

For the Sake of Man: Woman's Creation and Theological Hierarchies in Jewish and Christian Thought - A Critical View
من أجل الرجل: خلق المرأة والهياكل العقديّة في الفكر اليهودي والمسيحي – قراءة نقدية

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For the Sake of Man: Woman's Creation and Theological Hierarchies in Jewish and Christian Thought - A Critical View

من أجل الرجل: خلق المرأة والهياكل العقدية في الفكر اليهودي والمسيحي – قراءة نقدية

☆ *Dr. Abdul Basit Quresh*

Abstract

The question of whether woman was created “for the sake of man” has remained central to theological anthropology in both Jewish and Christian traditions. This article examines the interpretive frameworks that have historically shaped the subordination of women, beginning with the biblical accounts of Genesis and extending through rabbinic exegesis, patristic theology, medieval scholasticism, and Reformation debates. In Jewish tradition, the dual creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 generated contrasting views: the first suggesting equality – “male and female he created them” – and the second portraying woman as derivative, formed from Adam's rib as his helper. Rabbinic interpretation, along with liturgical practices such as the daily blessing in which men thanked God “for not having made me a woman,” reinforced patriarchal order. The myth of Lilith offered a counter-voice but was marginalized, while medieval authorities like Maimonides codified women's inferiority in law and theology. Christian thought inherited these tensions, reframing them through Eve, the archetype of disobedience, and Mary, the “new Eve,” exalted for her obedience yet separated from ordinary women. Patristic figures such as Augustine interpreted Eve's role in the Fall as confirming female subordination, embedding it within the doctrine of original sin. Scholastic theology, particularly in Aquinas, further naturalized hierarchy by describing woman as a “deficient male.” The Reformers, Luther and Calvin, maintained these structures, situating women within divinely ordained domestic and ecclesial subjection. By tracing these trajectories, this study demonstrates how the doctrine of woman's creation “for man” legitimized enduring theological hierarchies, while modern feminist critiques expose its impact on debates over ordination, authority, and gender roles.

Keywords: Gender and Theology; Jewish Tradition; Christian Thought; Eve and Mary; Lilith; Misogyny in Scripture; Augustine; Aquinas; Luther; Calvin; Feminist Theology

Introduction

The question of woman's creation and her relation to man has occupied a central place in both Jewish and Christian theological traditions. From the earliest interpretations of Genesis, woman has frequently been understood not as an autonomous being but as one created for the sake of man—derivative in origin, secondary in function, and subordinate in spiritual status. This conception has profoundly shaped religious anthropology, social norms, and gender hierarchies across centuries of Jewish and Christian thought.

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In the Jewish tradition, the dual creation accounts of Genesis (1:27; 2:18–23) offer contrasting portrayals: in the first, man and woman are created simultaneously and equally in the image of God; in the second, woman is formed from *Ādam*'s rib as his “helper.”¹ Rabbinic exegesis, liturgical practice, and halakhic traditions often accentuated the latter account, reinforcing an image of woman as derivative and inferior.² The Lilith myth further illustrates the tension, presenting an alternative female figure who resists subordination but is ultimately excluded from normative Jewish memory.³

Christian tradition inherited these interpretive tensions but reconfigured them in light of Eve and Mary. Eve was cast as the origin of sin, the one through whom humanity fell, while Mary was exalted as the “new Eve,” whose obedience and purity counterbalanced Eve's transgression. Yet even in Mary's glorification, the framework of female subordination persisted, since her elevation to divine motherhood required separation from ordinary women through doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.⁴ Patristic authorities, most notably Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and Gregory the Great, codified this theological anthropology, framing woman as a derivative creation, dependent on man, and a source of temptation and disorder within human history.⁵

This article seeks to examine these constructions of womanhood in their scriptural, rabbinic, and patristic contexts, showing how the idea of woman's creation “for the sake of man” became a central motif in Jewish and Christian theology. By highlighting both the continuities and divergences in these traditions, the study aims to reveal how theological anthropology has historically sustained patriarchal hierarchies and continues to shape discourses on gender within religious thought.

