal and develop together, the Biblical story on creation of life, more precisely on creation of humans, places men at the centre of its focus, determining, thus, since the very beginning, the position and role of women. The legend about the rib that God extracted from Adam in order to create Eve contributed to the belief that the woman was created because of and for the man. He decides about her place and role, while she exists to be “helpful” to him. Sex is understood as a means of procreation7 and not pleasure, at least not for women, while men could have sex without significant limitations. The female ideal of that time was no longer associated with a fertile, sensual woman but rather with a girl who has not yet developed secondary sexual characteristics, which, naturally, entailed obligatory preservation of virginity. The original sin which Eve brought upon the whole humanity is repented by her daughters through their submissiveness to their husbands, but also through the labour pains which go along with their salvation on earth and their mission – childbearing. Drawing on the wisdom of one of the most cited philosophers – Aristotle, well-known theologians, questioned quite seriously whether a woman had a soul at all.

Having estimated that she did not have a soul in the same sense as a man – a human in the true and full sense of the word – but that women had more of a soul than animals, they concluded that there was still something to be saved for eternal life and granted women a choice between celibacy and motherhood

---

6 “A man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.” (English translation from: http://www.gasl.org/refbib/Bible_King_James_Version.pdf Accessed 27 January 2016).

7 Procreation – sexual drive exclusively for the purpose of continuation of species.
within ecclesiastical marriage. To redeem this wavering entity which could after all be called a soul, and, to deserve the heaven and atone for the sin of the first among them as well as their own sins, women will be either nuns, which is more desirable, or mothers. The choice is somewhat broader than in Judaism and Islam since it includes the right to celibacy and a life dedicated to God. Priesthood is, however, not an option since “I suffer not a woman to teach.” A woman in the public space, in a position of power, is not something that can be tolerated in a deified patriarchal tradition.

Islam

Even the most recent among the three major monotheistic religions does not offer a more “generous” or better position for women. It is a fact that the Quran has certainly improved the catastrophic position of women in regard to the previous situation existing in pre-Islamic Arabia. Certain tribes of pre-Islamic Arabs had a practice of killing female new-borns, burying them alive in the desert. The Quran mentions and condemns this custom. When it comes to the female body, it is within the man’s power, to whom the woman belongs and is always available for accommodating his needs. The sole woman’s partner is her husband, obviously also a Muslim, who can have more wives – a privilege which, as it can be assumed, does not apply vice versa. However, the Quran

---

8 1 Corinthians 7:34: “The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband”; and 1 Corinthians 7:38: “So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.” (English translation from: http://www.gasl.org/refbib/Bible_King_James_Version.pdf Accessed 27 January 2016).

9 1 Timothy 2:11-15: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” (English translation from: http://www.gasl.org/refbib/Bible_King_James-Version.pdf Accessed 27 January 2016).

10 Quran, XVI, 58-59: “And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief; He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide.”(English translation from: quran.com, accessed 29 January 2016).

does set limitations to polygyny. Such limitations are set also for the, thus far, entirely accepted and justified violence against women. Unfortunately, as it can be noted, this limitation does not mean prohibition of violence. To hit a woman is consented for “educational purposes” in a way that does not leave marks on her body: bruises, wounds, fractures of body parts... However, as it can be noted, in the holy book women are not equal to men. Similarly to Judaism, the husband has the exclusive right to unilateral divorce by simply declaring his decision, the so-called talaq. By this act, the husband “lets his wife go”, he “divorces her”. The duty of wearing a hijab (a veil that covers the head) or chador (a veil that covers the whole body, burqa) for all girls who entered puberty (i.e. from the moment of first menstruation) is not found in the Quran in an unequivocal binding form. Namely, both female and male believers are recommended to “reduce [some] of their vision” and to cover themselves, specifying however persons to whom a woman can show herself and to whom she cannot. Which “private parts” are to be covered is not explained precisely in the Quran but only in the Hadith – a collection of reports which describe

\[\text{Quran, IV, 3: “And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].” (English translation from: quran.com, accessed 29 January 2016).}\]

\[\text{Quran, IV, 34: “But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.” (English translation from: quran.com, accessed 29 January 2016).}\]

\[\text{Quran II, 228: “And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable. But the men have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]”; IV, 34: “Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient.”}\]

\[\text{Quran XXIV, 30-31: “30 Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do; 31 And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.” (English translation from: quran.com, accessed 29 January 2016).}\]
the prophet’s life – a religious tradition established much later. They can be also found in more recent, most often fundamentalist interpretations of the Quran.

