

'It is by both faith and works that a person is justified.'

Evaluate this view with reference to Christianity.

'Islamic teachings on the role of men and women do not promote inequalities.'

Evaluate this view.

Answer 1

From an outsider perspective, it could be argued that Islam promotes inequality between men and women. The traditional role of a man is to provide for the family and to protect it. The role of the woman is to be a mother, to bring up children, to manage the household and, to educate the children in the ways of Islam. However, Sura 2:228 states, 'they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them' and some within Islam have used this to suggest man has an element of authority over women. Badawi states, 'In consideration of the physiological and psychological make-up of man and woman, both have equal rights and claims on one another, except for one responsibility, that of leadership. This is a matter which is natural in any collective life and which is consistent with the nature of man'. Nonetheless he does add, 'Such degree is Quiwama (maintenance and protection). This refers to that natural difference between the sexes that entitles the weaker sex to protection. It implies no superiority or advantage before the law'. In terms of the statement this could be argued as promoting inequality to some extent.

Badawi, a traditionalist, does justify his understanding of the role of men and women in Islam as far more advanced for its time than Christianity and Judaism. He argues that there were many more restrictions on women within these two religions than Islam and that Muhammad had, by comparison, liberated women. Be that as it may, there are different understandings of the role of men and women within Islam today and so this can be challenged.

An alternative line of argument would be a feminist critique of the role of men and women within Islam. Idris Morar writes about the contemporary feminist Haleh Afshar, 'Haleh Afshar argues that the contribution of women has been systematically erased from history by men. Modern Islamists are backward looking and deny modern, progressive ideas whilst trying to revive interest in Islam'. Saraji Zaid supports this when she states, 'We need to stop people who abuse the religion of God and (...) oppose those who would brutalise women in the name of Qur'an and Sunna'.

However, such feminists argue that it is not Islam that undermines women but rather it is human interpretation and application of Islamic teachings that are distorted by cultural preferences and influences.

Maqsood takes this line also when she argues that 'Anyone wishing to understand Islam must first separate the religion from the cultural norms and style of a society' and she cites examples of female genital mutilation in Africa and forced marriages in Pakistan and India as examples where culture and not Islam dictates.

Although on a superficial level there appears to be much to support the statement, another argument is to distinguish role from status. Just because someone's natural role is different does not imply inequality. Saimah Ashraf writes, 'One of the basic principles of Islam is justice for all humans and equality in the eyes of God. Women are considered no less than men in aspects of religion and are not denigrated anywhere in the Qur'an'. Her argument is that men and women have the same spiritual status within Islam and she argues that 'the solution for achieving true freedom, independence, and happiness must come from within from the teachings of the Prophet, from the depths of the Qur'an, and from the wealth of rich Islamic tradition'.

Overall, there are clear instances where Islam may be seen to promote inequality in the way it is practised; however, many Muslims would defend the view that it is not Islam that promotes inequality but simply the way it is sometimes applied in different societies.

Feedback:

This is a wide ranging discussion showing understanding of the debate about the role of men and women in Islam. Of the three answers, this is the best. The arguments are discussed and assessed rather than just being stated. There is a clear path of reasoning though to the final conclusion about the statement not being aware of the distinction between Islam and how it is applied. The knowledge base has been reasonably well selected. This does not mean the answer is perfect. Possible discussion around the words of the debate (differences/inequalities) including recent perspectives may have been a better structure. Also new perspectives such as other feminist positions could have been introduced.

Answer 2

Family life is vital for Islam. It is within the family that Islamic practice is strengthened. Men and women are part of the family and both have very important roles. Their roles are different but they are each equal to the other really.

Islam liberated women and in no way does it promote inequality. According to Islamic teaching, the traditional role of a man is to provide for the family and to protect it. The role of the woman is to be a mother, to bring up children, to manage the household and, to educate the children in the ways of Islam.

The Muslim woman is given fundamental spiritual and intellectual equality with man, and is encouraged to practise her religion and develop her intellectual faculties throughout her life and this does not promote inequality. The Qur'an states, 'and they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them'.

In relationships, both men and women are to observe modesty of behaviour and dress and a strict code of morality that discourages unnecessary mixing of the sexes. This does not promote inequality.

Marital relationships should be based on mutual love and compassion. The man is responsible for the

maintenance of the wife and children, and she is to give him the respect due to the head of the family. She is responsible for the care of the home and the children's early training. She may own her own property, run her own business and inherit in her own right. Therefore both have rights and roles.

