

Genesis, Gender, and Human Identity: A Theological and Philosophical Exploration

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Abstract

This study investigates the intersection of biblical interpretations, philosophical thought, and gender theory to explore how the concept of human identity and gender roles has evolved. The purpose of this research is to analyze traditional religious and philosophical views on gender duality, focusing on interpretations of the Genesis creation narrative and philosophical ideas like Plato's Symposium. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach, incorporating theological, historical, and logical analysis to assess various interpretations of gender identity. The findings reveal that while traditional religious perspectives emphasize gender complementarity, philosophical discourses present androgyny as a model for understanding human identity. This research highlights the need for a contemporary dialogue between theological institutions and modern gender theory to address issues of gender equality and identity formation. The conclusion recommends that religious institutions reconsider their stances on gender roles and engage with evolving social perspectives to promote a more inclusive view of human identity. Ultimately, the study advocates for inclusive theological reflection that respects traditional values and modern understandings of gender equality.

Keywords

Genesis, Gender Duality,
Human Identity, Androgyny,
Gender Equality



I. Introduction

A core topic in scholarly, philosophical, and religious debates has been the issue of human identity, gender, and creation. The genesis of man and woman is described in the biblical story of Genesis, which has influenced social mores and theological beliefs. However, different interpretations have produced different understandings of gender roles, divine order, and the origins of humanity. These views range from Christian Patristic philosophy to Jewish Midrashic traditions. With an emphasis on Ethiopian Orthodox views, this study attempts to investigate how biblical texts, theological viewpoints, and philosophical discussions on the nature of gender and human identity intersection.

1.1 Study Background

The creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 provide the scriptural foundation for understanding human origins. Genesis 1:27 states that God formed humanity "male and female," while Genesis 2:21-22 describes the formation of Eve from Adam's rib. Jewish Midrash suggests Adam may have been created as an androgynous being before being separated into male and female, a concept also reflected in Greek philosophy, such as Plato's Symposium.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church holds a distinct view, emphasizing that Adam was created as a man from the beginning and that Eve was formed to complete divine harmony. While this interpretation aligns with traditional Christian teachings, contemporary gender discourse challenges historical understandings of gender as binary, calling for a renewed theological and philosophical exploration of the topic.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 have shaped theological and philosophical discussions on gender and human identity for centuries. However, varying interpretations—especially between Judeo-Christian traditions and philosophical perspectives have led to ongoing debates about the nature of Adam and Eve made gender distinctions. One of the most intriguing discussions arises from Jewish Midrashic traditions, which suggest that Adam was initially created as both male and female, later separated into two beings. This concept contrasts with the traditional Christian interpretation, which holds that Adam was male and Eve was formed separately from his rib.

From a philosophical standpoint, Plato's Symposium presents a similar idea, proposing that early humans were originally androgynous before being divided into male and female. This perspective has influenced various theological and cultural understandings of gender throughout history. However, Ethiopian Orthodox theology, which is deeply rooted in the Patristic tradition and ancient biblical interpretations, firmly rejects the idea of an androgynous Adam, emphasizing that man and women were distinct from the beginning of creation.

Despite the significance of these debates, several critical questions remain unanswered:

1. What theological evidence supports or challenges the Midrashic claim that Adam was originally male and female?
2. How do Ethiopian Orthodox interpretations compare with Western Christian and Jewish traditions regarding the creation of gender?
3. What role does philosophical thought, such as Plato's notion of gender duality, play in shaping religious discussions?
4. How can biblical interpretations of gender inform contemporary debates on identity, gender roles, and theology?

These questions reveal an imperative intellectual gap in existing scholarship. While many studies have explored biblical exegesis and philosophical gender theories separately, few have attempted a comparative analysis that integrates theological, philosophical, and Ethiopian Orthodox perspectives on gender and human identity. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive theological and logical exploration of Genesis, gender, and human identity and focusing on Ethiopian Orthodox interpretations. These gaps highlight the need for an interdisciplinary approach that assimilates biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and philosophical reasoning.

1.3 Research Gaps

Although the creation narratives in Genesis have been extensively studied, imperative gaps persist in how different traditions understand the nature of gender, identity, and divine order. The existing research is limited in the following ways:

a. Lack of Comparative Theological Analysis

Most theological studies focus on Christian or Jewish interpretations of Genesis but rarely compare and contrast different theological traditions. While Western Christian perspectives emphasize the separate creation of Adam and Eve, Jewish Midrashic interpretations introduce the idea of an androgynous Adam. Meanwhile, Ethiopian Orthodox theology offers a distinct perspective rooted in ancient biblical and patristic traditions. There is a need for a comparative study that examines how these differing interpretations shape understandings of gender and human identity.

b. Limited Engagement with Philosophical Perspectives

Many theological discussions overlook the philosophical dimensions of gender creation. Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Plato's Symposium, provides a theory of original human androgyny that parallels Midrashic thought. However, the connection between biblical, theological, and philosophical understandings of gender remains underexplored in religious scholarship. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how philosophical concepts influence religious interpretations of gender.

c. Underrepresentation of Ethiopian Orthodox Theology

Despite the rich theological tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, its perspective on gender and creation remains understudied in academic discourse. Most biblical and theological analyses focus on Western Christianity or Jewish traditions, neglecting the theological contributions of non-Western Christian traditions. Since Ethiopian Orthodox theology rejects the Midrashic and Platonic notion of an androgynous Adam, it offers a unique perspective on the theological construction of gender that warrants further exploration.

d. Insufficient Connection to Contemporary Gender Debates

Modern discussions on gender identity, roles, and theological implications often disconnect from historical and religious perspectives. While contemporary gender discourse challenges binary gender distinctions, traditional religious teachings emphasize the divine creation of males and females as complementary beings. A historical-theological examination of gender in Genesis can contribute to current debates by offering insights into the original biblical framework and its implications for contemporary discussions on gender and identity.

