

## **“Genesis Revisited”**

**with Rosemary Radford Ruether,  
Rachel Adler, and Mehnaz Afridi**

**2011**

**Gwynne:** Welcome to The Guibord Center - Religion Inside Out. I'm the Founding President of The Guibord Center whose mission is "to bring people together, to challenge assumptions, unleash the Holy and affirm the faith that transforms the world." Through the mission statement of The Guibord Center, it is our intent to reclaim the positive power of religion and of spiritual integrity in order to grapple with the problems we all have in common as human beings and must address as people of faith. We will challenge the distortions that chain and divide and affirm the deep values that inspire and that connect.

We are very pleased to have with us what I have been referring to, with apologies to Dr. Mehnaz Afridi, as the Holy Trinity. And I'm very, very proud that they are here, but before I introduce them, I want to say a couple things. If you would be so kind as to turn off your cell phones, we would appreciate that. That's number one. Number two, there are restrooms in the north of the cathedral and also off to the side of this little fountain area over here. We must be out of the main part of the church by four o'clock because there is a Presbyterian church that comes into the Episcopal cathedral to have their services and they need time to set up. We have three well known feminist theologians and I will introduce them in just a moment, but the program for this afternoon is that each is going to speak for 15-20 minutes. They will then have what is referred to as "cross-talk" and time permitting we will have allow people to ask questions, bring them forward with your check which you will put in my pocket, with great discretion.

Dr. Rachel Adler is a Professor of Modern Jewish Thought and Judaism and Gender at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. She was one of the first theologians to integrate feminist perspectives and concerns into the interpretation of Jewish texts and the renewal of Jewish law and ethics. She is the author of *Engendering Judaism* which won the National Jewish Book Award for Jewish Thought. She is a Professor and is currently writing a book about the theological challenges posed by suffering. Please welcome Dr. Rachel Adler. Then we have Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether. In nearly every correspondence that I had with her, I misspelled her last name. She has been the pioneering chief feminist theologian for over three decades and perhaps one of the most widely read theologians in North America. Her book, *Senses Beyond Talk*, is a classic in the field of feminist theology. She has written or edited over forty books and hundreds of articles and reviews. She is currently Visiting Professor of Feminist Theology at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University. Let's welcome Dr. Ruether. Dr. Mehnaz Afridi is a Muslim scholar who teaches Judaism and Islam at Antioch University, Los Angeles, and has taught at Loyola Marymount University. Originally she's from Pakistan and was raised in Europe and the Middle East so she

brings a multicultural perspective to Islam. Her deep interest in Judaism and Islam has led her to numerous Interfaith conferences, invitations by non-Muslims to expound the intellectual and theological similarities between Jews and Muslims. We're going to have the three present.

## I

**Rachel Adler:** Thank you. The novelist Elie Wiesel has said that God created humanity because God loves stories. Stories are complex, multifaceted, and embody particular perspectives. Truth for Judaism is a bringing together of many stories, regardless of their contradictions. Each offers a piece that is important to the whole. These stories in Genesis come to us wrapped in centuries of commentary and *midrash*, stories backed with stories. From a liberal Jewish perspective, the task of modern men and women is not to discard ancient sacred texts but to read them with understanding and compassion without evading or denying their patriarchal biases and to seek in them and beyond them for redemptive meanings towards a more just and loving future.

In Genesis, we have not one, but two stories of creation, each written from a different point of view. The first story, Genesis 1, is written by the priestly writer, who sees creation as a process of drawing boundaries. It is the story of the beginning of this created world, but not the story of the beginning, with a capital B. The first verse ought to be translated "In the Beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth, the earth was a chaos unformed." The world begins, then, with boundariesness. Unlike the Babylonian genesis on which this story is based, creation is peaceful. It is not an aftermath of war. It is not the carving up of the body of a dead goddess.

Drawing boundaries is not creating oppositions in this story. Instead, there are parallels among the created elements. Stretched over the kindred waters above and below are kindred solid expanses, sky and earth. The sky is sewn with stars, the earth is sewn with grasses. Sea and air bring forth their many kinds of creatures. The sea brings forth its many beasts. The creation of humankind continues this pattern of upholding the uniqueness of created things and their similarity to some differing other. The priestly writer is interested in order, harmony, plenitude, fertility, and also justice. Remember, that it's the priestly writer, who in Leviticus 19 relays the commandment, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Here the priestly writer emphasizes that both male and female human beings were created simultaneously. They are both called *Adam*, Adam, the red creature, from the word *Adom*. The earth creature from the word *Adamah*. And the blood creature, from the word *dam*. It's a pun, a triple pun.

