

Patriarchy: A Gateway to Ministry to Women in High Identity Muslim Contexts

By Linda Smith

This article is in many ways biographical; it reflects my personal answers to important questions I needed to address soon after moving to a traditional Muslim community.

I asked questions such as, Is the patriarchal system (that maintains inequity among men and women) intrinsically evil? Finding an answer for this question was fundamental to understanding if my role was to challenge it or if I had to learn how to adapt. Or, does the patriarchal system provide unique windows of opportunity for ministering among Muslim women? I turned to the Bible for answers to these questions and many more.

Linda Smith (a pseudonym) has worked in Muslim countries in Central Asia and the Middle East and has a passion for helping Muslim women deepen their spiritual walk.

Understanding the Context

Browsing through one of the busiest bookshops in Cairo I asked to be shown the most popular books around. To my surprise the bookseller said, “Madam, our people like to read books on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), they want to know what is right and what is *haram* (wrong).”

He then led me to a large section where dozens of books on Islamic laws (detailing the minutest aspects of everyday life) were on display. Soon I learned that “jurisprudence” meant a highly codified system that regulates everything from how to dress to how to greet neighbors in an Islamic way. The purpose of jurisprudence is to offer guidance so that every aspect of life is lived out consistently with the Islamic *din* (religion).

The section in the bookstore for the *muslimah* (Muslim woman) addressed mainly issues relating to their roles as mother, wife, and believer. The “ought to” and the “don’ts” are carefully crafted from Qur’anic injunctions, stories, and sayings but are mostly exempli-

fied through colorful narratives known as the *hadith* literature that has the crucial role in the development of how matters of faith and practice are to be understood and that depict how the Prophet Mohammad and his companions dealt with their wives in similar situations. Mohammad's multiple wives, known as the *mothers of the believers*, epitomize the female ideal and their example serves to model the Islamic ideal.

This normative system reflects the realities of living under a cultural patriarchy that became Islamized as a result of the constant interplay between different schools of thought and the different local cultures. The result is a complex mosaic that shares the assumption that the patriarchal structure cannot be contested as a whole without creating anarchy. The Islamic world is far from homogeneous. Many voices are competing within the Islamic community in areas regarding identity, self-awareness, spirituality, sensitivity, gender relations, family structures, and political reform. This article will deal with the more traditional setting, without ignoring the fact that this is just one type of Islamic community.

Relating to the Patriarchal Realities

I am a Westerner in a patriarchal setting, holding deep seated assumptions about equality, love, rights, and freedom which come from my own cultural

background. It is useful to remind ourselves that the patriarchal system did not start with the intent of oppressing women, but rather developed as a viable model to establish and maintain social, religious, political, and economic systems. In seeking to share the gospel with Eastern women what should my focus be in a strongly family-oriented Islamic community? Thus, I had to ask myself three fundamental questions in order to identify that focus.

1. Can the patriarchal system be an appropriate vehicle for the gospel and how should I relate (from the Bible perspective) to a culture in which patriarchal relationships are predominant?

2. What happens to family life when the gospel encounters the realities of inequality that are at the root of the patriarchal system? How much could be affirmed without compromising the integrity of the Good News from God?

3. Does the patriarchal system offer unique windows of opportunity for ministering to women in the Muslim context?

How Did God Relate to the Patriarchal System?

Can the patriarchal system be an acceptable vehicle for conveying the gospel? To answer this question I studied the story of Israel in the Old Testament. Why? Because when we grasp the structure, laws, mission, and narrative of Israel, we are

in touch with God's thinking, values, and priorities as to how family life should be conducted in a patriarchal context.

After all, Israel was meant to be God's showcase to the nations, a light to the world so that *every family* on earth could be blessed through her (Gen 12:2, 3). Through Israel God attempted to create a new community of people who, in their social life, would embody righteousness, peace, justice, and love which are all reflections of God's own character.

In the Old Testament, God was chiseling out something

them). The result was that four women contributed to the making of these twelve tribes and yet no distinction is made among the sons due to their origin at the time when God bestowed his blessings upon them (see Gen 49).