Section One — Creation of Woman for the Sake of Man

1.1 — Woman's Creation for the sake of Man in Jewish Tradition

In the Jewish tradition, as preserved in **Genesis 2–3**, the creation of woman is narrated in a way that simultaneously affirms her spiritual identity while subordinating her to man. The Torah presents woman as drawn from *Ādam*'s rib, suggesting at once her intimate identification with him and her secondary derivation from him. Biblical commentators have long debated whether this signifies equality in essence or subordination in purpose. Philo of Alexandria, for instance, interpreted woman's creation as both a completion of man's nature and a reflection of her derivative status, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical framework within creation.⁶

Before the Fall, the woman is depicted in a paradisiacal state of innocence and unity with *Ādam*. Yet, after the transgression, her position undergoes a profound transformation. The Yahwistic account of Genesis 3 emphasizes that Eve's role in the Fall results in her being placed under a curse, particularly the words: “*your desire shall be for your husband, and he*

¹ See Genesis 1:27; 2:18–23. For Jewish exegetical perspectives, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 112–15.

² Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 45–49.

³ Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 221–30.

⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 54–57.

⁵ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 1:115–17.

⁶ Philo of Alexandria, *On the Creation of the World*, in *Philo: Volume 1*, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library 226 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 33–35.

shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16).⁷ Here, womanhood becomes bound to subordination, with her sexuality and dependence on man framed as part of divine punishment. As Tikva Frymer-Kensky⁸ observes, the narrative is not simply descriptive but prescriptive, placing women within a structure of patriarchy legitimized by divine decree.⁹

The post-lapsarian image of woman is consequently marked by ambivalence: she is seen as both indispensable to man's existence and yet dangerously susceptible to temptation. Jewish exegetical traditions, especially in post-exilic literature, intensified this portrayal. The wisdom tradition, as reflected in *Proverbs*, frequently associates women with seduction and folly, while later rabbinic writings institutionalized a misogynistic reading of the Genesis narrative.¹⁰ Eve's act of disobedience thus becomes emblematic of female weakness, temptation, and moral instability, providing theological justification for the subordination of women within Jewish thought and practice.

1.2 — The Lilith Myth and Liturgical Exclusion

Another dimension of the biblical concept of womanhood emerges in the myth of **Lilith**, a figure absent from the canonical text but developed in Jewish midrashic and folkloric traditions. The apparent discrepancy between **Genesis 1**—where man and woman are created simultaneously in the divine image (“*male and female he created them*”)—and **Genesis 2**, which narrates woman's creation from *Ādam*'s rib, opened space for interpretive speculation.¹¹ This tension was resolved in some rabbinic and mystical writings through the Lilith legend, which posits that *Ādam*'s first wife was created equally alongside him in Genesis 1.¹² Refusing to accept subordination, Lilith departed from *Ādam* and was demonized in later tradition as a seductress and child-killer.¹³

The Lilith myth thus reflects the anxiety surrounding female autonomy in Jewish thought. While Genesis 1 suggested the radical equality of the sexes in divine creation, Genesis 2 became the normative narrative, with woman defined as derivative and subordinate. The rejection of Lilith and the privileging of Eve underscore how the tradition sought to suppress alternative visions of womanhood that might destabilize patriarchal order.

⁷ Gen. 3:16 (NRSV).

⁸ Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky (1943–2006) was a prominent Jewish scholar of the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East. She received her Ph.D. in Assyriology and Sumerology from Yale University and later served as Professor of Hebrew Bible and the History of Judaism at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Her research explored the intersection of gender, religion, and society in biblical and Mesopotamian traditions. Frymer-Kensky was particularly influential in feminist biblical studies, examining the status and portrayal of women in scripture and ancient Near Eastern culture. Among her major works are *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (1992) and *Reading the Women of the Bible* (2002), both of which critically assess the theological and cultural dynamics of women's representation. She was also active in Jewish feminist theology and interfaith dialogue, leaving a significant impact on the fields of biblical interpretation, gender studies, and comparative religion. Please see Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992.

⁹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 102–104.

¹⁰ Judith Baskin, “Jewish Women in Historical Perspective,” in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 21–23; see also Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 55–57.

¹¹ Gen. 1:27; Gen. 2:21–23 (NRSV).

¹² Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 175–178.

¹³ Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 221–226.