These few citations, while not extensive, provide us with a general picture of a woman they describe but what is more important is that the same picture is prescribed in all three holy books: she is not worth as much as the man and therefore cannot be left to decide on her own about her body, life and destiny. The choice belongs to others, usually to the “head” of the family, who makes decisions in accordance with the personal, national or religious interests.

The woman exists for the purpose of reproduction; she is a guardian and transferor of traditional values but not their creator. The central category of subjectivity – autonomy – does not belong to her; free will does not belong to her either, probably because she had “demonstrated” back in Eden how she uses it. This has very concrete and far-reaching consequences to the woman’s life – both throughout history and today. Deified patriarchal ideology exercises decisive influence on the construction of gender identity, distribution of gender roles, the position of women in society and to the whole corpus of rights: right to freedom of movement, thought and expression, right to vote and to be elected, right to inherit, right to education, right to exercise sexual rights including free choice of partner, regardless of her/his class, race, religion, nationality or any other belonging, reproductive rights (right to decide if, when and with whom to have children, regardless of her marital status), availability of medical protection, services and right to be informed about them. In a nutshell, this influences all aspects of women’s every-day life, in both private and in the public sphere.

Fundamentalisms and women’s human rights

The nature of political-religious interaction is very complex. “Political traditions presuppose value commitments and interpretation of collective association. In the extent to which these elements are also prescribed in religious traditions, it becomes clear that the religious-political system is an integrated network and that the elements in the religious sphere and those in the political sphere tend to reinforce each other. When there is compatibility between these two spheres stability is promoted. When there are tensions between them, the political system faces the problem of legitimisation and the result is a social anomy, destabilisation and potential for social chaos. This suggests that politics permeates religion and vice versa” (Ramet, 2006).

By claiming that only their version of religion are true, fundamentalists want to impose their undisputable and exclusive interpretation of faith which should
become binding for all citizens by incorporating it to the applicable law of a state. This is why we cannot view religious fundamentalism as religious but only as a political movement which manipulates and misuses religion with the goal of gaining political power. Fundamentalist hard-liners are characteristic for all three major religions and are therefore promoted in a global phenomenon representing a serious threat to democratic processes worldwide and act in the direction of jeopardising human rights, particularly women’s human rights.

A paradox – women as more religious beings

Although it was previously mentioned that all three monotheistic religions almost unanimously characterise women as beings not equal to men in “earthly life”, the fact that, according to available research on this topic, women are more religious beings than men comes as a paradox. It is true that there are certain problems related to specifying what religiousness is, and some shortcomings due to the fact that this claim has not been verified in historical and geographical specificum. Namely, earlier research on this topic is largely linked to Christianity. However, there are opinions that more widespread religiousness of women is not confirmed even in this case (Deconchy, 1973; Feltey and Poloma, 1996). Not only is it not possible to discuss a more widespread and intense religiousness in so-called popular, non-proclaimed religions but also in Islam and Judaism.

However, there is no dispute about the very matter: the record on more widespread religiousness among women in Christian cultural circles is massive. The differences between men and women are not always radical but they are systematic vis-à-vis the existence of religiousness and pertain to all dimensions of religiousness. This problem was studied particularly by Francis (1997) who recorded women’s experiences during their visits to churches, mystical experiences, believing in god and the presence of a positive attitude towards religion in general. In relation to these, he offers evidence of over one hundred research cases from different Christian communities related to different age of respondents. None of his statements diverge in regard to the aforementioned difference in degree of religiousness between men and women. Other prominent researchers of this topic also do not doubt the existence of this difference (Thompson, 1991; Walter and Davie, 1998). The difference in the extent and intensity of religiousness can be unreservedly taken as one of the facts on which the sociology of religion can be constructed, although it is not as clear and outstanding as “the basic fact of criminology” that committing crimes is
concentrated with men between the age of 16 and 21 in all societies (Kanazawa and Still, 2000).