The thought of God willing to enter time and history in order to make himself known is sobering. By doing this he risked being misunderstood by those who accuse *the God of the Old Testament* of being barbaric and primitive when compared with *the God of the New Testament*. "Indeed, it would appear that

Can the patriarchal system be an appropriate vehicle for the gospel and how should I relate to a culture in which patriarchal relationships are predominant?

new, never seen before, from the defective ore of the historical realities of that time. He built a nation with less than perfect materials and yet God does not seem to focus on the state of the ethos of the original tribal society from which Israel came into existence. Consider for instance the origin of the twelve tribes of Israel. They came from a polygamous family that had been built on deception (Laban imposed Leah on Jacob) and by concubinage (Rachel and Leah gave their servants to Jacob so that they would conceive for

the norms of the patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal society were quite acceptable starting points for conveying Yahweh's revelation of himself to the whole human race" (Musk 2004:52).

In early times the father was the ruler and priest of his own family, and he exercised authority over his children, even after they had a family of their own. His descendents were taught to look up to him as their head, in both religious and secular matters. This patriarchal system of government Abraham endeav-

ored to perpetuate, as it tended to preserve the knowledge of God. It was necessary to bind the members of the household together, in order to build up a barrier against idolatry that had become so widespread and so deep-seated. Abraham sought by every means in his power to guard the inmates of his encampment (more than a thousand) against mingling with the heathen, and witnessing their idolatrous practices (White 1958:141).

I concluded that if God could work through the vehicle that a male oriented culture offered, I as his disciple should too.

Patriarchal Family in Old Testament Theocracy

The second question I wished to address was what happens to family life when God and his revelation enter into contact with a culture in which the patriarchal system is prevalent? How did Israel build ethical and religious values within the patriarchal family structure that was at the heart of their own society?

God, rather than creating a completely new cultural model for Israel, entered into the existing one, challenged it and purified it, by means of critical affirmation of families and women in the spiritual arena, by calling them to higher ground, by upholding sexuality, and by limiting the negative effects of sin through the law (minimum standard) that reflected God's qualified tolerance.

Affirmation of the Family

The clearest social-cultural pattern that Israel shared with the surrounding nations was the importance of kinship and its family structure. But in Israel, it has some unique traits. In Israel kinship took the form of a three tier structure under the final rulership of God: first, there was father's house which included all those living under the authority of a single male who was the head of the household. It was usually a three generation community which shared a small cluster of land. Second, there were several associated households that formed a clan whose main duty was economic, social, judicial, and military protection. Third, there was the tribe which was the largest kinship unit which held the territorial rights over the land allotted to them under God's guidance. The decision making authority resided in a network of local elders up to the time of the monarchy.

Early Israelite society, then, as a fabric of such sturdy units, enjoying considerable autonomy and social freedom, was socially decentralized and non-hierarchical. It was geared towards the social health and economic viability of the lowest units, not the wealth, privilege or power of the highest (Wright 2004:11).

In this social structure the family was the focal point for living and experiencing the meaning of the covenant relationship in the social, economic, and religious spheres. Covenant

relationship defined the unique relationship that Israel had with God because of the promises that were made to Abraham. God was to be their God, he was to make Israel a nation, give them land, and send (in the appointed time) a redeemer to save Israel. It was by belonging to the family that the individual could claim membership in the nation of God.

In the family, belonging and redemption were experienced through ceremonies such as the Passover meal, circumcision, the dedication of the firstborn, and marriage. Sitting on their fa-

tal authority in which mother and father are to be honored if one is to have a long life, (2) respect for sexual integrity, and (3) respect for economic viability. Each of these areas is later reinforced by other regulations. The economic aspect, which is often treated as a separate issue is key to understanding the existing social mechanisms that ensured the well being of the family. In Old Testament times, a way of affirming and strengthening families was to provide them with a solid economic platform and social autonomy.

God, rather than creating a completely new cultural model for Israel, entered into the existing one, challenged it and purified it.

ther's lap, children who wanted to know why they had to abide by the law, were instructed on the story of their past redemption (Deut 6:20-25). One of the father's main roles was to keep alive the acts of God on behalf of their nation and interpret and teach the meaning of the law. In response the family was to live with a sense of separateness (holiness) in the presence of God through worship and obedience to the law.

