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A Comparative Study of the Status of Women in Islam and the New Testament

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Abstract

This article uses a descriptive-analytical, comparative approach to examine and explain women's status in the Qur'an and the New Testament. The analysis is organized around such axes as the creation of woman, original sin and Eve's error, women's rights, hijab and modesty, and the views of selected religious figures. The aim is to describe and analyze the similarities and differences observed in the textual evidence of the Qur'an and the New Testament and to interpret them within the framework of each of these two textual corpora. In this analysis, particular views found in some New Testament epistles are not generalized to the entire New Testament, and the analysis distinguishes between textual evidence, theological interpretations, and historical developments. The findings indicate that, in areas such as the creation of woman, original sin, women's rights, and hijab and modesty, the two textual corpora differ in expression and in the scope of their teachings. This study analyzes these differences within the limits of the evidence examined and avoids attributing the views of a particular text or individual to an entire religious tradition.

Keywords: Primordial Creation, Eve's Error, Women's Rights, Hijab, Christianity, Islam.

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Introduction

A review of women's status across various civilizations demonstrates that women have historically encountered diverse forms of restriction and discrimination. In this study, this historical context serves only to frame the research problem. The primary basis for comparison remains the textual evidence from the Qur'an and the New Testament.

A central issue in analyzing women's status in religious texts is examining the foundations of creation, moral responsibility, social rights, and rulings on dress. This study addresses these topics within the Qur'an and the New Testament. To ensure analytical clarity, the study distinguishes between the primary texts, their interpretations, and subsequent historical developments.

The sources utilized in this study include works addressing the existential personality of women from the perspectives of the Qur'an and the Two Testaments, as well as analyses of hijab within Semitic religions. Notable among these are Qaderi's "The Existential Personality of Woman from the Perspective of the Qur'an and the Two Testaments" and "An Analytical Study of Hijab from the Perspective of Semitic Religions (Islam, Judaism, Christianity)," both cited in the references. Nevertheless, the primary comparative focus is restricted to the Qur'an and the New Testament. The study systematically examines five axes: the creation of woman, original sin and Eve's role, women's rights, hijab and modesty, and the perspectives of selected religious figures. It further distinguishes between direct textual evidence, theological interpretations, and historical developments, thereby contributing a structured comparative analysis within the defined evidentiary limits.

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This study confines its scope to a comparison between the Qur'an and the New Testament. Consequently, references to the views of Paul, commentators, or historical developments within the Church are treated as specific evidence or interpretations, rather than as representative of the entire Christian tradition. The examination of women's status in human societies extends beyond historical inquiry and intersects with contemporary debates on rights and human dignity. A review of relevant sources underscores the need to distinguish between primary texts, theological interpretations, and historical developments when comparing religious perspectives on women. Accordingly, this descriptive-analytical and comparative study investigates evidence regarding the status of women in the Qur'an and the New Testament along specified axes, while deliberately avoiding the generalization of particular views to entire religious traditions.

1. Woman in the Qur'an and the New Testament

1.1. The Creation of Woman

A primary consideration in the scriptural teachings on the status of women is the manner of woman's creation. The central question is whether woman was created independently or as derivative and secondary to man. The answer to this question serves as a fundamental criterion for understanding women's existential status. This issue is paramount, as it defines women's position within religious frameworks. Human self-knowledge is foundational for all other forms of knowledge, and understanding one's place enables further analysis of related phenomena. Thus, it is necessary to examine whether man and woman share a single essence and origin, with no existential advantage, or whether man is the primary principle in creation and woman is secondary,

created as a result of man's creation (Qaderi, n.d.: 4). In this respect, Islam and Christianity present significantly different perspectives.

1.1.1. The Creation of Woman in the New Testament

An examination of the creation of woman in the New Testament reveals that its teachings on the relationship between the creation of woman and man affirm a narrative in which woman's creation is later and dependent on man. Although the New Testament treats this subject more briefly, its content remains unchanged. This view is clearly articulated in Paul's epistles: "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man." (1 Corinthians 11:8) It is also mentioned in Paul's letter to Timothy: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." (1 Timothy 2:13) Thus, based on the content found in the New Testament, the creaturely status of woman is described as later than and dependent on the existence of man. In this perspective, man is the original principle of creation, and woman is its derivative (cf. Qaderi, n.d.: 27).