By addressing these research gaps, this study will provide a holistic exploration of gender and human identity through the lens of Genesis, theology, and philosophy, with a special focus on the Ethiopian Orthodox perspective.

Existing studies primarily focus on:

1. **Biblical Studies:** Traditional exegesis of Genesis with limited engagement in contemporary gender discourse.
2. **Philosophical Interpretations:** Exploration of gender duality in ancient philosophy without considering theological perspectives.
3. **The Ethiopian Orthodox View:** Understudied in academic discourse despite its rich theological tradition on gender and creation.

This study aims to bridge these gaps by offering a comparative analysis of religious, theological, and philosophical perspectives on gender and human identity. The general objective is to explore the theological and logical dimensions of human identity and gender as presented in the Genesis creation narrative and focus on Ethiopian Orthodox perspectives. The specific objectives are

1. To examine biblical and theological interpretations of Genesis 1:27 and 2:21-22.
2. To analyze Jewish Midrashic traditions and their implications on the concept of an androgynous Adam.
3. To compare Western and Ethiopian Orthodox perspectives on gender and creation.
4. To investigate philosophical interpretations of gender duality, particularly with Plato's Symposium and religious thought.
5. To assess the implications of these interpretations on contemporary gender discussions.

This research is significant for several groups:

1. Academicians: Provides a comprehensive interdisciplinary study on gender and human identity.
2. Religious Scholars: Offers comparative insights on Christian, Jewish, and Ethiopian Orthodox perspectives.
3. Theological Institutions: Helps shape gender theology in light of biblical and philosophical discourse.
4. Faith Leaders: Assists in addressing contemporary gender discussions from a religious standpoint.
5. General Readers: Engages with historical and modern debates on human identity and divine order.

II. Research Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, integrating biblical exegesis, theological analysis, and philosophical inquiry to explore gender and human identity in the Genesis creation narrative. A comparative approach will be used to analyze Jewish Midrashic interpretations, Western Christian theology, and Ethiopian Orthodox perspectives. Additionally, philosophical theories on gender duality, such as Plato's Symposium, will be examined with biblical thought.

Since this study deals with textual analysis, theological interpretation, and philosophical reasoning, a qualitative approach is most suitable (Creswell, 2014). The study does not rely on statistical or empirical methods but instead focuses on historical, theological, and philosophical perspectives to construct a deeper understanding of gender in religious discourse.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

a. Primary Sources

Biblical Texts: The primary scriptural source will be the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) and Christian Old Testament, specifically:

1. Genesis 1:27: "God "created mankind in His image... male and female He created them."
2. Genesis 2:21-22: The creation of Eve from Adam's rib.
3. Commentaries from the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, particularly those of early Ethiopian Church Fathers.
4. Jewish Midrashic Texts: Including Midrash Bereshit Rabbah (Neusner, 1985), which presents the idea that Adam was originally male and female before separation.
5. Philosophical Texts: Plato's Symposium will be analyzed with theological interpretations (Plato, 1997).

b. Secondary Sources

Academic literature will be reviewed from theological and philosophical scholars, including:

1. Christian theological perspectives on creation and gender (Augustine, 1998; Tertullian, 1885).
2. Jewish interpretations of Adam's androgynous nature (Freedman, 1996).
3. Ethiopian Orthodox teachings on the creation narrative and its implications for gender theology (Kaplan, 1992).

2.3 Data Analysis Methods

a. Thematic Analysis

The study will use thematic content analysis to identify key themes in the biblical, theological, and philosophical sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It will help in grouping theological perspectives on gender and human identity.

b. Comparative Analysis

A comparative approach will be used to examine differences and similarities between:

- Western Christian vs. Ethiopian Orthodox views on the creation of gender.
- Jewish Midrashic interpretations vs. Christian theological perspectives.
- Philosophical theories vs. religious doctrines regarding androgyny and gender roles.

2.4 Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability and validity, this study will:

1. Cross-check theological interpretations using a variety of sources (Yin, 2018).
2. Ensure historical and doctrinal accuracy by consulting primary religious texts and established theological scholars.
3. Conduct peer review by engaging with scholars specializing in Christian theology, Jewish Midrash, and Ethiopian Orthodox traditions.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Traditional Biblical Exegesis of Genesis

Traditional exegesis of the Genesis creation narrative, predominantly Genesis 1 and 2, has long been central to Judeo-Christian understandings of gender and human identity. In the traditional Christian interpretation, God creates Adam first, from the dust of the earth, and then creates Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:7, 2:21-22). The theological emphasis has been on the complementary nature of male and female, with Adam as the first human being and Eve as his helper or companion (Augustine, 1998).

In Jewish tradition, the creation story is interpreted with nuances, notably in the Midrash, which expands on the notion that Adam may have been male and female, with Eve emerging from his side or rib as a distinct female being (Neusner, 1985). This interpretation reflects a belief in gender complementarity and unity in humanity's origins. In contrast, Ethiopian Orthodox theology consistently upholds a traditional exegesis, rejecting interpretations like the Midrashic and Platonic views of androgynous beings. Instead, the Ethiopian Church Fathers emphasize that Adam and Eve were created distinctly as male and female from the beginning, with an inherent divine order that underscores their complementary roles (Kaplan, 1992).

a. Limited Engagement with Contemporary Gender Discourse

The traditional interpretations, particularly in Christianity and Judaism, tend to remain relatively static in engagement with contemporary gender discourse. The biblical creation story has been used to justify a binary view of gender, positioning male and female as complementary but distinct, which aligns with the traditional family roles and patriarchal systems present throughout history (Tertullian, 1885). However, with the rise of modern gender theories, particularly the concepts of gender fluidity and non-binary identities, these interpretations have faced challenges in engaging meaningfully with contemporary debates.