Therefore, the roles of men and women in Islam are different but not unequal. Qur'an states, 'men and women are equal'.

Feedback:

This is a weak attempt at evaluation. It starts with an irrelevant few sentences on family. The answer only has one line of argument and there is no real discussion or awareness of any challenges to this. There is reference to a Qur'anic text but it is just stated rather than developed as part of an argument and it is perhaps not the best one to use! There is a brief partial attempt at a conclusion in the last line. Again it is not developed. The quote from the Qur'an is inaccurate.

This is more of an AO1 skill answer than an AO2. It consists of reciting some arguments but not weighing the relative strengths and weaknesses of those arguments.

Answer 3

Arguing against the statement, the Qur'an provides clear-cut evidence that woman is completely equated with man in the sight of God in terms of her rights and responsibilities. The Qur'an states: 'Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds' (Qur'an 74:38). It also states: '...So their Lord accepted their prayers, (saying): I will not suffer to be lost the work of any of you whether male or female.' (Qur'an 3: 195).

Also, in support of this the Qur'an clearly indicates that marriage is sharing between the two halves of the society, and that its objectives are emotional wellbeing and spiritual harmony. According to Islamic Law, women cannot be forced to marry anyone without their consent.

In addition, within marriage both have equal rights and claims on one another, except for one responsibility, that of leadership which is the role of the man, although ironically the mother is responsible for the family. Man's role of leadership in relation to his family does not mean the husband is a dictator. Islam emphasizes the importance of taking counsel and mutual agreement in family decisions and so it is more of a partnership. When a man expects his wife to do anything contrary to the will of God she has the right to refuse him. A Muslim woman has only one Master, God. If her husband does not represent God's will the marriage contract is broken.

With regard to the woman's right to seek employment it should be stated first that Islam regards her role in society as a mother and a wife as the most sacred and essential one. However, there is no decree in Islam which forbids woman from seeking employment and therefore she has an equal right to men.

Despite the Qur'an saying nothing explicit, some Islamic sources suggest that a woman's testimony in court is worth only half of that of a man. This ruling, argues the scholar Maqsood, should be applied only in circumstances where a woman is uneducated: therefore, a woman equally qualified to a man

will carry the same weight as a witness.

The Qur'an is addressed to all Muslims, and for the most part it does not differentiate between male and female. Man and woman, it says, 'were created of a single soul', and are moral equals in the sight of God.

Although it could be argued that the spirit of Islam is clearly patriarchal, it regards men and women as moral equals. Islam encourages patriarchy and although women may not be equal in the manner defined by Western feminists, their unique status is acknowledged, and they have rights of their own that men do not have.

Feedback:

This is a fair attempt at an evaluation. Despite recognising that there are a variety of views within Islam, the argument does limit itself by not being able to explore in more depth the issue of role and status. It really just defends Islam against various areas that could be considered to support the statement. It also has little scholarly support. The verses from the Qur'an are used well at first but after this the Qur'an is only referred to generally. The conclusion does follow from the argument and does concede an 'apparent' weakness only as the counter argument.

QUESTION 1

'The teachings on divorce in Islam contradict the importance placed on family life.' Evaluate this view.

Answer 1

Everyone is supposed to be married in Islam unless they are financially unable or physically it is not possible. Marriage is encouraged because it is essential, provides stability for the wider extended family and it is also a sacred contract. The contract binds together not only two individuals but two families. As it is a sacred bond, then to break this through divorce is seen as 'reprehensible' but it is NOT a sin. Nonetheless it does contradict the importance placed on family life.

The importance of the family can also be seen from the clear roles and responsibilities that mother and father have. Within the marriage, men and women have clear lines of responsibility although the roles are complementary and form an ideal partnership of strength and stability. As well as a wife and mother, the woman manages the household and supervises the religious and moral education of children. The man's role is really the public face of the family, dealing with matters outside the family such as support and protection. This forms a strong, cohesive unit and for this to break down it challenges central Islamic principles that it intends to promote. Therefore, divorce does contradict the importance placed on family life in Islam.

However, it could be argued that the act of divorce itself indirectly highlights the importance of family

life in a wider sense. Although divorce 'is of all the permitted things, the most abominable with God' according to Hadith (Dawud), when a marriage appears to be failing someone from within the Muslim community will intervene in order to seek a reconciliation. This is because family in Islam is not just the direct, immediate family of husband, wife and children but also is an extended unit in two ways: the extended family; and, the ummah. Therefore, the involvement of the wider family in seeking reconciliation is important and therefore the apparent contradiction serves to reinforce the purpose of the family in Islam, that is, to support each other at all times.