This derivative understanding of women is further reinforced in **Jewish liturgical custom**. In the daily *Shema* prayer (“*Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is One*”), men recite blessings thanking God “for not having made me a woman,” while women recite, with diminished status, blessings of gratitude for not having been created as slaves or heathens.¹⁴ These liturgical formulas, recorded in the Talmud and perpetuated in Jewish practice, institutionalize a hierarchy of being that explicitly places women below men. As Judith Plaskow has argued, such prayers not only reflect but actively shape the self-understanding of women in Jewish communities, embedding patriarchy within the very language of devotion.¹⁵

1.3 — Liturgical Bias and Feminist Critique

Loewe, in his study of Jewish liturgy, argues that the blessings of daily prayer—where men thank God for not having been created as women, slaves, or gentiles—may be interpreted as affirmations of a greater capacity for active religious life rather than necessarily as expressions of misogyny. He notes:

*“All three thanksgivings are for having been vouchsafed the opportunity for a more active and intense (though not necessarily, in each case, ‘higher’) spiritual activity than would have been the case, had the accident of birth been otherwise. Yet should it nevertheless prove to be the case that the formula did have its earliest origins in anti-feminine feeling.”*¹⁶

Even with this more charitable reading, the underlying structure of liturgy privileges men as the normative religious subject. The thanksgiving prayers do not affirm the equal spiritual strength of women; rather, they reinforce a hierarchy in which men are positioned as more capable of fulfilling divine commandments.

This pattern has not escaped modern feminist critique. Simone de Beauvoir, in her seminal work *The Second Sex*, directly engages with the misogynistic underpinnings of Jewish customs and liturgical practices, arguing that they are symptomatic of a broader cultural system that “sensualizes” the superiority of men over women.¹⁷ For de Beauvoir, the prayer tradition exemplifies how theological discourse perpetuates social hierarchies and legitimizes the exclusion of women from full spiritual agency.

The traditional ethos of biblical interpretation also reflects similar biases. Male commentators, situated within patriarchal institutions of learning, have historically reinforced readings that subordinate women. As Meyer has pointed out, even the philological tradition illustrates this bias: the Hebrew term *Ādam*, often interpreted generically as “man” or “human,” does not perfectly align with *Ādamah* (“ground” or “soil”), from which the first human is said to be formed (Gen. 2:7).¹⁸

Such distinctions demonstrate how exegetical choices and linguistic assumptions have been mobilized to naturalize male-centered interpretations of creation.

¹⁴ Talmud, *Menachot* 43b; see also David Abudarham, *Sefer Abudarham HaShalem*, ed. A. Berliner (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1963), 14–16.

¹⁵ Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 28–32.

¹⁶ Raphael Loewe, *Studies in the Mishnah* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), 145.

¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011), 110–112.

¹⁸ Lester Samuel Meyer, *The Creation of Man in Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), 67–69.

1.4 — Phases of Women's Status in Jewish Tradition

The inferior position of women in Jewish tradition may be described in three phases that scholars have identified as **“Torah tolerated,” “Torah established,” and “Torah taught.”¹⁹ In the first stage, woman was regarded as a non-person, counted among slaves or property. In the second stage, she gained recognition as a person but remained defined by her relationship to man. In the third stage, while she could study Torah for her own spiritual edification, she was denied public authority and access to communal teaching.²⁰

Rabbinic literature reinforced this subordination in concrete ways. The *Mishnah*, for instance, prioritizes saving a man's life before a woman's in situations of danger.²¹ Divorce also reflects inequality: a man may divorce his wife at will, whereas a woman must appeal to a rabbinic court and justify her request.²² In the teaching of **Maimonides**, a woman's devotion and obedience to her husband are demanded as absolute, yet never fully trusted.²³ The *Midrash* similarly portrays women as incompetent in matters beyond the domestic sphere, discouraging reliance upon them in external affairs.²⁴

It is also important to note that the **Yahwistic culture** existed in diverse forms among ancient Israelite communities, some of which allowed women significant roles. Archaeological and textual evidence indicates that in certain circles Yahweh was worshipped alongside the female deity **Asherah**²⁵, an eastern goddess later suppressed from the biblical narrative.²⁶ Prophetic and leadership roles were occasionally granted to women—such as **Miriam**, the sister of Moses, and **Huldah the prophetess**—yet these exceptions were minimized or marginalized in the canonical tradition.²⁷

Despite these contradictory images in the Hebrew Scriptures and rabbinic tradition, the general conclusion remains clear: women did not enjoy equality with men, either socially, religiously, or legally, within the dominant frameworks of Jewish thought.

¹⁹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 47–49.

²⁰ Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 22–25.

²¹ *Mishnah*, *Horayot* 3:7.

²² *Mishnah*, *Gittin* 9:10; see also Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 86–90.

²³ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Hilkhoh Ishut* (Laws of Marriage) 15:20–22.