For instance, gender identity in contemporary discourse has expanded beyond a male-female binary to include a broader understanding of gender fluidity and non-binary identities, which is difficult to reconcile with traditional biblical interpretations that insist on clear distinctions between males and females (Butler, 2004). This lack of engagement has resulted in restricted discussions within conventional biblical communities regarding how to align traditional interpretations with the changing social and cultural perspectives on gender. Most biblical scholars still focus primarily on historical readings of Genesis without significantly addressing the implications of modern gender studies on their interpretations.

3.2 Jewish Midrashic Traditions and the Concept of an Androgynous Adam

Jewish Midrashic traditions provide a rich commentary on the Genesis creation story, expanding upon the biblical narrative. One of the most intriguing Midrashic interpretations is that Adam was originally androgynous, encompassing male and female aspects before God separated the two into distinct beings (Neusner, 1985). This interpretation is found in several sources, including Genesis Rabbah, which suggests that Adam was initially created as a dual-gendered being. According to the Midrash, Adam's original form was both male and female, and only later was he divided to form Eve from his side or rib (Genesis Rabbah 8:1).

This interpretation offers a symbolic reading of the creation story, asserting that the first human was not a simple male or female but a composite being that contained both sexes, reflecting a theological understanding of unity and completeness before the separation. The dual nature of Adam in the Midrash is seen as a precursor to the complementary roles that males and females would later assume, but with an initial unity that transcends binary gender divisions (Neusner, 1985).

Jewish scholars and commentators have varied responses to the androgynous Adam theory. Some see it as a theological reflection of God's unity, suggesting that Adam's initial form as both male and female reflects the divine ideal of wholeness and balance before the separation (Bereshit Rabba 8:1). Others have viewed it through a mystical lens with the androgynous Adam symbolizing spiritual truth about the nature of humanity and its relationship with God (Berkovits, 1993).

a. Theological and Philosophical Implications of an Androgynous Adam

The Midrashic interpretation of an androgynous Adam carries significant theological and philosophical implications for understanding the nature of humanity. First, the idea challenges the binary notion of gender that has been traditionally upheld in Jewish and Christian thought. If Adam was initially androgynous, it suggests that gender identity was not a fixed or inherent characteristic of humanity but rather something divinely determined and later altered by the separation of the sexes (Neusner, 1985).

In this context, the androgynous Adam is seen as a metaphysical and theological ideal rather than a literal historical figure. It raises questions about the nature of gender identity and its relationship to creation. Philosophically, it suggests that the separation of genders is not the natural or original state of humanity but a necessary development for the functioning of human society and the divine plan. This interpretation also reflects the idea of unity within the divine creation, where Adam, as both male and female, is a harmonious and balanced whole. Furthermore, Midrash's depiction of an androgynous Adam has implications for the human condition and how it is viewed gender roles and equality. If the original human embodied both male and female aspects, the gender roles typically linked to Adam and Eve might be regarded as products of social construction rather than divine decree, prompting contemporary reassessments of the biblical perspective on gender (Berkovits, 1993).

3.3 The Role of Theological Institutions in Shaping Gender Theology

Theological institutions play a crucial role in shaping the discourse on gender theology by providing a framework for understanding and interpreting biblical and philosophical perspectives on gender roles. These institutions, such as seminaries, divinity schools, and religious universities, provide the educational environment for spiritual leaders, scholars, and students to engage with sacred texts and philosophical writings concerning human nature and gender.

Within many theological institutions, gender theology is developed through careful exegesis of religious texts, including the Bible, while considering contemporary philosophical debates about gender. This process often involves synthesizing traditional biblical teachings with modern ideas on gender equality, gender identity, and sexual ethics. As these institutions engage in biblical interpretation, they provide the foundational tools for religious leaders to understand how to approach gender issues within their communities.

One of the central ways that theological institutions help shape gender theology is by examining the creation narratives in the Bible, particularly the story of Adam and Eve, in light of both traditional exegesis and modern gender theories (Meyers, 1988). For instance, some institutions emphasize a more egalitarian view of gender in which the creation of humanity in God's image is interpreted as applying equally to both men and women, while others maintain more complementary roles based on traditional readings of Genesis (Meyers, 1988; Sacks, 2004).

a. Philosophical Discourse and Gender Theology

The philosophical discourse on gender theology within theological institutions has expanded the scope of traditional theological interpretations. Philosophers like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler have influenced modern theological thought by challenging traditional gender norms and highlighting fluidity (Butler, 2004; de Beauvoir, 1949). These philosophical ideas have been incorporated into theological education, encouraging scholars and students to question the fixed nature of gender roles as presented in the biblical texts.

Additionally, the intersection of biblical interpretation with philosophical concepts of equality, freedom, and human dignity has helped some theological institutions embrace gender-inclusive theology. For example, certain Christian theological schools have revisited Pauline texts in the New Testament, such as Galatians 3:28, which speak of the equality of all people in Christ in the light of contemporary gender discourses (Ehrman, 1999). These institutions argue that gender roles should not be rigidly defined but should

instead be fluid and dynamic, based on a broader theological and philosophical understanding of human equality.