Indeed, it needs to be mentioned here that the problem is not exhausted by clarifying the greater prevalence and intensity of women’s religiousness and some of its dimensions. For the science this problem is certainly compounded if in addition to this women are religious in a different way than men, if there is a different type and configuration of religiousness. This diversity of religiousness between men and women, boys and girls, consists in the way that a monotheistic god is understood. For boys he is a powerful lord, omniscient, and for women it is a character of confidence to whom one expresses trust, and with whom one is in intimate contact and dialogue. Boys more often pray for specific goals, to get a specific accommodation and response, while girls accept the very dialogue with god as a value, the contact itself is the goal (Reich, 1997; Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975). The male focus on achieving an individual goal is visible here in contrast to female holism and expressiveness.

To study the problem more systematically, it is necessary to enter into a classification of sociological and psychological theories and explanations, which deepen the issue so that we can draw a clearer image of this phenomenon. Although there are explanations that at first seem ethical (different ethical attitudes and beliefs in men and women), functional (different functions of women and men in life), in reality all explanations could be classified as psychological or sociological. Biological determinism in its essence also belongs to the psychological one, since it deals with apparent biological differences that produce differences in psyche, which results in women being more inclined to religion.

**Psychological explanations**

Psychological explanations derive from specific psychological male-female dynamics, but even more from their inborn psychological differences or stable psychological structure formed in the process of socialisation. This especially pertains to the psychological structure that leads to differences in personality configuration. These are the most characteristic standpoints:

**Freudian viewpoint**

Notwithstanding the entirety of Freudian thought on religion and religiousness, what is important is that god is understood in analogy with a father. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud writes that “god is in every case modelled after the father”. Different consequences can follow from this in regard to religiousness of men
and women. However, the baseline is the one leading through boys, who after
overcoming the Oedipal complex, have an ambivalent attitude toward fathers,
while girls overcome this phase having a positive, unambiguous loyalty toward
fathers. It follows that girls could be more attracted to god than boys who ex-
perience certain reserves and barriers in that relationship. This standpoint is
theoretically clear and potentially contains a vast explicative power. However,
there are problems regarding its empirical verification, which is a weaker side of
Freud’s psychoanalysis in general. Some research does confirm, especially with
children, that God is understood as a father, as a father figure, as a being with
male characteristics. These findings are indeed not unequivocal and partially
depend on the respondents’ gender (sometimes the respondents tend more
to equate god with their own gender, while in other cases it is the other way
around) (Francis, 1997).

**Female personality traits**

These explanations are similar in some ways and can be drawn from the Freud-
ian one. They are about certain personality traits that are supposedly dominant
in women but at the same time there is their supposed organic link with reli-
giousness.

One such viewpoint is that the feeling of guilt is more present in women, and that
religion “covers” very well situations in confronting guilt. Argyle and Beit-Hal-
lahmi support this thesis arguing that the share of women in Catholicism is much
larger than in (fundamentalist, charismatic) Protestantism which centres much
more on sinfulness of human nature, thus inducing and reinforcing the feeling
of guilt. However, there is no sufficient empirical evidence to support the argu-
ment that female religiousness could be greater in Catholics than in Protestants.

There are opinions, insufficiently supported, that greater religiousness origi-
nates from female anxiousness, fearfulness and frustration (e.g. Bourque and
Back). The weakness of these viewpoints is that differences in personality struc-
ture are not universally confirmed, and Francis would add that it is not about
differences at the level of gender but rather at the level of gender personality
types (1997).

Among the presupposed personality traits there is also the assumed male in-
clination to take risks that makes religion with its certainty strange to a man,
as opposed to a woman. In this case, what needs to be explained is the low reli-
giousness of men, which originates from male adventurousness and propensity
to uncertain, risky endeavours (the hunter mentality). This higher propensity to
risk is confirmed in men but the question is whether it can be brought in direct connection to religiousness. In addition, some believe that this is about a deeper phenomenon – male psychoticism (according to Eysenck, Francis, 1997).

