

## Is it right for religions to treat men and women differently?

Thursday, 14th March 2013

Duration: 21:06

This is a Faith debate featuring Charles Clarke, Fatima Barkatulla, Harvey Belovski, Linda Woodhead, Mary Ann Sieghart and Rod Thomas. It focuses on the role of women in religion and gender issues in relation to God.

Students should complete a table showing what they know about the roles of men and women past and present.

The poll carried out prior to the debate shows what are perhaps surprising views about the role of women in religion:

### YouGov survey for Westminster Faith Debates, 2013

Online survey

Total sample size 4,437 adults.

Fieldwork undertaken 25th - 30th January 2013.

The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

### Approval of the Church of England (CofE)'s current policies towards women

16% of practising Anglicans 11% of nominal Anglicans 8% of the general population

Only 20% of Anglicans approve of how women are treated at parish level

### Approval of RC Church's current policies towards women

31% practising Catholics

22% Catholics

6% of the general population

### Would religions be better if women held senior positions?

Answering "no":

- 2% of 'nones'
- 2% of Hindus
- 5% of Anglicans
- 10% of Catholics
- 11% of Jewish respondents
- 18% of Muslims

Populus (May 2008)	All	Christian	None
<b>When you last thought about the concept of God, did you consider God as ...</b>			
Male	62	73	48
Neither male nor female	18	15	18

Both male and female	3	4	2
Female	1	1	0
None of the above	16	7	32

Students could be given the same issues as used in this poll and asked to vote on them prior to watching the debate, revisiting them later to see if any of the views expressed had caused them to change their minds.

All the people polled were 18+ so it could be worth comparing both the initial and final views of students with the YouGov results to see if there are any indications that young people, possibly more 'modern' in their outlook, give very different answers to the questions.

This programme is suitable for use with A level and GCSE students studying ethics, religion and society, sexual ethics and Christianity.

The debate focuses on two separate but related issues.

**First:**

The background for this debate was a recent vote by the General Synod (decision-making body) of the Church of England not to allow women to become bishops, which was met with dismay both within and outside the church. In the Roman Catholic Church women cannot be ordained at all, and leadership roles are reserved for men in many of the other world religions.

The majority of people in Britain think that religions would be better if more women held senior positions. If you rely more on God, religious leaders and teachings than you do on your own judgement, then you are much more likely to disapprove of women leaders in religion. Of the 5% among the population who do disapprove of women's leadership, there are twice as many men as women.

Church leaderships and hierarchy are increasingly adrift from consensus views on gender equality among their own membership and the population at large.

**Second:**

Should God continue to be described as male within the Abrahamic faiths?

All the expected arguments are rehearsed on the difference between the roles of men and women in life as well as religion. However, a key stumbling block appears for the Evangelical Christian position when discussing the language to use of God. It appears here that although it might be desirable sometimes to refer to God as female or as genderless this cannot be done because (a) people cannot think of a genderless God and (b) because Christianity is a revealed religion and so the gender used of God in the Bible cannot be varied.

Students can now add more information to their tables and discuss them with others, adding more information as appropriate.

For 6th formers it might well be possible to watch the discussion straight through, however, for younger students it might be advisable to watch each segment at a time (there are clear breaks between each part). After discussion, it would then be worth watching the two-minute summary to clarify and crystallize the thoughts and views expressed.