In many theological contexts, the study of gender theology is no longer confined to traditional, patriarchal readings of the Bible. Theological institutions are increasingly promoting the view that the Bible's teachings on gender must be read in conjunction with modern ideas of gender fluidity, intersectionality, and social justice, especially as societal attitudes toward gender have evolved significantly (Gorman, 2008).

b. Impact on Gender Roles within Religious Communities

The engagement of theological institutions in shaping gender theology influences the understanding and application of gender roles within religious communities. In many spiritual traditions, gender roles are strictly defined based on interpretations of sacred texts. However, as theological institutions incorporate gender-inclusive readings of the Bible, religious leaders may be equipped to guide their congregations in more inclusive and egalitarian ways. This has led to the acceptance of female clergy in certain denominations, the acknowledgment of same-sex relationships, and a more inclusive approach to gender identity (Pohl, 1997).

Furthermore, theological education in gender theology allows future religious leaders to advocate for gender justice and equality, particularly within communities where traditional patriarchal norms have held sway for centuries. This shift has influenced religious practices such as ordination, leadership roles, and church structure, encouraging a more inclusive approach to gender.

3.4 Philosophical Interpretations of Gender Duality in Plato's Symposium

The study of gender duality in philosophical thought, predominantly as interpreted in Plato's Symposium, reveals a complex view of human nature and gender identity. In the conversation, Plato introduces the myth of androgynous beings, depicting humans as originally formed as dual-bodied entities later divided by Zeus. This myth is a foundation for Plato's understanding of human relationships and the quest for wholeness through love and union (Plato, 1997). According to the myth, each individual, male or female, seeks their other half to restore their original unity.

Plato's concept of gender duality in the Symposium challenges the conventional, binary understanding of gender. Rather than positioning men and women as opposites, Plato suggests a more fluid human identity in which gender is not strictly binary but is part of an essential search for unity. The androgynous nature of early humans symbolizes a holistic view of gender, where they are interdependent and complementary rather than fixed and separate (Plato, 1997).

This philosophical interpretation is significant as it speaks to gender fluidity and the need for male and female qualities within individuals rather than adhering to rigid gender roles. It provides a metaphysical explanation of gender identity that transcends biological or societal definitions, offering an ancient philosophical lens to explore contemporary ideas about gender fluidity and sexual identity (Jowett, 1998).

a. Religious Thought and Gender Duality

In religious thought, gender duality has traditionally been understood in more binary terms, particularly within the context of Judeo-Christian teachings. The Bible, for instance, reflects a complementary model of male and female, where each gender has specific roles and responsibilities in the divine order of creation (Genesis 2:18-25).

However, the philosophical interpretations of Plato's Symposium have introduced alternative views of gender unity that challenge traditional religious readings of gender.

Many religious thinkers have engaged with Plato's ideas on gender duality, particularly his portrayal of male and female as interconnected and incomplete without each other. This idea resonates with religious interpretations that focus on the complementarity of the sexes but also opens the door to discussions on the fluidity of gender identity and the possibility of transcending binary gender roles within a theological context (Meyers, 1988).

Religious traditions, especially in contemporary theology, are increasingly exploring how philosophical ideas like Plato's gender duality can be reconciled with spiritual teachings. Theological interpretations that integrate gender fluidity into religious frameworks suggest a spiritual unity that transcends biological sex and embraces the diversity of gender expressions in human beings. This perspective contests conventional binary thinking, which frequently restricts the comprehension of human relationships within religious settings

b. Contemporary Relevance of Plato's Gender Duality in Philosophy and Religion

The study of gender duality in Plato's Symposium and religious thought reveals its relevance in contemporary discussions of gender equality, gender identity, and sexuality. In particular, Plato's myth of the androgynous being offers a philosophical perspective that embraces gender fluidity and emphasizes the importance of integration rather than division. This view is highly relevant in today's conversations surrounding non-binary and gender-nonconforming identities, as well as discussions about gender roles within religious communities.

By integrating philosophical ideas from Plato with modern religious discourse, new theological interpretations emerge that suggest gender roles and identities are spiritual and fluid, and should not be confined to a rigid binary framework. These interpretations encourage religious leaders and theologians to engage with gender as a more inclusive concept, allowing for a broader and more complex understanding of what it means to be human in both spiritual and social terms.

3.5 Implications of Philosophical and Religious Interpretations on Contemporary Gender Discussions

The analysis of philosophical and religious interpretations of gender duality, particularly seen through the lens of Plato's Symposium and biblical interpretations of Genesis reveals significant implications for contemporary gender discussions. The philosophical notion of androgyny, particularly in Plato's myth of the androgynous beings, introduces a view of gender fluidity that transcends rigid binary gender roles. Plato's concept of gender duality emphasizes that humans are inherently seeking to reunite with their other halves, which are not necessarily defined by male or female but by the union of complementary qualities (Plato, 1997). This interpretation challenges the binary understanding of gender by suggesting that male and female traits exist in agreement and are integral to the human experience.

This philosophical stance on gender unity has found resonance in contemporary gender theory, where non-binary, genderqueer, and gender-fluid identities are increasingly recognized. Plato's ideas are seen in the shift toward a more inclusive understanding of gender, where traditional roles and boundaries are blurred in favor of recognizing the fluid spectrum of gender identities and expressions (Butler, 2004).