Furthermore, a similar standpoint is that women are more prone to dependency and submission than men, which is also empirically verified. “The relationship with Christ fulfils woman’s need for relationship, as opposed to a man’s need for independency” concludes Walter (1990). For all conceptions from this group it can be said that it has not been sufficiently proven that these personality traits are not socially or culturally conditioned.

Low psychoticism as being more characteristic for women

A significant part of contemporary psychology and social psychology is still under the strong influence of Eysenck. He was an advocate of behaviourism and author of a large empirical In addition to intelligence, there is psychoticism, neuroticism and extraversion (or their absence). Eysenck and his numerous associates established the existence of those three clusters of personality traits as well as the applicability of this theory in research of criminality and politics. These clusters are confirmed by standard psychometrics and statistical verifications.

Psychoticism consists of the following personality traits: cold-bloodedness, aggressiveness, egocentricity, impersonality, impulsivity (outright acting), anti-social and anti-empathic behaviour, creativity and cruelty (Eysenck and Gudjonsson, 1989). According to the researchers who had worked on the basis of Eysenck’s methodology, it is the low psychoticism (and not introversion or low neuroticism) that is supposed to be the basis for religiousness to the extent in which it is connected to women and female types of personality (Francis, 1991).

Female and male personality type

Francis did not continue to advocate Eysenck’s model. He later opted for female and male personality types, irrespective of gender (men can belong to a female type of personality and vice versa). He used Daryl J. Bem’s much contested psychological inventory, which lists personality traits apparently characteristic for male and female gender and male and female orientation. In case of female orientation, such traits are: sensitivity, joy, childishness, complicity, the non-use of strong terms, enjoying flattery, tenderness, credulity, love toward children, loyalty, sensitivity for the needs of others, quiet speech, understanding character, loyalty, a tendency towards giving in. On the other hand, male orientation would imply leadership inclination, aggressiveness, ambition, an analytical mind, importunity, sportsmanlike orientation towards competitiveness, upholding one’s
own believes, dominance, ability to lead, independence, individualism, easy decision-making, masculinity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, strong personality, willingness to take positions and risks (Maznah and Choo, 1986).

Thompson followed Francis's path and also established that the presence and absence of religiousness is better explained by gender orientation (femininity and masculinity) than by gender itself. Moreover, he established that female and male gender orientations can better explain differences related to social positions. This means that differences are clearer when it comes to respondents with one or the other orientation than members of two genders (masculine women are thus less religious than other women and feminine men are more religious than other men). However, he introduced an element of social position to additionally examine the extent of gender orientation influence, and, having worked mostly with students, he looked only at fathers’ education (Thompson, 1991).

**Genetic assumption of female religiousness**

In today’s sociology and psychology, socio-biology, that is, evolutionary psychology represents a current and bold standpoint. There is an extensive literature on this topic as well as attempts to explain different concrete social phenomena using this framework: from criminality to politics as well as moral. However, cultural phenomena are, such as it is, harder to explain in this context and yet there are attempts to do this too, the most prominent being that of L. Kirkpatrick (1999). He does not claim that religion has a specific evolutionary-adaptive use, but is more inclined to claim that religion is a by-product of certain adaptation mechanisms, primarily when it comes to expanding adequate ways of discovering and understanding the world during childhood. Children develop ways which correspond to specific experience of certain domains of reality. However, these ways are sometimes expanded outside of the domains to which they correspond. As an example of this he offers totemism where categorization, that is, the classification of nature is expanded to social objects (families, tribes). This could be one of the sources of religious thinking in general (Kirkpatrick, 1999). For this paper it is interesting that Kirkpatrick (1999) states what we wish to explain as one of the arguments for our thesis: the fact that women are more religious and that they are religious in a different way is the evidence that it has a biological (evolutionary-adaptive) basis.

**Differences in moral development**

Some authors stress that there are differences in degree of moral development of men and women by claiming that women’s moral development ends in the care
for others and in attempts to bond with others and to understand them, which could lead to a greater extent of religiousness (contrary to male “isolationism”, not to say “autism”, and certainly contrary to their individual focus on achieving ultimate moral and other principles) (R. Fowler, C. Gilligan, 1998). Those endeavours as well as all efforts to establish clear stages in moral reasoning and development are not proven (Reich, 1997).