In contrast, the Noble Qur'an, in different terms, emphasizes the oneness of the origin of creation for man and woman. Verse 6 of Surah *al-Zumar* is among the verses that address the creation of the first woman. God states: "He created you from one soul, and then made from it its mate." (Qur'an 39:6) Commentators, including Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi in "Tafsir Nemooneh," interpret "One Soul" as the first human being, i.e., Prophet Adam. This means that all human beings, despite vast differences in race, temperament, talent, and individual characteristics, have originated from a single root.

In this interpretation, the phrase "Then made from it its mate" refers to the creation of Adam's spouse from the same primordial substance as his creation, rather than from a part of the man's body. In other words, Eve was created from a common origin with Adam, rather than from a bodily part of him.

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Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, drawing on other Qur'anic verses, likewise emphasizes the common human nature of man and woman. He explains that the word "*Min*" in this verse is an indication of origin, not discrimination; that is, the mate of this man was of his kind and like him. He cites the verse: "And among His signs is that He created for you mates from yourselves so that you may find tranquility in them." (Qur'an 30:21) (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2006: 4, 136)

Thus, exegetical analysis of verse 6 of Surah *al-Zumar* suggests that, from the Qur'anic perspective, woman and man were created from a single origin and share a common human essence. The notion that woman is derivative of man is not compatible with this interpretation of the Qur'anic verses (cf. Makarem Shirazi, 2006: 19, 400).

1.2. The Original Sin and Eve's Error

The second key axis distinguishing attitudes toward women concerns the narrative of the first sin and the role attributed to Eve.

1.2.1. The New Testament Perspective

In the New Testament, this outlook is perpetuated. New Testament texts explicitly portray Eve as deceived and regard her as primarily responsible. In the Pauline epistles, including Paul's first letter to Timothy (2:13-14), it states clearly: "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." In parts of the Book of Revelation (20:2), it also indicates that Eve did not know the serpent who spoke to her was Satan himself. Thus, the New Testament's interpretation introduces woman not only as the agent of error but also as the source of evil and human suffering.

This negative portrayal gradually became part of the Christian intellectual tradition and laid the groundwork for misogynistic views. According to this conception, Satan penetrates man through woman, and woman becomes an

"Instrument of Satan's power." This depiction, in the intellectual tradition of the Middle Ages up to the modern period in the West, provided the basis for the formation of anti-woman attitudes; woman was considered a symbol of seduction, rational weakness, and the source of error, and this notion later permeated philosophy, theology, and even Christian literature (cf. Qadiri Abyaneh, 2012: 108-111).

1.2.2. The Perspective of the Holy Qur'an and Islam

The Holy Qur'an, with a balanced and just approach, places responsibility for original sin jointly on Adam and Eve. In several verses, including Surah *al-Baqarah* (35-37) and Surah *al-A'raf* (19-25), God addresses both of them and does not separate one from the other in narrating their account. He states: "And O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise..." (Qur'an 2:35) And He continues: "Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom and removed them from that [condition]..." (Qur'an 2:36) The responsibility for the sin is shared between Adam and Eve, and both disobeyed the divine command due to Satan's temptation.

In explaining this difference, Professor Motahhari refers to the creation narrative and Eve's role in some Christian texts. In criticizing this view, he writes: "Christians introduced a false notion into religious history: that woman is the element of sin and deception. Satan, who could not influence Adam, entered through Eve, and Eve deceived Adam; but the Qur'an says precisely the opposite. The Qur'an considers human beings, regardless of gender, responsible for their actions and errors." (Motahhari, 2002: 117) In this study, this view is treated as a theological interpretation and critique, and, to avoid overgeneralization, the direct evidence from the New Testament is examined separately. The Qur'anic verses, by emphasizing the creation of

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humanity from a "One Soul," provide the Qur'anic basis for this comparison: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul..." (Qur'an 4:1) (al-'Uqaylī, 2016: 6)

1.3. Women's Rights

Enjoyment of social and human rights is the third area of comparison between the two religions.

