

# Developments and Conflicts between Christianity and Feminism

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**Abstract.** Christianity, one of the primary world religions, has profound influences in shaping people's views of gender equality. Many Christians perceive feminism to be against Christian doctrine regarding issues like marriage and gender equality. However, Christian feminists refute this with claims that reinterpreting the Bible helps reveal hidden ideas supporting gender equality - leading to further investigation of this relationship between Christianity and feminism. This research topic addresses Christian feminism's development alongside its conflicts with conservative Christian forces - particularly its contributions towards protecting women's rights. Through a systematic review of the historical literature on Christian feminism, the paper analyzes how it has promoted gender equality using the religious framework and examines conservative Christians' responses toward these movements. Findings indicate that many Christians are gradually accepting feminist ideas, although conservative Christians may see it as contradictory to biblical teachings. Christian feminism has made significant contributions towards protecting women's rights despite ongoing challenges from conservative forces. By systematically tracing its development, including conflicts with conservative forces, this paper unveils its contributions towards protecting these rights as well as providing researchers with an in-depth examination of religion-gender relations and gender equality.

**Keywords:** Christian feminism, gender equality, conservative Christianity, religious reform, Biblical interpretation.

## 1. Introduction

Since more people are paying greater attention to the intersection between Christianity and feminism, it has become a highly debated topic. While some research indicates that certain Christian doctrines from Scripture may impede gender equality efforts, an increasing number of scholars assert that Christianity itself does not oppose gender equality. Many Christian feminists have begun to promote feminism's manifestation by reinterpreting the Bible. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of systematic research on the evolution, historical development, and specific contributions of the feminist movement. Therefore, this research aims to uncover the influences and challenges Christianity presents to the feminist movement by exploring Western Christian feminism's development over time. By reviewing historical literature this research analyzes the formation process as well as key contributions throughout different eras of Western Christian feminism's existence.

In addition, this article conducts an in-depth analysis of existing studies to explore the conflicts and compromises Christian feminism faces when opposing conservative Christian forces and defending women's rights (such as abortion rights). This study uses a literature review to examine relevant texts from the perspectives of theology, sociology, and gender studies. This research finds that Christian feminists, through reinterpreting the Bible, have challenged traditional gender roles, and made significant progress in advancing gender equality. Moreover, while conservative Christian forces maintain a resistant attitude toward feminism, some Christian communities have recognized gender issues such as domestic violence and are gradually embracing the concept of gender equity. At the same time, Christian feminism has gained increasing recognition globally and has become a fundamental part of feminist movements. In conclusion, Christian feminism provides support from a religious perspective to feminism and fosters gender justice. Nonetheless, the conflict between traditional gender doctrines and modern gender beliefs still requires further exploration.

## **2. The Development of Christian Feminism in Western**

### **2.1. History Formation**

Christianity, the religion that holds Jesus Christ as the son of God and the savior of humanity, plays a significant role in the manifestation of feminism because of the great population of Christians, and most believe that the idea of feminism is against God's will as write in the Bible scriptures. Many Christians have been misled by the concept that the Holy Bible often portrays women as marginalized and, therefore, subordinate to their husbands. Even so, a study demonstrates that the Bible does not advocate gender inequality but instead portrays women as leaders in both formal and informal positions that can ultimately promote gender equality [1]. Christian feminism emerged during the mid-19th century American evangelical movement and has its roots in historical figures like deaconesses and widows who played significant roles within church ministries despite early church's restrictions on women's roles [2]. This empowerment reexamined historical roles for female church members and advocated for women to have equal status within Christianity. A study discovered many female Christians experienced domestic abuse but chose not to speak up due to sanctity of marriage and the pressure to act like model Christians in their community [3]. Regardless of the period, such findings suggest that Christian women should reexamine the role of a wife and reinterpret scripture to empower themselves and ultimately refrain from domestic abuse in some way. Additionally, research on how Christian women view their identity whether they define themselves as feminists or not indicates that Christian women often accept and support the idea of feminism despite rejecting the label, as they consider their Christian identity more central, especially in terms of worldview and social role. In contrast, gender identity relates more to their background [4]. Although current research indicates that most Christian women are not willing to embrace the label of "feminism" due to stereotypes, their position in the family, experiences of domestic violence, and underlying support for the principles of feminism suggest that most Christian women have the potential to become Christian feminists and may, in fact, already be Christian feminists.