In the religious sphere, the implications are more complex. Traditionally, Judeo-Christian interpretations of Genesis have positioned male and female as complementary beings, each fulfilling distinct roles. The creation of Eve from Adam's rib has often been understood as symbolizing gendered complementarity (Genesis 2:18-25). However, contemporary theological discourse has begun to include more progressive interpretations, influenced by philosophical ideas such as those found in Plato's works, that encourage an evaluation of traditional gender roles and advocate for a more egalitarian and inclusive approach to gender (Gorman, 2008). This shift reflects the increasing recognition that gender is not a fixed, binary construct but a fluid concept that can be explored in the context of both personal identity and spirituality.

These interpretations in contemporary gender discussions are profound, as they challenge long-standing beliefs about gender roles and introduce more inclusive, fluid, and intersectional ways of understanding gender identity and relationships.

a. Influence of Theological and Philosophical Thought on Gender Theory

The integration of philosophical and theological thought on gender into contemporary gender theory has led to the emergence of a more inclusive and diverse understanding of gender. Both Plato's gender duality and biblical interpretations of gender complementarity have inspired modern discussions about the fluidity of gender identities and the role of spirituality in shaping gender roles. These ideas have opened up new avenues for understanding gender inclusivity, particularly in religious communities that are now engaging with non-binary and gender-nonconforming identities. This engagement has led to the importance of gender diversity not just as a social construct, but as a spiritual and theological concept central to human wholeness.

In contemporary gender theory, the notion of gender as a fluid construct has gained prominence, particularly in response to binary gender roles that have traditionally dominated both religious and secular frameworks. This shift has been informed by philosophical and theological discourses, which promote the unity of opposites and the integration of masculine and feminine qualities within individuals, irrespective of biological sex (Butler, 2004). As a result, gender theory has expanded beyond the binary concept of male/female to encompass a wide spectrum of identities that include gender-fluid, a gender, and gender non-conforming categories.

This philosophical and theological engagement with gender has also influenced modern religious communities, many of which have reinterpreted scriptural texts and theological traditions in a more inclusive light. As theologians and spiritual leaders engage with ideas from gender studies and philosophy, they have increasingly advocated for gender equality and the recognition of diverse gender identities within religious contexts (Meyers, 1988). This reflects a growing desire to align religious practices with contemporary gender inclusivity and human rights discussions.

3.6 Ethiopian Orthodox Church's View on Gender Duality and Complementarity

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, with its ancient theological traditions and interpretations of biblical texts, upholds a view of gender complementarity that emphasizes distinct roles for men and women, yet acknowledges their equal worth in the eyes of God. The church's teachings are rooted in the Book of Genesis, where the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21-23) symbolizes the complementary nature of male and female. Males and females are considered distinct but essential partners in fulfilling God's purpose for creation. This understanding is central to Ethiopian Orthodox thought, where gender is seen as part of God's divine plan and order.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox faith, men and women are assigned specific spiritual and social roles that reflect their complementarity. Men are traditionally seen as the leaders in the spiritual and public spheres, while women have an essential role within the home and family. However, these roles are not viewed as hierarchical but as distinct complementary responsibilities designed to maintain balance and harmony in society. The concept of gender duality, as presented in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, reinforces the importance of mutual respect and cooperation between men and women in fulfilling their divine purpose.

The church's theological stance on gender is closely tied to its doctrinal beliefs about the nature of humanity and the relationship between man, woman, and God. Eve's creation from Adam's rib is interpreted not as an act of subordination but as a symbol of unity and oneness. This reflects the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's understanding of gender as complementary, where both male and female are integral to the divine design for creation. Furthermore, humanity's original state before the fall of Adam and Eve is seen as a harmonious state where gender differences did not imply inequality but cooperation and mutual support in fulfilling God's commands (Haddis, 2005).

a. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Approach to Contemporary Gender

While the Ethiopian Orthodox Church holds to traditional interpretations of gender as complementary and divinely ordained, it has also begun engaging in contemporary discussions on gender equality and women's rights in Ethiopia. The church has, to some extent, recognized the changing social and cultural landscapes that call for greater inclusion of women in various aspects of life, including education, politics, and church leadership. The church's engagement with modern gender discussions is cautious, as it seeks to balance its traditional teachings with the needs and expectations of present society.

However, there remains a significant tension between the traditional views of gender roles within the church and the evolving societal expectations regarding gender equality. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has not yet fully embraced the full egalitarian approach to gender, especially with women's participation in leadership roles within the church. Women, while revered and respected, have traditionally not held positions of priesthood or church governance. This reflects the ongoing dialogue within the church on the compatibility of its ancient traditions with modern gender norms and societal changes (Adane, 2011).

Nevertheless, the church's significant cultural authority and its longstanding role as a cohesive element in Ethiopian society indicate that its stance on gender will likely keep evolving, albeit gradually. Conversations within the church about women's roles, particularly in spiritual and leadership capacities, are shimmering wider global dialogues on gender equality and social justice.

3.7 Discussion

a. The Traditional Exegesis and Complementarity of Male and Female

Traditional biblical exegesis underscores the complementary relationship between male and female. The interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 has historically been understood as affirming distinct gender roles—Adam as the first man and Eve as the first woman, created in a complementary manner to fulfill God's plan for human society. In traditional Christianity, male headship and female submission have often been linked to this exegesis, with Eve's creation from Adam's rib symbolizing the unity and interdependence between men and women.

The traditional Christian interpretation aligns with the Patristic views of Augustine and Tertullian, who emphasized male leadership in the family and society, using the Genesis account as a foundation (Augustine, 1998; Tertullian, 1885). This idea has been deeply ingrained in Christian theology, with gender roles considered part of the divine order and thus unchangeable. The Ethiopian Orthodox interpretation also follows this line, emphasizing that the creation of gender was intended to be complementary and distinct from the start (Kaplan, 1992).