Family protection, in the Decalogue (Exod 20:3-17) takes the form of (1) respect for paren-

In the economic sphere, families were granted inalienable rights over land. Land owning was the basis for economical health. Even if people lost their land, it could never permanently remain in the hands of others; either the closest kin could redeem it, or the land had to be fully restored to the original owners at the time of the jubilee (every 50 years). Why is this relevant to gender relations? Economic stability helps sustain healthy gender relations. A husband who is oppressed in the market place,

is more likely to reproduce this dynamic at home. Nowhere is this more evident than in war zones.

Israel's economy called for economic relationships based on solidarity, mutual concern, generosity, compassion, and love; in general, Old Testament ethics are characteristically relational in which families and lives take precedence over property rights. This system made provision for financial protection of the widow and the destitute; interest was banned and prophets denounced angrily time after time the socio-economic forces

equal footing with fathers in teaching children: "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue" (Prov 31:26). Israel's sages were also cultural revolutionaries with regard to the role of women teaching in the home. The father's command to the son, "do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8), seems unexceptional to the modern reader. However, nowhere else in the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East, from the Euphrates to the Nile, is the mother mentioned as a teacher. In order for the mother to teach Israel's inherited wis-

Nowhere else in the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East, from the Euphrates to the Nile, is the mother mentioned as a teacher.

and judicial corruption that lead to dispossession, poverty, and debt because of the devastating effect it had on the family.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon regards family relationships as of paramount importance for those who desire to act wisely and live well and warns against the evils of adultery with vivid images (Prov 2:16-19; 5:1-23; 7:1-27).

Affirmation of the Mother in the Home

Mothers (see Prov 1:8; 23:22; 31:1; and Cant 8:2) stood on

dom, she herself first had to be taught. Note that in time of spiritual reform the law was reaffirmed in the presence of men, women, and children (See Josh 8:35 and Neh 8:2-3).

Spiritual Roles for Women

In the Old Testament men were always to be the spiritual leaders of the family but women were not completely excluded from this arena. Women were able to consecrate themselves with the vow of a Nazarite (Num 6:2), just like men. Women shared in the sacred meals

and great annual feasts (Deut 16:11, 16), shared in the fellowship of the family meal, and in offering sacrifices (see Judg 13:13-16). Women were graced by theophanies just as were men (Manoah in Judg 13:3-5, 9; Hagar in Gen 16:7; 21:17; and Sarah in Gen 18:9, 10).

Women were present in services to hear the Word of God (Neh 8:2, 3), engaged in music ministries (Exod 15:20, 21; 1 Chr 25:5), and sang, danced, and played tambourines in worship before the Lord (1 Sam 18:6; Ps 68:25). The daughters of music (Eccl 12:4) were singing women, but they were not included in the temple choir.

Sexuality Affirmed

In the Old Testament sexuality and spirituality “are intricately interwoven; when one is impoverished the other is warped, and that there is some kind of crucially important connection between the journey toward God and the journey toward coming to terms with our own sexual embodiment” (Carr 2003:10).

Sexuality is present in three basic garden stories that represent the three stages of history: creation, fall, and restoration. The first garden story (Gen 1-3) describes humans as embodied creatures, physically connected “bone of my bone” (Gen 2:23) and “naked and unashamed.”

In Isaiah’s vineyard (5:1-7) and other selected texts from Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel,

marital relationships become the symbol of the relationship between God and his people. The prophets, using eloquent words, and often by means of images and extraordinarily flexible metaphors, show both the love of Yahweh as a spouse but also betray Israel as a spouse who gives herself over to idolatry (adultery, a form of love gone wrong).

Sexual love between spouses is at the core of Solomon’s love song. In another garden setting, Solomon and the Sulamite woman unashamedly find ways to enjoy sexual pleasures.

Portrayal of the Ideal Woman

Solomon’s portrayal of the ideal wife (Prov 31) challenges the idea that wives were to be passive housewives and provides a view of some of the features of the ideal Israelite home and family. The ideal mother and wife is very much involved in decision making and has true business savvy. Her husband is honored in the community because of her initiatives, her home is a place of blessing and security for her husband and children, but also a source of hospitality and generosity for the needy.