1.3.1. Christianity and the Gospel

The early teachings of Jesus held a transformative and ennobling view of women (Luke 8:1-3). His teachings and conduct, from accepting women as disciples to defending sinful women, elevated women's spiritual status and exalted Saint Mary as a symbol of purity and a medium of grace (Motahhari, 2002: 125). However, the Church did not fully institutionalize this spiritual transformation in its structures and institutions. Subsequent ecclesiastical interpretations, particularly in the Pauline tradition, confined this view within an androcentric framework (Durant, 1999: 3, 245). Although prohibitions such as the ban on female priesthood existed, equality in religious roles and offices was not realized (Javadi Amoli, 2020: 187). It can be argued that the social restrictions on women in Christianity are more a product of historical interpretations and ecclesiastical structures than of the original teachings of the Gospel. This gap indicates that much of the restrictive view of women in Christianity is rooted in later interpretations and historical Church structures, rather than necessarily in authentic Gospel teachings.

1.3.2. Islam and the Qur'an

In its historical context, Islam brought about a fundamental revolution in the social and legal status of women. This religion, which before its revelation found women to be of the least social value, called them to various spheres of

life and designated for them a specific share in all social affairs. This transformation is rooted in Islam's ontological foundations, which are based on the intrinsic equality of men and women. From the perspective of divine justice and the order of creation, no privilege is attached to gender. The Qur'an identifies piety, faith, moral virtues, righteous deeds, and knowledge as the criteria for human superiority, not gender.

Both men and women possess human potentialities and are considered equal in building their human personality. Since human perfection is optional, every person, through effort and will, can attain it; woman, like man, possesses this freedom and choice to achieve human dignity and nearness to God through worship and the acquisition of moral virtues.

The Holy Qur'an states this equality in value and otherworldly reward in numerous verses. Below are some Qur'anic verses that emphasize this equality:

- "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer, We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do." (Qur'an 16:97)
- "Whoever does an evil deed will not be recompensed except by the like thereof; but whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer, those will enter Paradise, being given provision therein without account." (Qur'an 40:40)
- "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men

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and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so, for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward." (Qur'an 33:35)

- "O humanity, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." (Qur'an 49:13)

The dignity of women in Islam is defined to such an extent that she is considered a converser with angels and the special focus of prophets. The station of Lady Mary demonstrates the pinnacle of this spiritual dignity, where she receives divine sustenance without measure, and angels speak to her, bestowing upon her the ranks of "Selection" and "Purification":

- "...Every time Zechariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, "O Mary, from where does this [provision] come to you?" She said, "It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account." (Qur'an 3:37)
- "And [mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds. O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow [in prayer]." (Qur'an 3:42-43)

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli emphasizes that the angels' address to Mary was not merely an unseen revelation. Still, a manifest appearance, and these stations

prompted Zechariah to ask God for a righteous child (Javadi Amoli, 2006: 127-128).

Beyond the spiritual dimension, Islam lays the foundation for a woman's individual independence and explicitly states that the earth and the heavens were created for "Humanity," not merely for man, affirming women's central position in the network of creation. From a legal perspective, Islam is the first school of thought to officially recognize women's rights in social affairs, including the oath of allegiance. Imam Khomeini regarded the role of women in the social structure as essential and emphasized the complete legal equality of men and women in all dimensions: "In the Islamic system, woman has the same rights as man: The right to education, the right to work, the right to ownership, the right to vote, and the right to be elected. In all areas where a man has rights, a woman also has rights."

He also emphasized that Islam rendered the greatest service to women and liberated them from the conditions of the Age of Ignorance: "Islam rescued women from what existed in the ignorance. God knows that Islam has served women more than it has served men." (ibid., 2010: 4, 427) Family rights in Islam are regulated based on justice; the man has the duty of guardianship, but this position does not imply superiority in value; rather, it is a kind of social responsibility. The independent personality of a woman is guaranteed, such that the husband's ownership over the wife's property is void unless it is freely offered to him with her full consent. In the Prophetic tradition, practical respect for women is clearly evident. Among the famous hadiths, the Prophet (PBUH) introduced the best of men as those who are best to their wives: "The best of you are the best to their wives." (Ibn Mājah, 1997: 2, 363) In his Farewell Sermon, he also emphasized mutual rights and recommended: "O

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people, indeed your wives have rights over you and you have rights over them... So fear God concerning women and treat them with kindness." (Ḥarrānī, 1995: 30)

Finally, the emphasis on equality in giving gifts to children is so pronounced that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Be equitable between your children in gifts; if I were to prefer someone, I would prefer women over men," (Bukhārī, n.d.: 3, 157) which demonstrates the pinnacle of practical respect based on Islamic teachings.