²⁴ *Genesis Rabbah* 18:2.

²⁵ Asherah was a prominent mother-goddess in Canaanite religion, known as the consort of El and revered as “Mother of the Gods.” Biblical texts frequently condemn her worship in Israel (e.g., Judg. 3:7; 2 Kgs. 21:7; Jer. 7:18), while archaeological inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom (8th c. BCE) suggest that some Israelites venerated her alongside Yahweh (“Yahweh and his Asherah”). Her cult, often associated with sacred poles (*asherim*), was suppressed during Josiah's reforms (2 Kgs. 23:4–7). Modern scholarship views Asherah as a key figure in Israel's pre-monotheistic religion and as a suppressed symbol of the divine feminine. See Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 81–118; Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

²⁶ William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 176–183.

²⁷ 2 Kings 22:14; Exodus 15:20; see also Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 42–45.

Section Two – Woman's Creation for the sake of Man in the Christian Tradition

2.1 — The Christian Tradition: Eve and Mary

After considering the role of women in Judaism, it is necessary to examine the decisive position of **Eve and Mary** in Christian thought. As discussed earlier, Eve came to embody the center of sin and transgression, bearing the primary blame for *Ādam's* fall.²⁸ In Pauline theology, she is explicitly marked as the cause of deception: "*Ādam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor*" (1 Tim. 2:14).²⁹ Patristic interpreters, especially Augustine, extended this view to frame womanhood as inherently subordinate and prone to sin.³⁰

By contrast, Mary occupies an ambiguous but central position in Christian theology. On the one hand, her association with Eve has historically entailed suspicion: as "woman," she shares in the fallen nature attributed to Eve, and thus carries with her the potential for sexual appetite, weakness, and susceptibility to sin.³¹ On the other hand, in order to preserve Mary from the taint of Eve's guilt, the Church elevated her to a status that distanced her from ordinary womanhood. Through the doctrine of the **Immaculate Conception**, Mary was declared to have been conceived without original sin and preserved from the corruption transmitted through sexual reproduction.³² This elevation effectively isolated her as a singular, miraculous personality, distinct from other women and beyond ordinary human frailty.

The Pauline tradition reinforced the contrast: Eve is consistently identified with disobedience, sin, and death, while Mary becomes the new vessel of obedience and life.³³ Augustine went further, arguing that Eve was created already in a subordinate status, designed to be ruled by her husband even prior to her disobedience.³⁴ In his view, Eve's failure infected not only her own progeny but also *Ādam* himself, whose solidarity with her in the act of disobedience led to the transmission of concupiscence to all humanity. This sexualized "genetic infection," as Augustine describes it, became the means through which original sin was propagated.³⁵

The Catholic Church's development of Mariology was, in part, a theological attempt to resolve this tension. If Eve's disobedience had condemned all humanity, then Mary's obedience provided the possibility of redemption. The **Immaculate Conception** (formally defined as dogma in 1854 by Pope Pius IX) ensured that Mary was untouched by original sin.³⁶ Later, the **Assumption of Mary** (defined in 1950 by Pope Pius XII) declared that she

²⁸ Gen. 3:6–13 (NRSV).

²⁹ 1 Tim. 2:14 (NRSV).

³⁰ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. Arthur West Haddan, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 8.12.

³¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 24–26.

³² Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1974), 199–204.

³³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.22.4, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 455.

³⁴ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 11.42.

³⁵ Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, Vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 1.25.

³⁶ Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854), in *The Papal Encyclicals 1740–1878*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, NC: McGrath, 1981), 170–172

was taken into heaven without undergoing the ordinary corruption of death.³⁷ These doctrines elevated Mary to a near-divine status, but at the cost of further separating her from the experience of ordinary women—leaving Eve as the archetype of weakness and Mary as an exceptional, unattainable model of holiness.

2.2 — Patristic Perspectives on Women

Bertrand Russell identifies **St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and Pope Gregory the Great** as among the most influential thinkers of the early Western Church, while simultaneously noting their deeply problematic views regarding women.³⁸ In Russell's reading, **Ambrose** regarded procreation through sexual relations as degrading, to the extent that he preferred the extinction of humanity over dependence on women for reproduction.³⁹ Such views reflect the pervasive asceticism of the fourth century, where virginity was celebrated as a higher spiritual state than marriage, and women were often framed as necessary evils for the continuation of life.