In the Old Testament God entered into the existing social patriarchal system and purified it by uplifting human relations, by affirming the family, by affirming the teaching role for the mother (which was new for Israel), by affirming sexuality in

marriage, and by challenging some of the traditional views regarding a woman's role. All this was accommodated within the existing patriarchal system.

But God's activity also included judgment on the excesses of the patriarchal system and its regulations. There was still a humanitarian ethos in the penal law.

Regulations

The mosaic laws reflect a male-centered social environment placed at the heart of an *honor-shame culture*. Honor-shame cultures attach great importance on purity and property issues and this emphasis is clearly reflected in the book of Leviticus. The purity issues addressed in Leviticus include the following major categories: prohibitions against touching impure objects (chap. 5); against eating fat and blood (chap. 7); acceptable/unacceptable species of animals to eat (chap. 11); skin diseases (chaps. 13, 14); genital discharges both normal and abnormal (chaps. 12 and 15); the sanctuary (chap. 16); sacrificial animals (chap. 17); sexual partners (chaps. 18 and 20); everyday transactions (chap. 19); the priesthood (chaps. 8, 21, 22); the calendar (chaps. 23 and 25); profaning the divine name (chap. 24); and vows (chap. 27). These laws can be seen as morally offensive when ignoring their regulatory character, given in part to expose and regulate sinful behav-

ior and meant to function as a guardian until redemption was to be more fully realized when the gospel came in its richness because the law could not make anything perfect.

Paul argues that the law "was added because of transgressions" guarding those under its care while serving as their disciplinarian until the "fullness of the time" when a redeemer would appear "born of a women . . . under the law." In both contexts the law is honored, yet is understood as part of the redemptive process that lead to something better (see Heb 7:19).

Polygamy

Polygamy is neither condoned nor condemned in the Old Testament. In some cases a woman would be taken in at her request, presumably for protection. An extreme situation was when most of the men had been killed off in war. "Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, 'We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes; just let us be called by your name; take away our disgrace'" (Isa 3:25-4:1).

The wife in the Old Testament does not have exclusive sexual rights even though a husband does for he has full ownership over his wife (wives). At the time of the patriarchs, laws generally recognized five categories of women legally attached to a man: chief wife, concubine, captive wife, slave wife, and slave female. The law made provision

for a minimal state of protection for all of them. For instance, any woman who was married without exchange of property or contract or without certain clauses in her marriage contract was a concubine. The Mosaic statute required a husband to continue his marital duty to his concubine (Exod 21:10) even when no earlier statute affirmed such a custom, and no ancient statute preserved any marital rights for slave-wives.

The patriarch was the legal head of the family and the chief wife or matriarch the legal head of the household responsible

gives what he has to his sons as an inheritance, he is not to show favoritism to the son of the loved wife as his firstborn over the firstborn of the unloved wife” (Deut 21:15, 16; see also Exod 21:10). The nation called by God to be a light for the nations was built on the shoulders of four women: Leah, Rachel; Bilah, Zilpah. Note that no difference is made between Jacob’s sons from his wives or from those born from his concubines.

Even though the Old Testament does not condemn polygamy, through its narrative it brings to light its effect upon

The wife in the Old Testament does not have exclusive sexual rights even though a husband does for he has full ownership over his wife (wives).

for all sub-wives, concubines, female slaves, and any or all children (see Gen 30:16). The patriarch and chief wife lived together, and a plural wife had to pursue her legal right to have children through the chief wife (see Gen 30:15).

The fact that bigamy needed to be regulated seems to point to the fact that it had become widespread. “If a man has two wives, one loved and another unloved, and both the loved and the unloved bear him sons, and if the unloved wife has the firstborn son, when the man

family life; believers are to learn from the evidence that God’s Edenic model was superior and therefore preferred to any other form. This idea is consistent with a Qur’anic principle that the monogamous union is still the preferred one since Allah has not given men two hearts (surah 4, The Clans). The original Qur’anic intent of allowing up to four wives had the purpose of limiting multiple marriages to four rather than condoning it. Sharia law requires the consent of the first wife before her husband marries another wife.