**Sociological explanations**

Sociological explanations take into consideration not only differences in social position and different roles of men and women, but place them in more general theories of patriarchy, modernisation and secularisation, as well as on decreasing the importance of natural determinism in contemporary society. The following standpoints can be distinguished:

**Differential socialisation of boys and girls**

Doubtlessly, there are differences in modalities and content of boys’ and girls’ upbringing and socialisation. From our point of view, there are two key differences:

a) *Differences in general expectations from and orientation of girls and boys.* In addition, by positively valuing boys’ aggressiveness, boys are expected to achieve specific goals and to be analytical, while girls are expected to manifest tendency to understand situations in general (in contrast to a specific situation), and to be accommodating and to find solutions by reconciliation. The latter would match submissiveness – characteristic of the prevailing religiousness of Christianity. There is extensive literature on this topic particularly by feminist authors.

b) *Differences in religious education.* Supposedly, girls are expected to behave in a more religious way and to have a more religious disposition; the exception being sectarian religiousness, where conversion is expected by men, who deviate and are prone to making more mistakes than girls.

**Differences in social position**

Women and men do not have the same social roles, which are not equally valued either. By default, women’s roles are less valued. These are, however, also subject to change, and the tendency to improve the position of women does exist. This said, however, today we are still facing evident inequalities. Francis believes to have verified those inequalities and demonstrated that inequities in
women’s social position are not a factor that produces differences in the extent and intensity of religiousness. However, he unjustifiably narrows the notion of social position. Supposedly, the absence of women’s employment leads to the narrowing down of social contact, into isolation which is then in turn compensated by religiousness: he analyses only employment of women and men and establishes that women are still more religious if the religiousness is controlled by employment.

According to de Vaus’s research in the US, to which Frances makes reference, employed women are less religious than unemployed women (which is in line with the assumption but, according to Francis, insufficient to confirm such a hypothesis). In addition, unemployed men are more religious than employed men. He states that it is possible that religious women opt more for the traditional role of housewife and that economic activity therefore represents a consequence and not the cause of religiousness. However, this standpoint is clearly too narrow when it comes to the analysis of a woman’s social position. In addition to employment, components of social position of a woman include the type of job, social influence and power that stems from the profession and job, and a pronouncedly political nature of that influence (political power and participation), as well as financial status.

*Women’s role in child-birth and care*

Davie and Walter expressed a new variant of a social position of women as a cause of them being more frequently and intensely religious. They did not dwell upon the framework of social stratification but rather focused on a specific set of women’s roles which are apparent in both professional and private life. Women more often perform professions related to child-care and care of others. They do this more often also in their daily lives, going through the experience of child birth and they are closer to dealing with the event of death. Facing and enduring such experiences is much easier if one believes that they are holy events and the result of god’s will. In these cases, the holy and the divine can be not only more visible but also more explicit. They state that religiousness is more pronounced with those having other professions dealing with facing death and caring for the wounded and injured (such as soldiers grown old). In addition, they claim that differences between men and women do not pertain only to the extent of religiousness but that the religiousness of women is more often a religiousness of connecting and helping than religiousness of absolute justice (Walter and Davie, 1998).
Instead of a Conclusion: Directions to possible solutions for the problem

The struggle for safeguarding and promotion women’s human rights endangered by the strict application of certain parts of holy monotheistic books, as well as by the growing fundamentalist forces ranges from efforts of feminist theology/theologies to primarily secular approach to human rights.

Efforts of feminist theology/theologies

Rising from the experience of multilevel oppression, feminism as a line of thought, reinterpretation of scriptures, deconstruction of social constructs and dogmatised interpretations, has in its essence women’s insurgence against definitions of who and what would a woman need to be (Raiser, 2002).

Unfortunately, in all three major religions, misogyny is traditionally deeply rooted in dominant structures and teachings of religious “rulers”. In a religious hierarchy or structure of the most prevalent and most known monotheistic religious communities there is no place for women (Spahić-Šiljak, 2007). The problem of misogyny, that is, of systematic discrimination against women in religious structures is not the only oppression faced by religious communities through history. History also records slavery, which was defended by religious “officials” and dignitaries. It recalls memories of racial discrimination too, the problem of attitude toward other ethnicities, peoples and religions. Nowadays, in some religious communities many of these problems are still present to a lesser or greater extent and at a lower or higher level (especially the issue of attitude towards other religions and their members).