Adam is God's conundrum. An earth, fleshly, bloody being who is nevertheless described as resembling God. The text dwells insistently on the link in the space of two verses, the likeness between the man and woman Adam, and God, is reiterated four times. Human beings are in God's image. In the image of God he created it. Male and female he created them. Power is conferred on the man and the woman. They are to rule over the natural world. This does not seem to be permission to exploit the creation. Human beings at this time do not even at this point have permission to eat animals.

The questions that Genesis 1 seems to address are: how did the created world come to be? And what is humankind's place within it? What is the nature of humanity? Is the creation good? God declares repeatedly in Genesis 1 that it is good.

In Genesis 2 and 3, in contrast, the questions are less on the relationship between human and the world, and more about the relations between man and woman, and the relationship of both two their own desires and choices, and to God. I would suggest that Genesis 2 and 3 is a story about how the patriarchal universe came to be. In this story, Adam, Adam refers only to the male human. His maleness represents the original human condition for the writer of Genesis 2 and 3. The male Adam is created first and rather than being akin to his creator, he is an artifact, molded out of the dust of the earth whereas in Genesis 1 Adam is not created for an instrumental purpose.

In Genesis 2, Adam is created to labor in the Garden of Eden, to serve the earth out of which he is created. God recognizes Adam's loneliness, but the solution for him is to create an oppositional other. God declares, "I will create for him a helper over against or opposite him." This is the first hint of an unequal complementarity between man and woman. He is the subject and woman is his helper and reflection. Together, they are referred to as *Adam* and *Ishto*. The Adam and "his woman." The woman is brought into being in a manner unlike all other created things. She is not created, like the creatures in Genesis 1. She is not "molded" like the creatures in Genesis 2. Instead, she is constructed, *banah*, out of the Adam's rib, or you can translate it as "side." He greets her with joy:

"this one is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called *Ishah*, woman, for from man, *ish*, was she taken. Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his woman, so that they become one flesh."

This is the opposite, as it has often been observed, of the human birthing process in which man is taken out of woman. Here Adam turns out to be the first birther, as it were. Genesis 2 presents the world as a collection of potentially useful or valuable resources. Woman's importance lies in the function she serves for man. Unlike the birds and the beasts, she will serve as a suitable mate. In this world where everything is viewed not as simply "good" like the creations of Genesis 1, but good for some use, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is an anomaly, a resource whose consumption is mysteriously forbidden.

This is a depiction of the patriarchal universe in which the self relates to what is external to it by subjugating it or incorporating it. Adam of Genesis 2 just can't let difference coexist as equal to the self. Genesis 3 takes the form of an animal fable, so you'll be relieved to know that it's unnecessary to posit that snakes once spoke Hebrew. But a fable usually ends with a pithy moral lesson and we get none at the end of this story. Instead, it answers a variety of questions about why things are the way they are. The snake is usually regarded in Jewish commentary as a personification of the impulse to do evil, the *yetzer ha-rah*. The snake shows the woman that the fruit of the tree is desirable and

confers a benefit and indeed, upon eating it, she knows that she is naked. There is a pun here on the word, *arun*, which means “wiley,” and *eron*, which means “naked.” The snake is wiley. The woman seeks to be wiley, but the first thing she learns is a source of shame. In this episode, Adam is there, but is silent and passive. The woman gives him some of the fruit. Interestingly, she does not seek to keep this source of power all to herself. Later the Adam will accuse her and God, saying “the woman you gave me gave me the fruit and I ate.” In other words, it’s your fault and her fault. The woman acknowledges that the snake tricked her and she ate.