2. Woman in the Sayings of Religious Luminaries

An analysis of prominent figures and religious texts on women provides insight into their status among adherents of various religions. Attitudes toward women in divine religions often appear in the views of their leaders and luminaries.

2.1. Women in the Words of Christian Luminaries

The statements of certain Christian luminaries express markedly negative and degrading attitudes toward women. These perspectives, often shaped by specific interpretations of original sin, have significantly influenced the social status of women in Christian societies throughout history:

- Tertullian: Addressing a woman, he said: "You are the devil's gateway. You are the one who persuaded him whom the devil dared not attack head-on. Because of you, the Son of God had to die. You should always wear mourning and rags."
- Saint Ambrose: "Adam was led to sin by Eve, not Eve by Adam. It is just that a woman should accept as her master the one she led into sin."

- Saint John Chrysostom: "There is nothing more harmful among all wild beasts than a woman."
- Thomas Aquinas: "Woman is an accidental imperfect being; the female sex is in reality a mutilated male. Woman is likely the result of a defect in the male's generative power."
- Saint Augustine: He could be considered the most prominent Christian scholar of all ages. He believed that woman is an animal that has neither firmness nor stability. She feeds on evil and is the beginning of all quarrels and oppositions, and the path to all moral corruption (cf. Qadiri Abyaneh, 2012: 108-111).

2.2. Woman in the Words of the Prophet of Islam and the Imams (AS)

In contrast, the statements of Islamic leaders consistently emphasize respect, compassion, and the observance of women's rights. These hadiths serve as practical manifestations of Qur'anic teachings regarding the dignity of women:

- "The man's statement to his wife, "I love you," never leaves her heart." (Kulaynī, 1986: 5, 569)
- "Whenever a servant's faith increases, his love for women increases." (Majlisī, 1982: 103, 228)
- "...For a woman is a delicate flower, not a master..." (Nahj al-Balāghah, Letter 31), meaning do not assign to her what she cannot bear, for she is like a flower (delicate and vulnerable), not a dominant commander.
- "Whoever treats his family well will have his life prolonged." (Ḥarrānī, 2008: 305)

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- "Whoever loves us (the Infallible Household) more, loves women more." (Majlisī, 1982: 103, 227)

3. Hijab and Modesty (Chastity)

The concept of hijab, broadly defined as a covering or barrier, is regarded in the Abrahamic religions not as a static regulation but as a fundamental principle for maintaining social order and individual well-being. Observance of modesty and the preservation of privacy are fundamental commonalities in the teachings of all Abrahamic and divine religions, rooted in the innate disposition of human nature.

3.1. Hijab and Modesty in the New Testament

In the New Testament passages examined, the principle of modesty and the avoidance of excessive self-adornment are articulated within a religious framework. However, attributing a comprehensive system of hijab regulations to the New Testament as a whole necessitates a broader textual analysis. Consequently, this study refrains from generalizing the content of specific epistles to the entire New Testament.

3.2. Hijab and Modesty in Islam

In Islam, the principle of modesty is legislated through the clear and balanced rulings of hijab to preserve the dignity of women and the health of society. The Holy Qur'an elaborated the main foundations of this ruling during the ten years of prophetic rule in Medina, initially addressing the Prophet's wives and later all believing women.

The most important Qur'anic evidence concerning hijab includes verses from Surah *al-Aḥzāb* and Surah *al-Nūr*. Verses 32 and 33 of *al-Aḥzāb*, by prohibiting the Prophet's wives from speaking softly and refraining from the "Display of adornment of the Age of Ignorance," lay the groundwork for

public modesty in behavior and appearance. Verse 53 of *al-Aḥzāb* emphasizes maintaining privacy in interactions by "Asking from behind a veil," whose primary purpose is stated as purifying the believers' hearts. The turning point of outward covering is verse 59 of *al-Aḥzāb*, which commands full-body covering (*Jilbāb*) so women may be recognized as modest and thus not be harassed.