Jerome, another towering figure of Latin Christianity, was even more severe in his assessment of women. In his writings, woman appears as a source of danger, quarrel, and cruelty.⁴⁰ For Jerome, female sexuality was a perpetual threat to male holiness, and the highest ideal for women was virginity, renunciation, and withdrawal from worldly life. His interpretation of Paul's exhortations (e.g., 1 Cor. 7) positioned celibacy above marriage, thereby reinforcing a theology in which women were primarily obstacles to spiritual perfection unless they embraced virginity.

Augustine, whose theology decisively shaped Western Christianity, also articulated a hierarchical understanding of gender. As discussed earlier, he identified Eve as the source of sin and interpreted her role in creation as subordinate to *Adam*. Augustine explicitly drew an analogy between the marital relationship and the Christ–Church relationship: just as Christ rules over the Church, so too man rules over woman.⁴¹ The wife, in Augustine's thought, was therefore to serve her husband, while her reproductive role further linked her to the transmission of original sin.⁴²

Russell's critique underscores how the patristic inheritance of Christianity institutionalized misogynistic assumptions within theology. Women were constructed not only as spiritually inferior but as symbols of weakness, temptation, and disorder, necessitating male authority to restrain them.

2.3 - Augustine's Anthropology of Subordination

Christian tradition has consistently emphasized that woman was not only created *from* man but also *for* man. Augustine provides one of the most enduring articulations of this doctrine. For him, the subordination of woman is intrinsic to her femaleness; her very purpose is to

³⁷ Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950), in *The Papal Encyclicals 1939–1958*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, NC: McGrath, 1981), 153–157.

³⁸ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946), 365–368.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 367. See also Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, Vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), 1.47.

⁴¹ Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, 9.9.

⁴² Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, Vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 1.25.

serve the interests of man.⁴³ Because of the Fall and the ensuing corruption of self-will, human society is prone to disorder, which Augustine argues must be restrained through hierarchical structures of domination.⁴⁴ In this framework, just as heretics and dissenters are compelled to submit to ecclesiastical authority, women are compelled to submit to men. This results in a double subordination: first, in the natural order of creation, and second, in the inherited guilt of sin.⁴⁵

Augustine maintains that redemption in Christ does not dissolve this natural subordination. Even the redeemed woman remains ontologically inferior to man. Humanity suffers death as the consequence of the loss of free will, but the redeemed will be raised at the resurrection and united with God by His sovereign grace.⁴⁶ In this eschatological state, men and women will rise in their respective genders, though their reproductive roles will cease. Augustine describes this condition as being “fitted to glory rather than to shame.”⁴⁷ Women who have lived spiritually devout lives will shine with equal brilliance to men in heaven, yet their spiritual state remains relationally defined in connection to men.⁴⁸

This distinction underscores Augustine's hierarchical anthropology: on earth, hierarchy is gendered, with men surpassing women in the order of creation as well as in the narrative of the Fall. In heaven, hierarchy is spiritual, where the redeemed are ordered according to divine grace rather than biological function.⁴⁹ Thus, women's full participation in spiritual merit is deferred to the eschatological realm rather than realized in the present order of creation. This Augustinian framework, grounding female subordination in both creation and sin, shaped the trajectory of Western Christian thought and was echoed by subsequent theologians in the Latin tradition.⁵⁰

2.4 – Thomas Aquinas and the Aristotelian Foundation of Women's Subordination

Thomas Aquinas adopts Aristotelian philosophical anthropology in his interpretation of woman's subordinate position. According to Aristotle, woman's biological constitution is marked by weakness and imperfection, rendering her a “misbegotten male” and a “natural slave.”⁵¹ This biological inferiority, Aquinas argues, legitimates the hierarchical ordering of men over women.

While acknowledging Augustine's distinction between woman *as human* and *as female*, Aquinas expands this duality in his theological framework. As a human, woman participates in the intellectual soul, created in the image of God, which grants her the possibility of salvation and eternal union with God.⁵² Yet, as a female, her position in creation is deficient,

⁴³ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* (On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis), trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 1 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 9.5.9, 371.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, 14.11, 572.

⁴⁵ Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 45–46.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. Henry Paolucci (Chicago: Gateway Editions, 1961), 27–28, 58.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, 22.17, 1057.

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 34.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 9.5.9, 371.

⁵⁰ Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence*, 121.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), II.3, 737a–737b; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 92, a. 1, in *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), 466.

⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 93, a. 4, 473.

lacking distinct personhood apart from her relation to man. Her primary purpose is to serve as a "helpmeet" for procreation rather than as a companion in friendship; Aquinas insists that if companionship were the sole purpose, "another man would have been a better partner."⁵³

Following Aristotle, Aquinas maintains that woman's role in generation is limited to supplying matter, whereas the male alone provides the formative power of the seed.⁵⁴ Thus, the female contribution is defective and incomplete, producing an imperfect outcome in the form of woman herself. This imperfection, both biological and metaphysical, undergirds her subordination: women are considered weak in intellect, will, power, and physical strength.⁵⁵ Consequently, they require male governance, as they are often incapable of supervising themselves.

This incomplete humanness, Aquinas argues, justifies women's exclusion from priesthood, prophecy, and sacramental authority.⁵⁶ By integrating Aristotelian biology into Christian theology, Aquinas naturalizes and sacralizes the hierarchical order in which women are permanently subordinated to men.

2.5 – Aquinas on Original Creation, Sin, and Female Subordination

Aquinas maintains that woman's susceptibility to sin is rooted in her ontological inferiority as established in original creation, an inferiority that he links to her biological deficiency.⁵⁷ The very structure of creation, he argues, signifies a hierarchical order: the lower must be subordinated to the higher, and the body to the soul, all under God. In this schema, woman represents a subordinate element in the cosmic order.

Aquinas describes this harmony as *original justice*, a primordial condition in which each part of creation was properly ordered under divine authority.⁵⁸ However, this order was disrupted through sin. For Aquinas, the woman's disobedience toward God and her seduction of *Adam* constituted the critical breach that destroyed original justice.⁵⁹ As a result, the ideal subordination of creation collapsed, and humanity was subjected to disorder, mortality, and concupiscence.

According to Aquinas, Eve's transgression resulted in two distinct punishments for women: the pain of childbirth and permanent subjection to male authority.⁶⁰ The first addresses her biological role, while the second establishes her social condition as one of enduring subordination. Thus, Aquinas integrates biological imperfection, theological anthropology, and the doctrine of sin into a unified account of woman's inferior position in both nature and grace.

2.6 – Martin Luther on the Fall and Gendered Subordination

Luther interprets the Fall as the decisive event that crystallized the differentiated roles of men and women in society. *Adam* was entrusted with authority in the public domain, while Eve

⁵³ Ibid., I, q. 92, a. 1, 466.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, IV.2, 767b; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 92, a. 1, 466.

⁵⁵ Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 65–68.

⁵⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement, q. 39, a. 1, 512; Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence*, 102–5.

⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 92, a. 1, in *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), 466.

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 85, a. 3, 871.

⁵⁹ Ibid., I, q. 95, a. 1, 481.

⁶⁰ Ibid., I, q. 92, a. 1, 466; cf. Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 72–75.

was relegated to the private sphere.⁶¹ This division established a permanent order in which male domination and female servitude became the defining principle of the sexes.

For Luther, woman's lesser nature was confirmed and intensified by original sin.⁶² Because of this deficiency, women were categorically excluded from positions of leadership in the Church. While acknowledging that women occasionally exhibited prophetic gifts—as attested in the Hebrew Scriptures—Luther emphasizes that such cases were extraordinary and temporary, not normative for the Christian tradition.⁶³

Luther holds that woman's subordination cannot be overcome in earthly life, where she remains subject to male authority as punishment for disobedience.⁶⁴ Her redemption is deferred to the eschatological realm, where she may regain equality before God. In this life, however, her condition is defined by natural subjugation and domination.⁶⁵

2.7 – John Calvin on Female Subordination and Ecclesial Order

For Calvin, it is the normative duty of the wife to accept with goodwill the authority of her husband as part of maintaining divine order.⁶⁶ A harmonious household and a stable society, he insists, are only possible when women demonstrate respect toward their husbands and assist them in the smooth running of life. Any attempt to deny these divinely designated rules results in disorder and undermines true joy.⁶⁷ Thus, woman is understood as a subordinate partner in both the home and the wider community.

Calvin consistently recalls the story of Eve's seduction of *Adam* in Genesis as the foundational narrative of disobedience and disorder.⁶⁸ In this framework, Eve represents humanity's susceptibility to sin, while *Adam*'s fall underscores the consequences of yielding to feminine persuasion. Yet Calvin also acknowledges the New Testament testimony, where Christ treats both men and women as children of God and objects of his redemptive ministry.⁶⁹ He highlights the roles of Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene as essential to the Gospel narratives, on par with the male disciples.