### **2.2. Contributions from Christian Feminists to Feminism**

Christian feminists have made an important contribution to feminism by actively reforming spiritual doctrine to meet modern women's needs. Instead of rejecting scriptures that contain patriarchal elements from the Bible, these feminists passionately reinterpret traditional gender norms in pursuit of an inclusive faith that empowers both men and women [5]. Their efforts proved immensely impactful as it set a precedent for future Christian generations as well as being an ideal model that balances gender equality with faith for other religions, and they even encouraged radical social change using religious belief and identity to make change. During its first wave, Christian feminists encouraged radical transformation through use of religious belief and identity to bring about social transformation. Christian women utilized the idea of the 'Christian home'-- the idea that women extend their domestic roles into the public sphere to address social problems-- to inspire other Christians to support marginalized groups, especially women during that time. For instance, they built multiple shelters for marginalized women in vulnerable positions: unmarried mothers in Denver, additional wives in Mormon marriages in Salt Lake City, and individuals involved in sex work in San Francisco [5]. By developing the principle of the Christian home, they attracted greater attention to women in public life and created more opportunities for women. The approach Christian feminists took is profound. By founding shelters for socially excluded groups, Christian feminists showed that they welcome every individual, even the one who is not always considered acceptable for Christianity. This corroborates that most Christians are integrating with the more open idea and feminism. Christianity has been considered associated with conflicting or even anti-feminism for various reasons for a long time. Yet engaging Christian women in feminism could greatly expand its diversity, encouraging more groups to join this cause in future.

### **2.3. Manifestation and the Development of Contemporary Christian Feminism**

Many Christian feminists argue that both men and women were created in God's image, suggesting innate equality within gender. Hence, it advocates for shared responsibilities in leadership and marriage arrangements. Biblical figures such as Deborah, Miriam, and Jael serve as evidence that God provides gender equality through His creations. Influential voices such as Pope John Paul II have also highlighted gender equality within the church, suggesting that its ideology is slowly adapting to support feminist principles. Nuns provide an example of women leading within Christian environments. Christian feminists also demonstrate their dedication to these values by taking steps against domestic violence and gender discrimination within church communities [6]. Christian feminism exploits domestic violence discourse to highlight larger, global women-related issues [7]. However, one of the most significant challenges faced by Christian feminists is the depiction of the Holy Father and Holy Son as male figures, which probably will enhance the idea of obedience to husbands that has already been widely spread in Christian communities and can diminish their efforts over time.

## **3. Conflicts between Conservative Christian Force and Feminism**

### **3.1. Views on Women of Christian Conservative Forces**

Conservative Christians often intensify the idea that women are subordinating to their husbands, as mentioned in Ephesians 5:22: 'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord' [8]. While people could perceive it differently, such a notion may mislead people to believe that wives are submissive to their husbands [9]. At the same time, conservative Christian's view marriage as a God-given commitment that is supposed to be lasting a lifetime, which may deter women from leaving unhealthy relationships when suffering domestic abuse. Furthermore, according to the Scriptures, suffering can become temptation, which leads to redemption, spiritual growth, and closer bonds with God. This notion reduces the severity of abusive and immoral of husband behavior, and leads Christian women to focus more on overcoming hardships and results instead of fundamentally to escape suffering [9]. Overall, the point of view on women from conservative Christians is inclined to hinder the progress of Christian feminism. Still, because of the supporting force supplied by other (or partially conservative) Christian feminists, there still is a possibility for conservative Christian views to turn to beneficial feminism. For example, some conservative Christians have now recognized and admitted to the need for gender equality [10].

### **3.2. Christian Conservative Forces' Effect on Women's Rights Protection**

The philosophy of wifely submission to husbands, a belief widely endorsed in the evangelical Christian community, is identified by Christian feminists as a primary cause of domestic abuse [7]. Granted that most conservative Christians hold negative attitudes that may influence the development of Christian feminism they have also dedicated some key initiatives. Christians addressing family abuse CAFA, founded by the church, has begun to address domestic violence and acknowledge it as a significant issue. They created an environment where women feel safer and more trustworthy to speak up, and it can increase the likelihood of suffering women gain their rights [7]. Furthermore, while Christians insist on the sanctity of marriage and discourage divorce, Churches have also announced that abusive behavior can defile the sanctity of marriage [7]. Under such a context, churches have gained more space for women to negotiate with husbands when facing immoral behavior and have more life choices. Christian conservative forces have served as a promotion for Christian feminism. While many researchers have studied the conservative Christians' perspective, there are only a few have included the context of how conservative Christians' views on feminism have changed over time or certain significant events like the Seneca Falls Convention on Women's Rights, the passing of the 19th Amendment, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Further research into the

inner struggles and progress conservative Christians made on considerable feminist events is needed better to understand the correlation between feminism and conservative Christianity.

### **3.3. Reasons for Christian Conservative Forces against Women's Abortion Right Protection**

Currently, one of the most significant contradicting issues concerning feminism in the United States is the abortion right. Many studies have dived into the reasons behind the opposition to abortion from the Christian view. A few major factors are causing Christians to go against abortion. On the one hand, many Christians believe that there is inherent value in life within the womb [11], and the Bible prohibits murdering, so aborting an unborn child equals murdering, and it is against God's will [12]. On the other hand, a vast number of conservative Christians discern the role of women as given in the Bible as holy, and aborting one's child violate the position given to women – mother. As a result, they identify abortion not only as a moral challenge but also as a violation of family values [12]. Having faith in the innate worth God has given before one is born, as mentioned in Psalm 139: 'For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb' [8], Anti-abortion Christians believe they have protected the unborn babies following what is in the book. Nevertheless, this movement limits access to abortion worldwide in a certain way, especially in developing countries, and it offends women's rights, particularly if it is coerced sex that is against women's will. From the perspective of proponents of abortion, scholars can interpret scripture from Exodus 21 to support their ideas. "If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eyes for an eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise" [8]. They expound this scripture to clarify the distinction between the fetus and the mother. They argue that this scripture suggests that the life of the mother is more important than that of the fetus since causing the miscarriage of a fetus only requires paying a fine, while harming the mother requires a more severe punishment, such as 'an eye for an eye' [13].