Completing this framework are the verses of Surah *al-Nūr*, which emphasize covering adornment and controlling the gaze. Verses 30 and 31 of Surah *al-Nūr*, which mutually emphasize lowering the gaze for both men and women, stress covering women's adornment. These verses establish two specific requirements: first, the non-disclosure of adornment except "What appears thereof," i.e., the outward adornment; and second, the explicit command "And let them draw their head-covers (*khumur*) over their bosoms," which requires drawing the headscarf over the chest to cover the cleavage. Accordingly, the bounds of hijab are defined to include the obligation of wearing the *Jilbāb*, refraining from the display of adornment of the ignorance, covering the adornment except for what is excepted, and covering the chest. The specific application of these bounds, of course, has been determined through the Prophetic tradition and the Ahl al-Bayt (AS). Beyond physical aspects, modesty in Islam encompasses broader behavioral dimensions. These dimensions include refraining from intermingling of unrelated men and women and seclusion (gatherings and private meetings of men and women), as well as controlling one's gaze.

4. Analysis of Differences in the Textual Evidence of the Qur'an and the New Testament

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In the case of original sin, for example, the Qur'an presents Adam and Eve together in the account of the error, whereas 1 Timothy 2:13-14 refers to Adam's precedence in creation and Eve's deception. This difference can be analyzed as an observable difference between the two textual corpora, without concluding from it alone that either text has been distorted.

- 1) One explanation proposed in Islamic tradition for the differences between Islamic law and earlier laws is the gradual revelation of legislation and the progressive perfection of religious rulings throughout history. This view explains differences in some laws and regulations within successive stages of legislation. However, in this study, this is presented as a theological explanation rather than a conclusion derived solely from a comparison of the Qur'an and the New Testament.
- 2) The Gradualness of the Revelation of Laws and the progressive perfection of divine teachings. In verse 89 of Surah al-Nahl, God Almighty points out that each earlier prophet communicated a portion of the knowledge according to the capacity of their era. Therefore, it is natural that the Sharia of Islam, as the final and most comprehensive religion, presents the most complete framework for all aspects of human life, including women's rights.

Therefore, the observed differences between the Qur'an and the New Testament evidence should be analyzed with careful reference to each text and within the boundaries of the available data. When theological explanations or historical developments are used to interpret these differences, they must be clearly distinguished from direct textual evidence. This approach enables a more precise comparison of the two textual corpora

and prevents attributing the views of a specific text or individual to an entire religious tradition.

Conclusion

The comparative study of the status of women in Islam and the Old and New Testaments (the Two Testaments) shows that although these religions originate from a single divine source, due to differences in the transmission and interpretation of earlier texts and the difference in the level of legislation of rulings, differing attitudes towards women have emerged. While the New Testament presents women as a secondary being derived from man, the Holy Qur'an, by stating that both sexes were created from a "One Soul," emphasizes the unity of the essence of man and woman and their intrinsic equality.

In the area of original sin, a fundamental difference is also observed. The New Testament texts, by attributing the fall of humanity to Eve, have historically portrayed the female sex as the element of sin and deception. In contrast, by placing the responsibility for error on both and accepting their joint repentance, the Qur'an has corrected the degrading view of women and restored their human dignity.

From a legal perspective, Islam fundamentally transformed women's status by granting those rights to ownership, inheritance, the oath of allegiance, education, and social participation. While earlier texts largely imposed legal and social restrictions on women, Islam, by making piety and righteous deeds the criterion, opened the way for spiritual and social excellence for both sexes in a just manner.

Regarding hijab and modesty, a comparison of the textual evidence shows that both corpora address modesty, dress, and religious conduct. Still, their

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expression and the level of detail differ. In 1 Timothy 2:9-15, the emphasis is on dress accompanied by modesty and the avoidance of excessive self-adornment; by contrast, the Qur'anic verses provide more specific instructions on controlling the gaze, covering adornment, and dress.

In summary, the findings show that accurately comparing the status of women in the Qur'an and the New Testament requires distinguishing between direct textual evidence, theological interpretations, and historical developments. The differences identified in this study are best analyzed in terms of variations in expression, framework, and the scope of the teachings within the examined texts, while avoiding generalizing the views of a particular text or individual to an entire religious tradition.

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