A biblical Bible scholar asks the question: “Did they fall or were they pushed?” Does this story set woman and the Adam up to leave the infantile and idyllic world of Eden for the as-yet unredeemed world full of choices and responsibility? Is there a fall of humanity? The history of this text is so fraught with patriarchal bias that it’s difficult to read it attentively. But you must note that neither the man nor the woman is cursed in this text. The *land* is cursed. It will bring forth thistles and thorns and will be hard to cultivate. The *snake* is cursed. There will be enmity between you and the woman and your seed and her seed. They will strike at your head and you will strike at their heel. But the fate described for the man and the woman is a life of painful effort, alienation, brokenness and defeat. But not cursed. The redemptive truth of this passage, it seems to me, is that patriarchal social relations do construct a world that cries out to be mended, yet mending is contingent on the mending of gender relations.

Gender polarity creates a world where power is a burden, both for those who wield it and for those under its foot. Compulsive toil and unrelenting watchfulness replace cooperation and trust while hierarchy obstructs fellowship and communion. Boundaries become fearful places where the underling strikes at the heel of his superior, meanwhile strikes at his head. At the top of the ladder, privileged man, facing his unrewarding labors, must doubly watch his back. First, against the striking serpent, and then against his nearest competitor, who was, we are told, in Eden, his beloved and friend.

The good news is that we need not conclude that it is God’s will that we live in this misery. Judaism does not read Genesis 2 and 3 as normative. The rabbinic tradition doesn’t use it as a source of legal statements nor is there any prohibition on alleviating its conditions. No Torah-observant followers refrain from using advanced farming equipment to root out thorns and thistles from the fields. No one harvests with sickles because it says “by the sweat of your brow you shall get bread to eat” or refrains from hydroponic gardening because it says “your food shall be the grasses of the field.” When childbirth anesthesia was invented, some Victorian clergymen objected, because it translated “in pain shall you bear children” and considered anesthesia rebellion against God’s decree. But no Jewish legal authority forbade alleviating childbirth pain.

Why, then, single out “your desire shall be for your husband. He shall rule over you” as the only normative statement in this chapter? It doesn’t work. In the post-Edenic world, passive existence of conditions is not an option. One must act upon things the way they are in order to change them and survive. The question is whether we’ll learn to change the way we interact in the social world and the natural world in just and non-damaging

ways, and whether we'll learn to do it fast enough. Will we learn to co-exist without opposing or dominating or conquering the other? The novelist Dorothy Sayers once asked, "if women are the opposite sex, what is the neighboring sex?" When woman is defined as opposition or derivative, a shared reality is denied. If we could learn to live harmoniously with the creation, and justly and equally with one another, one element of the original creation would be restored and men and women would be, as the traditional wedding blessing puts it, loving companions as they were in the Garden of Eden of old.

## II

**Rosemary Radford Ruether:** In this talk I'm going to explore the relationship, and I'll focus much more narrowly on one text, explore the relationship between the idea of humanity made in the image of God and gender, humanity as male and female. So I'll focus on the text of Gen 1:27, "so God created Adam in his own image, in the image of God he created him (or "it"), male and female he created them."

Now in the Christian tradition there are two models for interpreting the relationship between these two phrases, that is to say Adam in the image of God and male and female. These two models are "dominion" and what I'm calling here "spiritual exemplarism." In the tradition of dominion, the term "image of God" is seen as the human's representing divine dominion. God creates the human to be God's delegate, to in effect be the representative of divine rule over creation and this implication is drawn from the next phrase in Genesis 1:28: "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air"—if there was ever an arrogant idea there, I always laugh when I think of having dominion over the fish and the birds—"and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Now when this idea of "image of God" as dominion is stressed, women are generally excluded from the possession of the image of God. This is seen as possessed by the patriarchal male human (not all males are patriarchal, we're really talking about the elite ruling class of males) who exercise dominion over women and everything else. Now, in St. Paul, we have a kind of ambivalence toward this concept of image. In 1 Cor 11:7, here Paul is denouncing women speaking in church without veiled heads. And he says, "the man ought not to cover his head because he is the image and glory of God." But woman is the glory of man. What does that mean? Now the word translated as glory is in Greek *doxa* and this word can mean a vision, an opinion, an appearance, a reputation. However, in the Christian tradition, *doxa* has generally been understood as saying that women do not possess the image of God in themselves but rather they are a kind of secondary expression of humanity under the male.