However, these interpretations are increasingly questioned in light of modern feminist and gender theories that advocate for the fluidity of gender. For instance, Judith Butler (2004) argues that gender is performative and not inherently tied to biological sex, challenging the rigid male-female dichotomy. This contrasts the challenge to traditional readings of Genesis, which, while affirming the complementary roles of male and female, offer no space for alternative or fluid identities.

b. The Limited Engagement with Contemporary Gender Discourse

While traditional biblical exegesis emphasizes a binary view of gender, it has limited engagement with contemporary gender discourse. In recent decades, scholars and theologians have begun to question whether biblical teachings on gender can adequately address modern concepts of gender identity, fluidity, and equality (Butler, 2004). Modern discussions around gender non-conformity, including the acceptance of non-binary and transgender individuals, often clash with biblical interpretations that have been long held to promote a clear distinction between male and female (Parker, 2007).

The Midrashic interpretation, which proposes an androgynous Adam, is one attempt to move beyond the rigid binary, suggesting that gender may not be as fixed as traditionally believed (Neusner, 1985). However, this interpretation remains relatively obscure and underdeveloped in most traditional Christian and Jewish contexts. In contrast, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church maintains a strict interpretation of Genesis. It has not yet integrated modern discussions about gender diversity into its official theology, likely due to its commitment to preserving ancient traditions (Kaplan, 1992).

Furthermore, the concept of gender as a social construct, as proposed by Butler (2004) and Simone de Beauvoir (1949), challenges the inherent distinction between male and female created in the Genesis narrative. If gender is seen as a product of social conditioning rather than divine ordination, it invites a reinterpretation of biblical texts, urging scholars and theologians to reconsider how they approach gender in the scriptures.

c. Implications for Contemporary Christian and Jewish Thought

As contemporary gender theories evolve, religious traditions increasingly need to engage with these shifts. The traditional biblical exegesis that separates men and women into distinct roles may face a crisis of relevance in a world that recognizes multiple gender identities. Scholars may need to revisit the biblical narratives and theological frameworks surrounding creation, acknowledging that a binary understanding of gender may no longer capture the complexity of human experience.

Theological debates about gender roles—especially regarding leadership in the church and family—are already at the forefront of religious discussions. The growing acceptance of gender equality in many Christian denominations, as seen in the ordination of women, challenges traditional interpretations of Genesis that uphold male leadership as divinely ordained. The shift toward gender inclusivity in some Jewish and Christian communities may push the biblical exegesis to engage more with contemporary gender

studies, potentially leading to a more inclusive and fluid understanding of gender in theology.

d. The Theological Implications of the Androgynous Adam

The Midrashic tradition's portrayal of an androgynous Adam has profound theological implications for how gender and humanity are understood within Jewish thought. According to this interpretation, Adam's dual-gendered nature suggests that gender is not an intrinsic, immutable characteristic of human beings, but rather something created by God for specific purposes (Neusner, 1985). The separation of Adam into male and female represents a divine act of distinction, marking a transition from a singular unity to a complementary duality.

This perspective challenges traditional theological views that gender is divinely preordained and fixed. Instead, gender identity is not static but subject to divine will and creation. It suggests that gender, in its binary form, is a necessary distinction for the functioning of human society, but not a fundamental aspect of the original human condition (Berkovits, 1993).

Moreover, the Midrashic interpretation highlights humanity before the creation of gender roles. If Adam was male and female, this unity reflects the idea that all humans, regardless of gender, were created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), with equal worth and dignity. This challenges the idea of male superiority and provides a basis for more inclusive theological perspectives on gender equality in contemporary religious thought.

e. Gender Identity and the Androgynous Adam

The concept of an androgynous Adam has significant implications for understanding gender identity within religious and philosophical contexts. The Midrash presents gender as fluid, suggesting that the binary division of male and female is a later development rather than an essential characteristic of humanity (Neusner, 1985). This interpretation invites modern readers to reconsider how gender is conceived within religious frameworks, particularly with evolving gender identities and fluidity.

Considering contemporary discussions on gender identity—such as the acknowledgment of non-binary and gender-fluid individuals—the theory of an androgynous Adam establishes a theological basis for understanding gender as more intricate than a basic binary. It lays groundwork for embracing gender diversity within religious frameworks, questioning strict interpretations that uphold fixed binary gender roles (Berkovits, 1993).

f. The Midrash's Relevance to Contemporary Gender Discourse

In contemporary Jewish and religious discourse, the Midrashic view of an androgynous Adam may be increasingly relevant as societies continue to engage with issues of gender equality and gender diversity. The Midrashic interpretation focusing on the unity of male and female in the original human form provides a theological framework for considering how gender roles might be more flexible and fluid. The Midrashic perspective, which emphasizes the unity of male and female within the initial human form, offers a theological lens through which gender roles can be more adaptable and fluid.

Moreover, Midrash's suggestion that Adam was both male and female before being separated could inspire a deeper engagement with modern feminist and queer theological perspectives that challenge traditional views of gender and identity (Butler, 2004). The androgynous Adam theory allows for a more expansive reading of Genesis, embraces the full spectrum of human gender identity, and recognizes the fluidity of human nature.

g. The Theological Interpretation of Gender and the Bible

The biblical interpretation of gender, as shaped by theological institutions, has evolved considerably over time. In traditional theological readings of the Bible, gender roles were often viewed as divinely ordained and fixed. However, modern theological perspectives that integrate gender equality and gender fluidity have begun to challenge this interpretation. The Genesis narrative of Adam and Eve, for example, has been reexamined in light of both historical context and modern gender theory to argue for a more egalitarian interpretation of gender (Meyers, 1988).