Unfortunately, this injunction is not always followed.

Adultery and Divorce

“Do not commit adultery” (Exod 20:14, Deut 5:18). In Old Testament times (and other ancient societies) adultery is repudiated because it infringes upon another’s man valuable property, his wife. Fornication therefore is less serious than adultery. The penalty for illicit sex for a married man with an unmarried (or unbetrothed) woman is less than when illicit sexual relations take place with a married (or betrothed) woman because such a man was depriving the woman’s rightful owner of his property rights and progeny, therefore the adulteress had to be put to death (see Deut 22).

Due to the intrinsic inequity of the patriarchal system, the divorce statutes were clearly weighted in favor of the husband (Deut 24:1-5). He alone had the right to initiate a divorce even when the grounds for it were as shaky as because he had found some indecency in her or come to dislike her. And yet, this legislation was meant to restrict the practice of arbitrary divorce by requiring a cause for it and provide the women with a letter of divorce to protect her in case she would later decide to remarry.

Did God condone divorce? No, for God hates divorce and compares it as a way to cover oneself with violence.

Another thing you do: you flood the Lord’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why?” It is because the Lord is acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not (The Lord) made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So, guard yourself in the spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce” says the Lord God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the Lord Almighty (Mal 2:13-16).

So, divorce was tolerated within legal limits, but it seems to be more offensive to God than polygamy. Why? Perhaps due to the fact that while polygamy extends the sacrality of marriage beyond its boundaries, divorce destroys it.

Jesus makes it clear that this law did not reflect God’s first intent but that it was given because of people’s hardness of heart (Matt 19:3-8). Once again God reaffirms the creation story and the sacrality of the marriage vow that was to extend until death and was only to be broken in case of infidelity. Jesus said,

What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. . . . And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery (Mark 10:9; Matt 19:9).

In the specific case of Islam, before the arrival of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad, adultery and fornication (*zina*) were not considered a sin, but Muhammad clearly established that *zina* constituted a crime against God, against established law and the social order. In the women's oath of allegiance by which new converts were to be admitted into the Islamic community, women pledge six things: (1) that they will ascribe nothing as a partner unto Allah, (2) that they will not steal, (3) will not commit *zina* (adultery), (4) will not kill their children (in reference to the common

affirmation of families, women, mothers, men and husbands, children; he upholds sexuality in its original intent that was to reflect the values and views of the Creator. God also offers a qualified tolerance in situations that are less than ideal. Some things have to be tolerated while the gospel works like salt or yeast that calls people to higher ground.

Is there anything that has to be rejected? Yes, anything that competes with God for first place, anything idolatrous. This same theme clearly resonates with the Islamic worldview in which the indivisible One calls

Some things have to be tolerated while the gospel works like salt or yeast that calls people to higher ground.

practice of female infanticide), (5) will not produce any lie that they have devised between their hands and feet, and (6) will not disobey Mohammad in what is right (Mernissi 1987:58, 59).

With this as a background I can now return to the original question that opened this section: What happens to the family when the gospel enters into a predominantly patriarchal culture? The survey on the social life of Israel rules out simplistic views on our part.

Once society is fallen, God engages with it by means of critical

for undivided loyalty. The Old Testament exposes practices that are abhorrent to God that therefore need to be eradicated, practices that lead not only to idolatry, but to perversion and destruction of life.

Patriarchy: A Gateway to Ministry among Muslim Women?

This section considers a much neglected area in ministering to Muslim women in traditional contexts, for the patriarchal system actually offers some unique areas of

opportunity for sharing and growing faith among women. These areas will emerge more clearly when the focus shifts from *gender relations* and *power issues* and moves to what real empowerment should be from a biblical perspective: to become the women God designed us to be and to build others in the faith (1 Thess 5:11).