All these problems which humanity has been facing through its history of religiousness and religious emancipation, led to returning to the sources of religious teachings as well as to mythology and tradition, and to their reinterpretation in light of contemporary social, philosophical, psychological, medical, political and other achievements. In those cases where theology is presented with the task of facing the problem for which it found itself philosophically, psychologically and anthropologically misguided, a new, contemporary approach to theology is being developed. Unlike previous centuries when only certain social strata had been considered privileged and called upon to discuss matters of faith, interpret and read scriptures in general, this new approach to theology

---

16 We use the term “rulers” to denote dominant individuals who represent religious groups and promote their ideas and have a considerable if not major social and political influence.
invites each individual to deal with it, to have their own approach to texts from their personal context and life circumstances and to give their contribution to the overall theological thought. Such a new, even revolutionary approach is called liberation theology.

Even though theology of liberation originates from Roman Catholic circles of Latin America during the 1950’s and 1960’s as a cry of the poor and socially and economically vulnerable social strata against economic, social and political inequality (some claim that it was under the influence of Marxist teachings), today it attained a much larger context. According to Gutierrez (1980), liberation theology has become inter-denominational and worldwide, while some scholars today group feminist theology under the domain of liberation theology because of the similarities in approach and connectedness in terms of opposition to oppression. Feminist theology in Christianity is dealing with an enormous and arduous task – a total transformation of centuries of masculine (male) dominance over church, theological language, religious tradition, and an opposing patriarchal system of thinking through a new approach to the Holy Scripture, through analysis and deconstruction of tradition, history and culture (Belonik, 2002).

In Judaism too, feminist theology finds motivation for rebirth of the tradition that places the woman on a lower social ranking than man. Feminist movements, with different methods of action and different results, are founded in all leading branches of Judaism (Hyman, 1976).

The main strategy of feminist theologians’ and reformist forces’ struggle is reinterpretation of holy books in an egalitarian spirit. Namely, in each Annunciation there are both egalitarian and discriminatory elements, while through history and history of legislation brought by the fundamentalists who seized power, non-egalitarian potential of holy scriptures had always been actualised for the purpose of control, most often over women, of course, but also over all marginalised groups in general, all “others”. Emphasizing that in the Quran (and the same can be claimed with certainty for Talmud and Bible) there is tension between an egalitarian attitude by which the believers are judged only according to their merits, and non-egalitarian which determines different roles for men and women, Karla M. Obermeyer (2003) notes that traditional interpretations stress those parts of holy scriptures which value women less than men and use them to define the subordinate role of women, in contrast to interpretation

---

17 Oppression (lat. oppressio; a pressing down, violence) represents manifesting authority or power in a burdensome, cruel and unjust manner.
of feminist theologians and reformists who claim that essentially there is an egalitarian ethos in Islam deformed by patriarchal forces. Religious advocates of women’s human rights are not trying to monopolise the area of human rights – they rather conclude alliances with secularists.\(^{18}\)

**The Secular approach**

On the other side of the spectrum there are women’s networks and groups which do not consider the discussion on religion as a main strategy of social change. This movement is not primarily directed towards opposition to religious dogmas from the holy books of monotheistic religions. It is a blade turned towards fundamentalisms, that is, political interpretation of the holy books. Criticising conservative and inhuman laws and practices, they condemn violation of women’s human rights regardless of them being justified by religion at a local, national or international level. They believe that women’s human rights can be fought for, preserved or reformed only through permanent opposition to theocratisation of state, insisting on secular character of society and strengthening global women’s networks against fundamentalism (Zajović, 2006).

**References**


\(^{18}\) As noted by Marieme Helie-Lucas (2007) in her interpretation of achievements of feminist theology and its differences from fundamentalist practice. Endeavours of women’s movement Catholics for Choice are directed in the same course – they fight for legalisation of abortion, and a theological teaching which recognises moral validity of decisions made in the area of reproductive capability, acquitting women also when they decide to have an abortion.