There have been different ways of obtaining a divorce in Islamic society. Sometimes the man proclaims divorce once or three times (once per month) but a three month waiting period ('Iddah) ; however, the idea that just to announce divorce 3 times to affect it immediately is actually considered sinful, although not illegal, and so in practice it is very rare. This apparent ease of obtaining a divorce would seem to contradict Islamic teachings on the importance of the family. Nonetheless, this argument is weakened when the conditions of a divorce, both before and after, are considered such as ensuring women and children do not suffer hardships in all cases. Once again, although it appears to go against Islamic teachings about the importance of family, these conditions ensure once again to support members of the family.

In summary, it would appear that the prosperity and welfare of society is related to the strength and unity or not of the family unit, both immediately but then beyond this to the extended family and wider ummah. Divorce may appear to contradict this on the one hand, but on the other hand, there is a strong case for the view that the way divorce is implemented certainly underlines the importance of family life in Islam.

Answer 2

In support of the statement, there is a popular misconception that a man is able to dismiss his wife by declaring that he divorces her. However, it is not as simple as this. Indeed the Qur'an, Sura (2:234-238) amongst other places, clearly states there were procedures to follow in a practical sense before and after divorce. Indeed, many Muslims would say that it is due to the focus on family life in Islam that the divorce rate within Islam is so low.

First and foremost divorce 'is of all the permitted things, the most abominable with God' according to Hadith (Dawud). Always, when a marriage appears to be failing an arbiter is appointed and reconciliation is sought. However, as Esposito suggests, 'the Islamic ideal was often compromised by social realities' and so the Qur'an and shari'a established principles that reflect the need for divorce. Therefore, it can be seen to be a practical way of preventing further damage to family life rather than contradicting its importance.

When a divorce is initiated it is usually by the man and it is known as talaq. The husband's initial announcement may be verbal or written, but once it is made, there is to be a waiting period of three months ('Iddah). During this period of waiting there can be no sexual relations and husband and wife must live under the same roof.

The waiting period helps to prevent hasty terminations due to anger and allows time for both parties to reconsider as well as to see if the wife is pregnant. If the wife is pregnant, the waiting period is lengthened until she delivers the baby. At any point during this time, the husband and wife are free to resume their conjugal relationship; thereby ending the divorce process. During this waiting period, the husband remains financially responsible for the support of his wife.

The divorce initiated by the wife is known as khul' (if the husband is not at fault) and requires that the wife returns her dowry to end the marriage because she is the 'contract-breaker'. In the instance of talaq, where the husband is the 'contract-breaker', he must pay the dowry in full in cases where all or part of it was deferred, or allow the wife to keep all of it if she has already been given it in full.

Answer 3

Family life is extremely important in Islam. It is the 'cornerstone' of Islam. One scholar has argued that it is a microcosmic model of the macrocosmic ummah! Divorce then, because it breaks up the family, is a clear contradiction.

In support of this we can take a look at the different roles of men and women. The traditional role of a man is to provide for the family and to protect it. The role of the woman is to be a mother, to bring up children, to manage the household and, to educate the children in the ways of Islam. To take away any element of this is to contradict the importance placed on family life in Islam.

Another way that divorce contradicts the importance placed on family life in Islam is because it encourages one to think about one's own needs before others. Surely a religious person would be able to work out their differences and maintain their vows. To break the vows displays moral weakness and can only damage family life.

I think that divorce is wrong because how can you have unity without a family. Ultimately it threatens the Islamic community.

Question 2

'Islam would not work if the importance of family life was not recognised.'

Evaluate this statement.

Answer 1

In Islam, family is the cornerstone of the social system; however, it is important to clarify what the term 'family' refers to. In Islam it can refer to immediate family members such as mother, father, and children; or, to the extended family of aunts, uncles and grandparents; and finally, extends to the whole Muslim community of believers world-wide that is the ummah. Therefore, right from the start it can be seen how Islam 'works' according to the principles of belonging to a family.

Family is not a casual or spontaneous organisation of people, but it is a divinely ordained institution recognised in the Qur'an. For example, Sura 5:56 states, 'As to those who turn (for friendship) to Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers,- it is the fellowship of Allah that must certainly triumph'. It is therefore Allah's wish that Islam 'works' best when recognising the worldwide family of believers.