Women have an important role to play in reaching out to Muslim women. "Women have an advantage, when family is central to a society, that has been overlooked by those focus-

Direct Access to the Home

Women ministering to women, once trust has been built, will find opportunities to enhance each other's life in areas that are traditionally female, such as the home, relationships in the family, finding and keeping one's husband, childrearing, nurturing, and care giving. Emotional needs and other issues are also easily shared among women.

Talk around kitchen tables provides fertile soil for seeds of forgiveness, peace, and love to sprout and take root. Women

It is important not to assume that all Muslim women are broken, feel powerless, and are looking for solutions outside their Islamic faith.

ing on authority patterns, they are the central figures in the central institution of the society" (Musk 2004:50). If this is so, then God's people must reach out to women, not because they are in a dire situation, but because of the privileged role and influence they have in the home and society.

Below, I explore some areas that provide *windows of opportunity* that are present in a Muslim traditional context. These, among others, could become gateways for ministry to women when explored from a missiological perspective.

praying together can seek God's power to be released from problems and difficulties thereby allowing God to be experienced in areas of need.

In situations where the social system cannot be changed, one's presence becomes an important source of healing and empowerment. It is important not to assume that all Muslim women are broken, feel powerless, and are looking for solutions outside their Islamic faith. Among my Muslim friends I discovered women with a great sense of humor, who experienced deep love, who knew how

to enjoy the little pleasures of life, and who were happy to be who they were.

Mentoring

Older women can teach younger ones (Titus 2). This is especially relevant when the broad shoulders of the extended families are no longer available and women seem lost without a clear support structure. Older women could transform their tears and failures into seeds of hope to guide younger women in areas that are taboo, or simply areas in which their experience could be translated into wise advice. Older women, many times given to gossip and criticism, could become real sources of guidance and blessing. Sharifa wept as she shared the pain of having lost an older woman as her mentor after she became an Adventist. She had no one to accompany her across town, to go with her to the doctor or tell her what to do when her babies were fussy. It is not surprising that Sharifa returned to Islam for her loneliness was too heavy to bear.

Spiritual Role for Mothers

Mothers are the spiritual heartbeat of the home. While fathers take the public role such as taking the boys to the mosque or leading out during religious celebrations, the daily spiritual life of the children is the mother's responsibility. Women are eager to learn ways by which they can guide their little ones

spiritually. A wise mother will enjoy the trust and respect of her family but most of all from her husband who will seek her advice at home. Unfortunately this spiritual role is often neglected or absent when women have not been empowered to take it.

Women in ministry could focus on developing spiritual, godly values, on the purpose God has for the believer, on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in one's daily walk, and on a child's psychological development. Most mothers will gladly accept additional information on how to understand their children's hearts and how to discipline them in godly ways.

Hospitality

Every time we open our homes with gladness, we are witnessing powerfully in a way that reaches the heart and communicates that "my home is your home." The Qur'an encourages the sharing of hospitality (Surah 24:61) so this is one area in which Christians often have much to learn from Muslim cultures. My Arab friends (Muslim and Christian alike) love to offer generous hospitality. At times their generosity intimidates me because I know that I will never be able to match their hospitality even though I try.

Uprooting Folk Practices

Muslim women are often the ones who seek power in the

world of the occult by connecting with the realm of the spirits; they seek to manipulate reality to fit their wishes or to rewrite their fate. Women ministering to other women have the advantage of being able to challenge these practices that are secretly kept deep within the home and break the bondage in the name of Jesus. Muslim women, like any other women, seek power either to receive protection or power to be in control of situations. Understanding this need for power is crucial to empower women in a godly way with the

Discovering Spiritual Gifts

This area is not an exclusive need for a patriarchal context, nevertheless, it is important to be mentioned here. Exploring each other's spiritual gifts and talking about ways to develop them can prove to be a very real source of empowerment and affirmation. Women can build each other in this area.

Strong Prayer Ministry

Because of the prominent role prayer plays within the Islamic community, women who have an active prayer life are

Muslim women, like any other women, seek power either to receive protection or power to be in control of situations.

weapons of the Spirit not only to receive God's protection but also to build God's kingdom.