Now the second tradition of spiritual exemplarism comes into Christianity from the Jewish Hellenistic philosopher Philo. For Philo, God created the human being originally as a purely spiritual non-gendered expression of the divine *Logos*, the divine Word, which manifests God and creates the world. This spiritual human being is then embodied and embodied generically and then the body is divided into male and female. Now Christians took over this view of the divine image as the expression of the divine *Logos*

to defend the belief that women indeed could be baptized or taken into humanity in Christ equally with men, following Paul in Galatians 3:28, “In Christ there is no more male and female.” The Greek Church Fathers like Origen understand that women were created equally with men in the image of God in the sense of possessing this non-gendered spiritual capacity for knowing and relating to God. This capacity of the soul makes possible her redemption in Christ and her spiritual journey to life everlasting.

Augustine, who is the major shaper of Western theology, then combines these two traditions. For him, both men and women are created in the image of God, so they possess the spiritual capacity to relate to God equally, but when we refer to male and female, the male represents the soul and the woman the body. Exegeting Paul’s text from 1 Corinthians, Augustine says:

“woman separately quality in her soul as a helpmate. As regards to woman alone she is not the image of God. But as regards to the male alone, he is the image of God as fully and deeply as when woman is joined to him in bond.”

What does that mean? The general drift here is that both men and women possess the non-gendered spiritual capacity to relate to God, but only the male has dominion over the earth, including over woman. This means that only the male possesses the fullness of the image of God in himself both as an individual and as a social agent in relationship with women, but women do not possess the full image of God in herself. In her female body and in her female social existence, she represents only the body and that which is under the male dominion. Now this double aspect of the image of God is made explicit in the theological anthropology of John Calvin in the Reformation.

For Calvin, both men and women possess the image of God equally as the spiritual capacity of the soul to relate to God, but women do not have what Calvin called “the second part” of the image of God, dominion. Woman is excluded from dominion in church and society. She cannot preach, be ordained, hold public leadership in the church—here we are just violating Calvin even as we sit here—and in society she cannot hold property or exercise political or social leadership. Now Calvin, and the Calvinists had a lot of problems in the sixteenth-century with the fact that there were a lot of queens around. Now they did recognize that this happened occasionally, more often than they’d like, but they thought it just shouldn’t happen and they saw it as evidence of the fallen and corrupt state of society. Elizabeth 1 did not appreciate that view, needless to say.

Now this Christian tradition which allotted women spiritual equality with men, but forbade women social leadership was gradually changed in modern Western society. And a key movement here which a lot of Christians don’t realize is actually the Quakers. For the Quakers, men and women were created equally in all things at the beginning, but dominion of some over others was not part of the image of God. Rather, it represents a simple distortion. With Quakers, all violence, war, domination flow from this original fall, which they define as the usurpation of power of some over others. Now what’s very important about this Quaker reinterpretation is that the blame for the fall and the sin was attributed to those who seized power. They did not blame women and their failure to

accept subordination, which had been the tradition. Rather, they blamed the ruling class men who seized power and created systems of domination.

Now nineteenth century Quakers like Susan B. Anthony led the development of American feminism. For them, women were created originally equal with men in all things, intellect, and social roles in society. Sin or injustice in society came about when the ruling class seized power and created systems of domination over women and slaves. Redemption in society, therefore, means overthrowing these unjust systems of social domination and including everybody in the share and care of society.

Now this view worked itself out roughly between the 1830s to the 1920s into the acceptance of women suffrage, in other words equality and citizenship and therefore, their admission into all forms of society, excepting of course those groups which did not accept this change. So having made that quick summary, I pose the key question: What do Christians do with this biblical text?

Phyllis Bird, who is a former colleague of mine, a Methodist scholar of Hebrew scripture, has written a carefully detailed discussion of what she sees as the original meaning of this text in the context of its priestly writers. In Bird's view, the original authors did not identify these two phrases, that is to say, "image of God" and "male and female," but rather they separated them. The image of God was understood as the human representation of divine dominion while creation as male and female was understood as the distinction of gender for the purpose of reproduction with humans shared with animals but not with God. The idea of image connecting humans with God was therefore one statement, and then a separate statement, male and female, connects us with animals, and with the rest of creation. Bird argues that the original writers saw this image of God as in a collective given to humanity as a whole, as collective Adam.

Now I think what we need to deal with here is the scripture by its very nature is not simply historical text limited to its original or past social context. Rather, scripture by its nature are revelatory texts because God speaks to us again and again, in our present contexts. And this means they are open to our ongoing better contexts, or insights. The meanings of texts can and must expand to include new insights and new realities such as women sharing in the exercise of care of creation, which the original creators perhaps did not imagine. Thus we have come to read this text more and more inclusively not only as including women as spiritual equals, but also as social equals.