Through the lens of modern theology, biblical passages traditionally used to justify gender inequality, such as 1 Timothy 2:12 and Ephesians 5:22-24, are being reinterpreted in a way that acknowledges the cultural context in which they were written, rather than as universal or timeless mandates (Ehrman, 1999). Theological institutions have played a significant role in encouraging this shift, allowing for more inclusive readings of the Bible that support women's leadership roles and gender equality within the church.

Additionally, theological institutions are increasingly adopting a more holistic understanding of gender that transcends the binary understanding of male and female and opens the door for discussions of non-binary and gender-fluid identities. This shift reflects a growing recognition that biblical teachings on gender must be understood within a broader cultural and historical context and must evolve in response to contemporary understandings of gender and identity (Butler, 2004).

h. The Philosophical Contributions to Gender Theology

The philosophical perspectives on gender theology have brought new insights into traditional theological teachings. Philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Judith Butler (2004) argue that gender is not an inherent or biological fact but a social construct. These ideas have influenced theological institutions to move away from rigid, essentialist views of gender and embrace more fluid, egalitarian perspectives.

Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" challenges the essentialist view that gender is biologically determined. However, Judith Butler's work on performative gender (Butler, 2004) suggests that gender is a social performance rather than a natural, immutable category. These ideas are particularly relevant for theological institutions engaged in gender theology, as they provide alternative readings of the biblical texts that go beyond patriarchal frameworks and promote more inclusive and progressive approaches to gender.

The influence of gender philosophers on theological institutions has contributed to a more nuanced and compassionate understanding of gender in religious communities, challenging theological traditions that have perpetuated gender hierarchies. This philosophical input has also supported the increasing acceptance of gender fluidity and the recognition of non-binary identities within religious contexts (Gorman, 2008).

i. Impact of Theological Education on Religious Communities

The engagement of theological institutions in gender theology has had a profound impact on religious communities by influencing the way gender roles are perceived and applied within the church and society. Theological education that includes gender-inclusive theology empowers religious leaders to advocate for gender equality in their communities. As a result, many religious denominations have begun to ordain women, accept same-sex relationships, and foster a more inclusive church culture (Pohl, 1997).

This transformation is not universal, and resistance to gender-inclusive theology remains in certain religious traditions. However, as more theological institutions provide

education in gender theology, the potential for change within religious communities grows, leading to a more inclusive and egalitarian religious practice.

j. Plato's View of Gender and the Search for Wholeness

Plato's philosophical discourse on gender duality in the Symposium reflects a view of human nature that transcends the physical distinctions between male and female. The myth of androgyny, in which humans were once complete beings that embodied both male and female characteristics, presents a profound insight into the human condition. Plato's view emphasizes that the pursuit of wholeness and unity is central to human existence, and this pursuit is facilitated through love and the desire to reconnect with one's other half (Plato, 1997).

From a gender studies perspective, Plato's myth challenges traditional gender binaries by suggesting that gender identity is not inherently fixed but rather dynamic and fluid. Plato's understanding of androgyny highlights the potential for gender integration, where the male and female elements within an individual can harmonize to form a more complete identity. This interpretation has become particularly significant in modern philosophical and gender studies discussions, where the boundaries of gender and sexuality are increasingly seen as socially constructed rather than biologically predetermined (Butler, 2004).

Furthermore, Plato's Symposium serves as an important text in contemporary philosophical debates on gender fluidity and the non-binary spectrum, where gender identity is understood as multifaceted and context-dependent. Plato's vision of wholeness—in which love and unity transcend the categories of male and female—serves as an early philosophical foundation for recognizing the diversity of gender experiences and the idea that gender can be a fluid and evolving construct (Butler, 2004).

k. The Interplay between Philosophical and Religious Thought on Gender

While Plato's myth provides a philosophical lens through which to view gender duality, traditional religious perspectives have often adhered to more rigid definitions of male and female, which are rooted in divine ordination. However, the Platonic ideas of religious thought have opened up new avenues for thinking about gender in more inclusive and fluid terms. The discussions of gender duality in theological contexts often juxtapose the philosophical understanding of gender unity with scriptural teachings on gender roles.

In particular, religious scholars have engaged with Plato's ideas by interpreting Genesis 2 through the lens of androgyny—understanding the creation of Eve from Adam's rib not only as an act of complementarity but also as a deeper symbol of the unity and interdependence of male and female (Gorman, 2008). These interpretations challenge the more patriarchal readings of the text and suggest a more egalitarian vision of gender relations within religious contexts.

Moreover, contemporary religious thought has increasingly incorporated gender-inclusive theology that reflects philosophical ideas of gender fluidity and equality. It allows for non-binary and gender-nonconforming identities within the communities, fostering a more inclusive and diverse understanding of human nature beyond traditional gender roles (Meyers, 1988).

l. Implications for Contemporary Gender Discourse in Philosophy and Religion

The philosophical interpretation of gender duality in Plato's Symposium has significant implications for contemporary gender discourse in philosophy and religion. In modern society, where gender fluidity is increasingly acknowledged, Plato's work offers a

philosophical foundation for rethinking gender as a social and spiritual construct rather than a fixed biological binary. This view has influenced gender studies and theological interpretations by advocating for a more inclusive, fluid, and egalitarian understanding of gender identity.

