

Applied Ethics (Christianity)
7. Religion and human relationships

Traditional roles in a Christian family

- Some Christians interpret Genesis as evidence that men are superior to women.
- In Genesis God fashions woman out of the rib of Adam to be his helper.
- Some Christians look to the Bible for evidence that the man is meant to be the head of the family.
- The Church of England still allows the option in the vows for the woman to 'love, honour and obey' her husband.
- Some Christians look to Mary, Jesus' mother, as a role model for obedience.
- St Paul also gave his advice to the Early Church that women should obey their husbands.

Modern interpretation of the family

- Most modern Christians do not believe that men are superior to women.
- They point to the creation story where it says:

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
Genesis 1:27
- St Paul also says that:

"There is neither...male or female ...for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
Galatians 3:28
- Most Christians believe in an equal relationship between men and women.

Traditional roles within the church

- Many Christians think of the members of their religion as one big family.
- St Paul taught that women should be silent in church.
- Some Christians argue that because Jesus chose 12 men as disciples, only men should be leaders within the church.
- Roman Catholics argue that Jesus chose St Peter to be the head of the church. Peter became the first bishop of Rome. Catholics believe the pope (Benedict XVI) is the successor of St Peter.
- Orthodox and Roman Catholics do not permit women priests.
- The Church of England ordained its first women priests in 1994.
- Both Baptists and Methodists allow women to become ordained as ministers.

Women in the Gospels

- Some Christians look to the Gospels and Jesus' treatment of women as a guide to how women should be treated in society and the church.
- The story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) encourages women to reflect on God's word.
- Women were present at the foot of Jesus' cross when the rest of the disciples hid in fear.
- The first people to discover that Jesus' tomb was empty were women.

Own point of view and different points of views

- In order to get full marks on the last 12 mark question it is necessary to give another point of view, your own point of view as well as references to Christianity in your answer.
- Students should be aware of the wide spectrum of beliefs and practices within the Christian church especially on the role of women, homosexuality, divorce, pre-marital sex and contraception e.g. think of the differences found in the Catholic Church and the Quakers.
- References can be made to beliefs and practices found in other religious traditions e.g. the role of women in Islam. "The sins of the people of Lut (Sodom and Gomorrah)" is synonymous with homosexuality in the Qur'an. Some Muslim lawyers have argued that it is a crime which should be punished by death.
- Hinduism teaches that marriage is an important duty; choosing to stay single (celibate) is not encouraged. A marriage does not just join together a man and a woman, but two extended families. Because of this, arranged marriages have been common in Hinduism with parents introducing people to each other.

A Christian wedding ceremony

Marriage is both a civil and a religious commitment for Christians. Each part of the marriage ceremony has meaning which is closely linked to Christian teaching about marriage. The Church of England ceremony is very simple:

- Beginning of the service: welcoming of the congregation and a statement of what Christians marriage means by the priest.
- Declarations: the couple make their promises in front of God that they will love, comfort, honour and protect their partner as long as they both shall live.
- Vows: The couple make their vows to each other.
- Rings: The couple exchange rings. The ring is symbol of unending love. Christian marriage is meant to be for life.
- Proclamation: The priest tells the couple that they are now husband and wife. The priest says, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."
- Prayers: Prayers are said for the couple. They may include a prayer for the gift of children.
- Readings and sermon: There will be readings from the Bible and a sermon. The sermon will often talk about the importance of love in marriage.
- Signing of the register: The bride and groom, along with two witnesses, sign the register, which is a legal requirement. They receive a legally binding marriage certificate.

Catholic teaching about marriage

The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is:

- A living sacrament – an outward sign of the love of God.
- Exclusive – it is just between a husband and wife.
- Permanent – the couple cannot be separated.
- Life giving – open to the possibility of children.

Same-sex relationships

- There are many places in both the Old and New Testament which condemn homosexuality:

"Homosexual acts are an abomination to God."
Leviticus 18:22

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.
Romans 1:26-27
- Many Christian churches condemn same-sex relationships.
- Some Christians like the Quakers are less judgemental about homosexuality and actually allow homosexual couples to get married in their meeting rooms.

Divorce

- Christian couples enter marriage with the expectation that it will last "till death us do part".
- Jesus taught that marriage is for life.
- There is, however, debate within Christianity about whether married couples should be allowed to divorce and marry again.

Divorce and the Roman Catholic Church

- The Catholic Church does not allow divorce.
- However, it permits a couple to separate and live apart.
- In exceptional cases the Church may grant an annulment i.e. proven the marriage was not valid in the first place.
- The marriage can be annulled if it can be proven that the couple were under-aged, forced to marry, of diminished responsibility or not consummated.

Divorce and the Church of England

- Divorce is permitted in the Anglican Church because Jesus taught that the right course of action is the most loving thing to do.
- Some point out that Jesus did permit divorce on the grounds of unfaithfulness.
- The Orthodox Church grants religious divorce.

Christianity and re-marriage

- Christians such as Roman Catholics, do not accept re-marriage after a civil divorce.
- They believe that marriage cannot be dissolved (see above c.f. annulment).
- Any re-marriage would be the same as adultery.
- The Church of England allows divorced couples to re-marry but leaves it to the discretion of the priest as some vicars do not believe it is right.

Sexual relationships

- Christians believe sex is a gift from God.
- They believe it is an expression of love between a husband and wife.
- They believe casual sexual encounters are wrong.
- One on the Ten Commandments forbids 'adultery'.
- Jesus called his disciples to purity; 'anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' Matthew 5:28
- Many Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants believe that a person should remain a virgin until they are married.
- Some Christians in America wear rings to show their commitment to abstain from sex before marriage.
- Quakers are non-judgemental about sex, which they see as a gift of God. Their attention is focused on the way in which it is used in human relationships.

Contraception

- Contraception is something which prevents conception from taking place during the act of sexual intercourse - i.e. the male sperm from fertilising the female ovum (egg).
- Roman Catholics reject the idea of artificial birth control. This is based on Natural Law.
- The Church teaches that marriage should be open to the possibility of children.
- As an alternative to the many forms of artificial contraception it teaches that couples should only use natural methods which depend upon the woman's monthly cycle and the fact that at times during that cycle the woman is not capable of conceiving. This is called the rhythm method or the Billings Method.
- Other Christian churches agree that the purpose of marriage is to have children but do not see anything wrong with couple using contraception if they want to limit the size of their family.