Now Bird's insight that the second phrase about male and female as relating to animals rather than to God, I think can perhaps open up for us a different direction of interpretation. Today we have to question the view that human dominion over nature gives us unlimited domination over the natural world. Our existence as male and female means we are animals among other animals, we are one species among others in the natural world, and we happen to be latecomers to the planet, dependent on our fellow animals, male and female, for our existence. So we need to ask how our care for creation must be exercised in a way that sustains the well being of all creatures in one eco-system of the earth not in a way that exploits or destroys other creatures and their habitats.

Subduing the fish of the sea and the birds of the air have, so to speak, overshot their mark enough already, of the subduing of the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. We probably have to learn something else. We have to learn how to sustain the healthy living of the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and all plants and animals and only in that way is our care for the earth truly representative of God's care for the earth.

### III

**Mehnaz Afridi:** I just want to begin with taking a few seconds before I speak in remembrance of the Holocaust which is today, so if we could just take a few seconds, and think of the victims through the Holocaust, I'd really appreciate that.

Thank you. First I want to thank Dr. Rev. Gwynne Guibord for this opportunity and for preparing this beautiful space, and I was lucky enough to come for the Inaugural here and it was a beautiful reception and I commend her for her hard work and for how she brings this "holy trinity" together. I also want to say that I am extremely humbled to be in this company of Dr. Rachel Adler and Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether who is actually world-renowned and famous—and I used to hear about her when I was a student—because I was actually essentially trained in Protestant theology, believe it or not, so I just want to say that, thank the company and Gwynne.

I also want to say that one of the things about Genesis and Islam and the *Qur'an* that you should know is that Genesis is not a book. It's not a story that's chronological. It's not something that Muslims even refer to in terms of a creation of the world. So my story is going to be a little different and I'm going to take the risk of being hard-nosed feminist about this. So one of the things I'm going to say about Genesis is that the early notions of the feminine and the divine are very prominent. If you look at fourteenth and fifteenth-century female writers in the Islamic world, they're talking about the divine and the feminine. Also contemporary Muslim feminists are constantly talking about gender equality, especially in terms of creation. So having said that, I want to say that this is my perspective, this is where I would like to re-vision very much for this Judaism and Christianity to read the *Qur'an* as being anti-patriarchal. So when Rachel beautifully put, "this is where patriarchy was being created," I agree with her. And I want to look at how patriarchy was created but how we can see patriarchy as a creation of the human being.

So I'll share some of the verses and I think it's important for us to have a taste of how does the *Qur'an* approach Genesis. I mean you don't think of Genesis and *Qur'an* or Islam but I want to give us a taste directly from the *Qur'an* and remember it's not in chronological order, so you'll hear verses being repeated. Genesis is being used as a reminder to the human being of not listening to the commandments of God as men and women and transgressing and listening to evil, the devil, also in Islam there is no notion of "original sin" or a fall, but there is a notion of transgression and not following the commandment of God. Is that clear?

So let me start with 2:33. I have three translations. I'm going to use Yusuf Ali just for the purposes of today: "He said O Adam, tell them their names. When he had told them,



*Allah* said, ‘Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth? I know what you reveal and what you conceal.’

2:34: “And behold, we said to the angels, bow down to Adam, and they bowed down.”

2:35 “O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden and eat of the bountiful things therein, as when and where ye will. But approach not this tree, for you will run into harm and transgression.”

2:36: “Then did Satan make them slip from the Garden and out of the state of felicity in which they had been. We said, get ye down, all you people, and enmity between yourselves on earth will be your dwelling place and your means of livelihood for a time.”

2:37: “Then learned Adam from his Lord words of inspiration and his Lord turned towards him for his oft-returning, most merciful”

and this moves on to the seventh chapter, *Surah*, as we call it,

“O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden and enjoy the good things as ye wish. But approach not this tree or ye run into harm and transgression.”

Another repetition.

7:20: “Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them bringing before their minds all their shame that was hidden from him before he said, ‘your Lord only forbade you this tree lest you should become ageless beings and live forever.’”