The debate over women's ordination has remained one of the most contested issues within Christianity. Margaret S. Ermarth identifies four traditional arguments that reinforce women's exclusion from the priesthood:

- * Only men were considered suitable to be apostles.
- * God and Christ are represented in masculine terms, and priests should mirror this identity.
- * By nature, women are too weak to bear the *indelible character* imparted by ordination.

⁶¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1–5*, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 1 of *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 115–16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 119–20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 122; see also Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 37–39.

⁶⁴ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 1:124.

⁶⁵ Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (New York: Random House, 2016), 263–64.

⁶⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 2:123.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:127.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:130–31.

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospels*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 1:215–16.

* Women have always been assigned a subordinate position by divine will.⁷⁰

While women have been venerated as saints, Calvin's theological culture, in continuity with much of the Christian tradition, resisted their recognition as theologians or ordained leaders.⁷¹

Section Three: Critical Evaluation of the Question of Woman's Creation for the sake of Man in Jewish and Christian Traditions

The assertion that woman was created *for the sake of man* has been a contested theme within both Jewish and Christian theological anthropology. While scriptural and exegetical traditions frequently reinforced a hierarchical reading, they also contained interpretive fissures that later critics have emphasized. A critical evaluation reveals how internal textual ambiguities, cultural assimilations, and theological constructions combined to legitimize female subordination, while simultaneously leaving room for alternative, more egalitarian readings.

3.1 Jewish Tradition

Within the Hebrew Bible, the juxtaposition of Genesis 1 and 2 generated two divergent anthropologies. The first chapter presents man and woman as created simultaneously in the *image of God*, a formulation that affirms their essential equality (Gen. 1:27). By contrast, Genesis 2 narrates woman's derivation from man's rib, a motif interpreted by later rabbinic commentators both as a sign of intimacy and as evidence of ontological priority.⁷² Rabbinic exegesis, reinforced through daily liturgical formulas—such as the blessing, “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has not made me a woman,”⁷³—institutionalized the latter interpretation, thereby embedding hierarchy in religious practice.

The myth of Lilith, although marginal in canonical texts, illustrates a suppressed alternative that imagined woman as co-equal in origin and autonomy. Its eventual demonization in medieval midrash (*Alphabet of Ben Sira*) reflects the broader rabbinic anxiety toward female independence.⁷⁴ Similarly, medieval codifications, most notably in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, adopted Aristotelian categories to describe woman as inherently deficient, thereby sacralizing philosophical constructs foreign to biblical revelation.⁷⁵ Modern Jewish feminist scholarship has drawn attention to this dynamic, arguing that the resources for an egalitarian theology—already present in Genesis 1 and prophetic traditions—were consistently subordinated to the patriarchal structures of rabbinic and medieval Judaism.⁷⁶

3.2 - Christian Tradition

In Christian theology, Pauline texts became central in shaping the narrative of subordination. While Galatians 3:28 proclaimed the erasure of gender distinctions in Christ, other passages (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:14) located woman's identity in derivative creation and deception,

⁷⁰ Margaret S. Ermarth, *The Cross and the Flag: The Influence of Religion on American History* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 94–96.

⁷¹ Suzanne W. Hull, *Women According to Men: The World of Tudor-Stuart Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 77–78.

⁷² Genesis Rabbah 17:6; see Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 151–153.

⁷³ Babylonian Talmud, *Menahot* 43b; see Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 24–26.

⁷⁴ *Alphabet of Ben Sira* (ed. David Stern, 1990); see Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), pp. 221–225.

⁷⁵ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Ishut* 15:20; cf. Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 456–458.

⁷⁶ Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), pp. 60–78.

thus grounding ecclesial restrictions on women's authority.⁷⁷ Patristic writers such as Tertullian and Augustine deepened this trajectory: Eve was construed as the archetype of weakness and sin, and female subordination was justified both by creation and by the Fall.⁷⁸

Mariology introduced a paradoxical counter-image. Mary was exalted as the "new Eve," yet precisely by virtue of her exceptionality, ordinary women remained bound to hierarchical roles.⁷⁹ Scholastic theology, particularly in Thomas Aquinas, further entrenched inequality by adopting Aristotelian biology, which described woman as a "deficient male."⁸⁰ The Reformation, though challenging Catholic ecclesiology, largely preserved gender hierarchy. Luther and Calvin affirmed spiritual equality but restricted women to domestic or subordinate roles, thereby perpetuating the theological logic of subordination.⁸¹