Modeling Spiritual Values

Godly women, through their lives, can model kingdom values such as service, respect, healthy relationships, and trust. Modeling is at the heart of making disciples and even though it takes place in every cultural context, this is especially relevant in cultures in which pragmatism and orthopraxis override dogma and orthodoxy.

sought after. Prayer in Islam usually refers to *salat* (ritual formal prayers recited five times a day), but Muslims have another form of prayer which is referred to as *du'a* which describes supplication. Muslim women love to be prayed for, especially since there is no conversational prayer in Islam.

Conclusion

What emerges from the study of Israel's story is a picture in which God enters a less than ideal context, affirms critically what is good, challenges his people to press forward to

higher ground, opposes what is destructive and idolatrous, and limits their shortcomings with laws that resonated within their cultural setting (a honor and shame cultural matrix in which purity and property were its pillars).

God's priority of making himself known in the life of the nations has not changed, but his willingness to progressively reveal his ideal indicates his willingness to walk within a people's receptive capacity. Thus, Jesus *pressed against* the gender limitations of his time (because the good news demanded it). He did not overturn the limiting institutions in a revolutionary way, because such action would have invited severe counter reactions by his opponents. At the same time, Jesus looked ahead to the perfect reign of God, when all things would be restored. We, too, are living in the in-between times of *the already, but not yet*.

God's people are free in Christ, and yet (the gospel asserts this radical freedom) believers are sometimes called upon to forego that liberty to promote a greater good. Therefore, some change agents and those working in Muslim contexts may be called upon to forgo their *right* to equality in situations where such emancipation might invite hostility or could be misunderstood. Equality is not to be understood in terms of promoting a feminist agenda but

must consist of a God-centered model.

In ministering to Muslim women, Adventist women must first learn what it means to be a godly husband, wife, son, daughter, granddaughter, etc. in a patriarchal setting. How is authority shared in the family and in the community? How can women be empowered to discover God's purposes for them?

The patriarchal system, when considered from a missiological perspective, offers some unique windows of opportunity for spiritual engagement, faith development, and transformation. Women, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can discover that these venues not only allow them to better appreciate the host community but also keep them focused on building God's kingdom using the local materials that are available to them.



Works Cited

- Adeney, Miriam. 1987. Esther across cultures: Indigenous leadership roles for women. *Missiology: An International Review* 15, no. 3 (July): 323-337.
- Besançon Spencer, Aida. 1985. *Beyond the curse: Women called to ministries*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Bloesch, Donald. 1982. *Is the Bible sexist? Beyond feminism and patriarchalism*. Westchester, UK: Crossway.
- Cate, Mary Ann, and Karol Downey, comp. 2002. *From fear to faith: Muslim and Christian women*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Carr, David M. 2003. *The erotic word: Sexuality, spirituality, and the Bible*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Countryman, L. W. 1988. *Dirt, greed and sex*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.
- Epstein, Louis M. 1942. *Marriage laws in the Bible and Talmud*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ferneá, Elizabeth Warnock. 1985. *Women and the family in the Middle East: New voices of change*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Groothuis, Rebecca Merrill. 1997. *Good news for women: A biblical picture of gender equality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Hurley, James. 1981. *Man and woman in biblical perspective*. Leicester, UK: InterVarsity.
- Joseph, Suad. 1992. The family as security and bondage: A political strategy of the Lebanese urban working class. In *Towards a political economy of urbanization in the third world country*, ed. Helen Safa, 151-171. New Delhi, India: New Delhi University Press.
- Love, Frank, and Jeleta Eckheart, eds. 2000. *Ministry to Muslim women: Longing to call them sisters*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Mernissi, Fatima. 1987. *Beyond the veil: Male-female dynamics in modern Muslim society*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Piper, John, and Wayne Grudem, eds. 1991. *Rediscovering biblical manhood and womanhood*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
- Selfe, P. L. 1987. *Advanced sociology*. London, UK: Pan Books.
- Trible, Phyllis. 1973. Depatriarchalizing in biblical interpretation. *Journal of the American Academy of Religions* 41, no. 1:30-48.
- White, Ellen G. 1958. *Patriarchs and prophets*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.
- Ziba, Mir Hosseini. 2000. *Marriage on trial: A study of Islamic family law*. New York: I. B. Tauris.