Think of the plural that’s being used for both Adam and his wife at this point.

7:21: “And he assured them both that he was their sincere advisor.”

7:22: “so by deceit he brought about their fall. When they tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them and they began to sow [very much in terms of the Genesis Christian tradition] sew together the leaves of the Garden over their bodies and the Lord called unto them, ‘Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?’

7:23: “they said, ‘O Lord, we have wronged our own souls (This is Adam and his wife). If thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us thy mercy, we shall certainly be lost.”

7:24: “Get ye down with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling place and your livelihood for a time.”

7:25: “He said thereon shall ye live and thereon shall ye die. But from it shall ye be taken out at last.”

So the promise of immortality is not a promise for us. Sorry.

7:26: “O ye children of Adam, we have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness, that is the best, such are among the sights that they may receive admonition.”

And again it repeats itself, but I’m just giving you a taste of what goes on constantly, so:

2:21: “but Satan whispered evil to him, and said to Adam, (only to Adam), ‘Shall I lead ye to the tree of eternity and to kingdom that never decays?’

And the result . . .

2:22: “they both ate of the tree and so their nakedness appeared to them. They began to sew together for their covering leaves from the Garden. Thus did Adam disobey his Lord and allow himself to be seduced.”

By whom? Adam only disobeyed his Lord.

The *Qur’an* seldom speaks of Eve. It was in popular legends and traditions about Prophet Muhammad’s time that portrayed Eve as a temptress because in the *Qur’an* Eve is not even mentioned by name nor her fall from grace. Many Sufi scholars, both male and female, have argued that the divine has a feminine soul and life. For example, if Mary is the mother of Jesus, which she is, in the *Qur’an*, and Eve the wife of Adam in the *Qur’an*, the divine has equally a male and female soul and life.

Is the *Qur’an* a patriarchal or misogynistic text? Does it represent God as Father Male or teach us that God has a special relationship with males or that male embody divine attributes and that women are by nature weak, unclean, or sinful? Further, does it teach that rule by the father/husband is divinely ordained and that earthly continuation of God’s rule as religious and traditional patriarchies claim?

Alternatively, does the *Qur’an* advocate gender differentiation, dualism, inequality, on the basis of sexual-biological differences between women and men? In other words, does it privilege men over women in their biological capacities as males or treat men as the self and the woman as the other? Or view men and women as binary opposites as modern patriarchal theories of sexual differentiation and inequality do?

I ask whether we can read the *Qur’an* for liberation? Can we read the *Qur’an* for hope, as our title suggests? I am asking whether its teaching about God as well about human creation, ontology, sexuality, and marriage relationships challenge sexual inequality and patriarchy. Alternatively, do the teachings of the *Qur’an* allow us to theorize equality, sameness, similarity or equivalence as the context demands of women and men?

As is obvious, these questions presuppose a particular view of patriarchy and in passing I should mention, that people don’t apply a patriarchal lens when they’re reading the

*Qur'an* even though many Muslims regularly condemn Islam as a patriarchal religion. How can we then define patriarchy? What are these confines and barriers that we hope to climb out of? I define patriarchy in both a narrow-specific and a broad universal sense in order to make the definition as comprehensible as possible.

Narrowly defined, patriarchy is an historically specific mode of rule by fathers that in its religious and traditional forms assumes a real as well as a symbolic continuum between a patrialized view of God as father-male and a theory of father-right extending to the husband's claim to rule over his wife and children. I apply this definition in reading the *Qur'an* because the *Qur'an* was revealed in the context of traditional patriarchy and my aim is to see if it endures the mode of patriarchy by representing God as Father or by representing the father or husband as ruler over his wife and children.

Since the *Qur'an's* teachings for Muslims are universal, and since father's rule has reconstituted itself, I also define patriarchy more broadly as the politics of sexual differentiation that privileges males, transforming biological sex into politicized gender which prioritizes the male while making the woman different, unequal, less than or other. Using this definition, I think its possible to answer the first set of questions—is the *Qur'an* a patriarchal or misogynist text? in the negative and can the *Qur'an* be a source of woman's liberation? in the affirmative.