Some would go as far as to suggest that the progress and welfare of a society, or its breakdown, directly relates to, and is dependent upon, the strength and unity, or to the weakness, of the family. Related to this it is clear that Islamic family law makes up 80% of shari'a law and establishes minimum basic rights to guarantee the interests of each family member. Therefore, underpinning the workings of the Islamic political, social and religious system is the emphasis on the family, hence supporting the statement.

At its very basic level it could be suggested that the importance of the family in Islam comes from its allocated function in preserving the human race by procreation but also, it is responsible for protecting the morals of the society and individuals. This is especially the case when the family has an important role in providing the socialisation and value orientation of children, and in providing social and economic security. Islam 'works' best when this is recognised.

Finally, the ideal of making up a family has far-reaching benefits for society at large in that it motivates individuals to work hard, sacrifice their own welfare, and become beneficent for the sake of their family and through this become more 'other aware'.

Despite all this, some would say that the family is not the only thing that makes Islam 'work'. The first obvious case is the revelation brought from Allah in the form of the Qur'an and it is because of this that Islam exists and functions as a religion today. Even those who place importance on the family would recognise this and defer, such as Fernea who writes, 'If the Koran (Qur'an) is the soul of Islam, then perhaps the institution of the Muslim family might be described as its body'. Esposito echoes this when he writes, 'For Muslims, the Qur'an is the Book of God. It is the eternal, uncreated, literal word of God sent down from heaven, revealed one final time to the Prophet Muhammad as a guide for humankind.'

There are also other elements of Islam that are important. For instance, the Pillars of Islam are fundamental to Islamic practice and the six beliefs are the essentials of Muslim belief. Indeed, it is true that without these Islam would not 'work'. For example, Richard Gray writes of the Shahadah, 'Shahadah is the ultimate declaration of faith for Islam. It is more than a creed or statement of belief. It is not just a matter of personal belief, but rather a public testimony of truth. It is, in essence, an action.' Colin Turner adds, 'it is incumbent on all Muslims, regardless of whether they are 'born Muslims' or 'converts', to make the Shahada part of their mental make-up.' Therefore such aspects of Islam cannot be ignored and certainly not seen as secondary to Islamic teachings about the family.

Perhaps the best conclusion would be to say that the basis of the family is Islamic belief and practice and that the statement can be supported if we add the phrase, 'because the ideal of family incorporates all religious teachings and practices associated with Islam'? Alternatively, if the family is defined as the ummah then it is even easier to support the statement as essentially, the family is exactly the same as Islam!

Answer 2

Family is the basis of Islam. Sura 17:23 states, 'treat your parents with kindness. If one or both of them attain old age in your care, never say to them a word (suggesting) disgust, nor reproach them, but address them with reverent speech'. This shows how family is vital for Islam to work.

Professor Badawi writes, 'The Qur'an clearly indicates that marriage is sharing between the two halves of the society, and that its objectives, besides perpetuating human life, are emotional well-being and spiritual harmony. Its bases are love and mercy.' Marriage makes a family and so this is important too.

Sura 52:21 says that families are important to Islam. 'And those who believe and whose families follow them in Faith - to them shall We join their families: Nor shall We deprive them (of the fruit) of aught of their works: (Yet) is each individual in pledge for his deeds' and so does Sura 5:56 which states 'As to those who turn (for friendship) to Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers, - it is the fellowship of Allah that must certainly triumph.'

All this shows how Islam will not work without the family and is supported by the writer Fernea who argues, 'If the Koran (Qur'an) is the soul of Islam, then perhaps the institution of the Muslim family might be described as its body'.

On the other hand Sura 4:36 says, 'Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good - to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious' which shows that everyone and not just family is important for Islam to work. In fact, one could conclude that it is Allah who makes Islam work and so it will always work regardless of anything else.

Answer 3

It could be argued that Islam will not survive if the family collapses. In the West we see a lot of disrespect for the family. In the media there are stories of divorce, adultery and child abuse. These horrific cases demonstrate that a society that is not run well will fall into chaos.

The family is crucial for Islam. Divorce is not liked and that is why family life and its importance is recognised. This argument demonstrates that without recognising family, Islam would not function or survive as Muhammad wanted it to.

Then again, Islam does work in Western society. There are many Muslim communities and they stress the importance of family and so Islam survives and flourishes. Indeed, it spreads further as more and more each day are entering the family of Islam.

That is another thing. The family of Islam is the ummah. This means brotherhood and 'brothers' are a family so it is right in one sense that without recognising the importance of family life then Islam could not work. Muslims are all a big family according to the ummah.

Scholars argue that Islam is ordained by Allah and so it can be practised anywhere and would work anywhere. Therefore, in this case the statement is wrong.