## **4. Feminists' Freedom of Religion: Integration of Religious Belief and Feminism**

### **4.1. Role of Women in Religious Institutions**

Traditionally, women have been excluded from positions of ecclesiastical authority in the church, focusing instead on caregiving, support, and volunteerism [14-15]. Even so, certain denominations have increasingly allowed women to take on roles equal to those of men-such as missionaries, religious educators, and social workers [14]. This expansion of women's roles within religious institutions reflects a growing acceptance among some churches that women are equally capable of responsibility and deserve the same opportunities as men. Furthermore, while some Christian denominations still resist permitting women to occupy the same roles as men, others, such as the Quakers, have always maintained gender equality in leadership [14]. These differences illustrate that different Christian hold different perspectives on gender roles and equality since everyone interprets the doctrine differently. it suggests that Christianity does not inherently link gender inequality or equality. Similarly, women's leadership in Islam has also increased over time. On the contrary, there are still limitations where societal changes, organizational reform, and supporting systems are needed [16]. Overall, women's empowerment within both Christianity and Islam is gradually emerging.

### **4.2. Reinterpretation of the Scripture**

In the study Bible Interpretation How and How Not by B. Felsenthal (1884), the author claims that the Bible should be interpreted regarding historical context, archaeological, and philosophical understanding instead of sectarian bias and constrained doctrine [17]. The belief of Felsenthal can inspire a reinterpretation of the Bible for Christian feminists to hold new notions that can better align

with the current situation in several ways. First, believers can reinterpret some scriptures that are biased by societal norms or gender stereotypes back at the time when they were written. For instance, passages that demonstrate gender roles that are influenced by the patriarchal system. Second, with more developed archaeology and linguistic understanding, the Bible can be retranslated from Hebrew to various languages, and it might uncover the underlying meaning that was obscured before due to mistranslating. Last, feminists, who are also followers of Jesus, can reexamine the scripture regardless of the constraint of traditional church teaching. These methods of reinterpreting scripture might open a new view of the Bible.

### **4.3. The Future Challenges and Opportunities for Feminists in Christianity**

Christian feminists faced three significant challenges: insistence on the traditional interpretation of the Bible, cultural resistance, and internalized patriarchal norms [18]. All three factors serve to reinforce patriarchy within the Christian community and undermine efforts at creating feminist-leaning spaces within Christianity. The traditional interpretation of the Bible limits the acceptance of feminism in church. Christian communities with conservative leanings view feminism as incompatible with Christian values and internalized patriarchal norms prevent women from advocating for change within their communities. Fortunately, three opportunities can overcome these challenges: the chance to reinterpret the scripture, integrate feminism with education, and build more inclusive church communities [18]. These three solutions can provide a brighter future for Christian feminism as they override the obsolete and biased patriarchal idea by interpreting the Bible with historical context, raising the awareness of gender equality, and building a more female-friendly religious institutional environment that empowers everyone. Christian feminists of the future can appeal to societal attention by creating study groups, or gathering in online forums to share common values, discuss injuries suffered by the patriarchal structure and offer women holistic support, which will gain more supporters. Furthermore, Feminist actions often cross with other social justice movements, such as racial equality and LGBTQ+ rights, increasing what it can do for society. Christian feminism has faced many challenges throughout history and has yet to go out of popularity or accepting it.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the analysis shows that while many conservative Christians feel feminism contradicts Biblical teachings, many others have accepted key ideas of Feminism, such as gender equality or anti-domestic violence, as part of their life philosophy. Many Christian feminists use their faith and love to build a shelter for marginalized groups. it intensifies their care and desires to help other female peers, which helps spread Christian feminism. Additionally, in fact, the Bible portrays women as leaders and capable of promoting gender equality, which encourages people to pursue gender equality. Despite the rejection due to the stereotype of labeling one a feminist and the force of conservative Christians might be an obstacle; many Christians embrace feminism's principles and have the potential to evolve into Christian feminism. The main contribution of this paper lies in its systematic review of Christian feminism development's path, with a particular focus on its conflict with conservative force and dedication from Christian feminism to the protection of women's rights. This study addresses a gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive perspective on how Christian feminism evolved and impacted the globe. The study provides an advanced framework for scholars to comprehend how Christian belief and gender equality (feminism) interact. Unfortunately, however, this research does have limitations that require further exploration. specifically, it fails to focus on the development and manifestation of Christian feminism in non-Western countries, future studies could extend the research area, and future research can investigate the differences in opinion toward feminism conservative Christians hold in various countries and discuss the role the country's environment plays in shaping their religious belief and accepting popular values.

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