To begin with, the *Qur'an* does not represent God as a father or male. Indeed, it explicitly forbids sacralizing God as Father nor does it sacralize fathers or fatherhood. It does not recognize that in historically existing patriarchies, men are the locus of authority and it does address patriarchies, but addressing a patriarchy is not the same as advocating or condoning one. The *Qur'an* repeatedly says “Following the ways of the father has prevented people from the path of God.” Reading *Qur'anic* accounts of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad also suggests an inherent conflict between monotheism and patriarchy in as much as the latter sacralizes men and their authority over women and children while the *Qur'an* does not.

The *Qur'an* does not establish men as ontologically superior to women or as rulers over them. Rather, it designates women and men as each other's guides and establishes love and mutuality as the basis of marriage. Moreover, in Islam, sexual equality is ontological in that the *Qur'an* teaches that God created humans from a single self. It does not privilege the man's creation or endow him with attributes or faculties not given to women. Rather, humans manifest the whole. The *Qur'an* also does not define men and women as opposites or portray women as lesser or defective men or the two sexes as incompatible or unequal. This is about patriarchy, not laws, ok. In fact, it does not even associate sex with gender. That is, while the *Qur'an* recognizes biological differences, it does not assign them any gender symbolism, making it difficult to derive a theory of sexual and gender inequality from its teachings. It does not link men and women to specific gender roles. There is not a single verse that suggests that men's gender roles are a function of their biology or that biological differences between men and women make them unequal.

The *Qur'an* does treat men and women differently with respect to some issues, however, this doesn't mean that it establishes them as unequal. For one thing, difference in itself does not imply inequality. For another, the *Qur'an* does not tie its different treatment to women and men to any claims of biological superiority or inferiority. The only basis on which Islam does distinguish between human beings is on the basis of their moral *praxis*. It distinguishes between those who have faith and those who do not, the believers and the unbelievers. It's not on the basis of such teachings that I describe the *Qur'an* as anti-patriarchal but also on the claim that the anti-patriarchal nature of *Qur'anic* epistemology flows from Islamic conceptualizations of God.

To my mind, this means that we should not read the *Qur'an* as designating men as rulers over women or as intermediaries between God and women, since this constitutes sin. Similarly, the *Qur'an* teaches that God is just. As such, I believe God's speech also cannot teach transgression against the rights of humans, since patriarchies do transgress against women's rights by oppressing them. The *Qur'an* cannot possibly endorse them and we should read its provisions with this idea in mind.

Likewise, the *Qur'an* teaches that God is unrepresentable. As such, linguistic references to God as "He" should be seen as limitations of human language and not accurate statements about God's reality. If we apply such criteria to read the *Qur'an* and also read it for its best meanings, and as a thematic whole, privileging its clear verses over its allegorical, as the *Qur'an* itself recommends, then we arrive at an interpretation that captures the radically egalitarian nature of its teachings. Now what I want to do is just share the verses that are about women and men in terms of equality:

"O mankind, reverence your guardian Lord, who created you from a single person, created of like nature, his mate and from them scattered like seeds countless men and women. Reverence *Allah*, through whom ye demand your mutual rights can reverence the wombs that bore you for *Allah* ever watches over you."

And then the other verse I want to share is about equal promise:

"And their Lord has accepted of them and answered them: 'you are members of one of another, those who have left their homes or have been driven out therefore, or suffered harm in my cause or fought verily I will blot out from their inequities.'"

Here we have equal verses in terms of their equality and the last thing I want to read is, before we move on, is, it's clear to me that the *Qur'anic* view of women is no different than of men. They both are God's creatures whose sublime goal on earth is to worship their Lord, do righteous deeds and avoid evil and they both will be assessed accordingly. The *Qur'an* never mentions that the woman is the devil's gateway or that she is a deceiver by nature. The *Qur'an* also never mentions that man is God's image. All men and women are his creatures. According to the *Qur'an*, a woman's role on earth is not limited only to childbirth. She is required to do as many good deeds as any other man is to do. The *Qur'an* never says that no upright women ever existed. To the contrary, the

*Qur'an* has instructed all believers, women as well as men, to follow the example of those ideal women such as the Virgin Mary and the wife of Pharoah:

“And *Allah* sets forth, as an example to those who believe, the wife of Pharoah, behold she said, ‘O my Lord, save me from Pharoah and his doings and save me from those who do wrong.’ And Mary, who guarded her chastity and we breathed into her the body of our spirit and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of his revelations and was one of the devout.”

Thank you.