Contemporary Christian feminist theology has exposed this contradiction, emphasizing that the subordination of women emerged not as an unavoidable doctrinal conclusion but as the result of selective readings and the absorption of cultural hierarchies into theological systems.⁸²

3.3 - Comparative Critique

Both traditions reveal a persistent tension between egalitarian scriptural motifs and hierarchical theological constructions. In Judaism, the interpretive dominance of Genesis 2 over Genesis 1, coupled with philosophical borrowings, institutionalized subordination. In Christianity, the privileging of Pauline restrictions over the liberative vision of Galatians produced a similar effect. In both cases, alternative voices—whether the Lilith myth or the Pauline proclamation of unity in Christ—were marginalized in favor of sustaining male authority.

The critical insight, therefore, is that the theological assertion of woman's creation *for man* functioned less as a reflection of divine intention and more as a mechanism for preserving socio-religious structures of power. Both traditions carry within them resources for equality, yet their dominant interpretations reveal the extent to which patriarchy shaped the trajectory of theological anthropology.

Conclusion

The question of whether woman was created "for the sake of man" has functioned as a theological axis around which Jewish and Christian anthropology has revolved for centuries. By tracing the interpretive traditions from Genesis to rabbinic exegesis, patristic theology, medieval scholasticism, and Reformation thought, we see how a single doctrinal motif—the

⁷⁷ For Gal. 3:28 vis-à-vis 1 Tim. 2:14, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 227–233.

⁷⁸ Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum* I.1–2; see *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), pp. 14–15. Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.11; see *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 595–597.

⁷⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 34–39.

⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 92, a. 1, *Reply to Obj. 1*; see *Summa Theologiae*, Latin text and English trans., ed. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), vol. 13, p. 118.

⁸¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), pp. 115–120. John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), pp. 172–175.

⁸² Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 97–112.

derivative creation of woman—was mobilized to sustain enduring structures of subordination.

In Jewish tradition, the dual creation narratives opened space for both egalitarian and hierarchical readings, yet rabbinic interpretation, liturgical practices, and halakhic rulings overwhelmingly privileged subordination. The Lilith legend offered a counter-narrative but was systematically marginalized, while medieval authorities such as Maimonides codified legal and theological hierarchies that placed women in an inferior position.

Christian tradition inherited and intensified these tensions. Through the figure of Eve, woman became the archetype of sin, weakness, and temptation, while Mary was exalted as the “new Eve,” but only by being set apart from ordinary womanhood. Patristic authorities like Augustine and Jerome, medieval scholastics such as Aquinas, and Reformers like Luther and Calvin consistently interpreted womanhood as intrinsically derivative, deficient, or subordinate—whether by nature, by sin, or by divine decree. Even when the possibility of spiritual equality was admitted, it was often deferred to the eschatological realm, leaving earthly structures of hierarchy intact.

What emerges from this historical trajectory is not a uniform misogyny but a complex set of theological strategies that consistently converged on the same outcome: the institutionalization of male authority and the restriction of women's roles in religious life. The subordination of women was justified through appeals to creation, reinforced through the doctrine of original sin, naturalized through Aristotelian biology, and sanctified through ecclesial authority. Across these traditions, woman was constructed as a being “for man”—an auxiliary to his vocation, an embodiment of his temptation, and a participant in his redemption only insofar as she accepted her subordinate role.

Modern feminist theology has laid bare the consequences of this legacy. By exposing the structural role of gendered hierarchies in the history of theology, feminist scholars have shown how doctrines of creation and fall, Mariology, and ecclesiology have perpetuated exclusion and reinforced patriarchal power. Contemporary debates over ordination, leadership, and the theological anthropology of gender cannot be disentangled from this history.

This study, therefore, demonstrates that the question of woman's creation “for the sake of man” is not merely an exegetical curiosity but a foundational issue in theological anthropology. It reveals how deeply the subordination of women has been woven into the intellectual and spiritual fabric of Judaism and Christianity. At the same time, it invites critical reflection: if theology has historically legitimized inequality, it must also possess the resources for reimagining human relationships beyond subordination. By revisiting the creation narratives, reexamining inherited interpretations, and engaging feminist critiques, the possibility emerges for a theological anthropology that affirms both man and woman as equal bearers of the divine image—created not one for the other, but together for God.



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