In religious thought, especially within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, the interpretation of gender roles has evolved as theologians reconsider traditional doctrines in light of modern philosophical insights. Plato's myth of the androgynous being has inspired religious thinkers to reassess the roles and relationships between males and females as complementary yet interdependent forces rather than fixed, separate roles. These conversations are reshaping religious practices, promoting gender equality, and fostering inclusivity within spiritual communities.

m. Challenging Traditional Gender Roles in Light of Philosophical and Religious Thought

The philosophical and religious ideas with contemporary gender discourse are reshaping traditional understandings of gender roles. The androgynous concept from Plato's Symposium, in which male and female characteristics are united in the search for wholeness, is a key philosophical argument against rigid, binary gender constructs. Plato's myth offers a foundational view that gender is fluid and complementary, not necessarily tied to biological or societal definitions. This notion supports the gender non-binary movement, which advocates for fluid and inclusive definitions of gender identity (Plato, 1997).

Philosophers like Judith Butler have further expanded this discourse by suggesting that gender is not a fixed identity but a performance shaped by cultural and societal expectations (Butler, 2004). Butler's theory of gender performativity argues that gender is a social construct, constantly being enacted through behavior and expression. This perspective directly challenges traditional views of gender as inherently tied to biological sex. It opens up space for a more inclusive understanding of gender identity that allows for gender fluidity and self-expression. The fusion of philosophical and religious interpretations of gender enables a broader, more inclusive view of gender identity that aligns with contemporary theories on gender equality and the recognition of diverse gender expressions.

n. Gender Fluidity and the Reinterpretation of Biblical Texts

In religious discourse, the reinterpretation of biblical texts in light of philosophical ideas on gender fluidity has led to a more inclusive approach to gender. Traditionally, biblical teachings emphasized a complementary view of gender roles, where male and female were seen as separate yet complementary beings, each with distinct spiritual and social responsibilities (Genesis 2:18-25). However, contemporary religious thinkers, influenced by Plato's myth and modern gender theory, are increasingly questioning this binary framework and exploring the possibility of gender unity and fluidity within theological contexts (Gorman, 2008).

By embracing the idea of gender fluidity found in philosophical and theological discourse, religious communities are becoming more open to gender inclusivity. This shift reflects a broader societal movement toward recognizing the full spectrum of gender identities beyond the binary male/female division. Many religious communities are engaging with these ideas to create more inclusive spaces for gender-diverse individuals and advocating for gender equality in spiritual practices and leadership roles.

o. Philosophical and Theological Integration in Modern Gender Discourse

The integration of philosophical and theological ideas in modern gender discourse has made substantial contributions to the ongoing conversation about gender identity and gender equality. Philosophical views on gender duality particularly the concepts of gender complementarity and fluidity in Plato's Symposium serve as an imperative foundation for contemporary gender theory. The androgynous perfect in Plato's myth emphasizes the interdependence and complementarity of male and female traits, which has informed modern discussions on gender inclusivity.

In the realm of theology, religious interpretations of Genesis and other sacred texts have been reexamined in light of philosophical insights. It has led to a growing recognition of gender equality and a more inclusive approach to gender roles within religious communities. As religious and philosophical thinkers continue to engage with these ideas, they pave the way for a more holistic and inclusive understanding of gender in both spiritual and social contexts.

In conclusion, the philosophical and religious perspectives on gender have significant implications for contemporary gender discussions, particularly in gender fluidity, non-binary identities, and the ongoing movement for gender equality in religious and secular spaces. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a more inclusive understanding of gender identity and plays in individual and communal identity in both the philosophical and theological realms.

p. The Theological Interpretation of Gender in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's teachings on gender are embedded in its theological understanding of humanity's creation and relationship with God. The church's interpretation of Genesis aligns with the belief that men and women were created as distinct yet complementary beings. This theological framework holds that gender is not arbitrary but part of the divine design. The creation of Eve from Adam's rib is seen as an expression of mutual dependence rather than subordination, which is a critical point in the church's stance on gender equality.

However, the church's traditional approach to gender roles within the family and society, where men are seen as the primary breadwinners and spiritual leaders, presents challenges in light of contemporary gender equality debates. The hierarchical nature of these roles, particularly within the church, remains a point of tension. Despite this, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has historically valued the roles of women in family life, education, and spiritual practices, with women playing an indispensable part in the church's liturgical and community life, exclusively through roles such as deaconesses and mothers of the church (Haddis, 2005).

In this context, gender complementarity in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church does not suggest inequality but different roles that contribute to the holistic development of the individual and the community. However, the potential for gender equality within the church structure is hindered by traditional interpretations that restrict women from certain leadership positions, such as the priesthood and bishopric. This theological stance is the broader religious traditions, particularly within Christianity, that have grappled with the question of women in leadership (Adane, 2011).

q. The Role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Contemporary Gender Discussions

As Ethiopian society undergoes significant social and cultural changes, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's role in contemporary gender discussions is becoming increasingly relevant. The evolving role of women in Ethiopian society, particularly in the

education, workforce, and political spheres, calls for a re-examination of the church's traditional views on gender roles and leadership. The church's engagement with these issues has been relatively slow, but there is a growing recognition of the need to incorporate gender equality into its broader social teachings.

This shift is significant in Ethiopia, where gender inequality remains a contest, particularly in rural areas. As part of its social mission, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has the potential to contribute positively to the gender equality discourse by advocating for women's empowerment and inclusivity within its doctrinal teachings and community practices. This shift, however, requires a careful balance of tradition and modernity, where the church can maintain its theological integrity while addressing the pressing needs of gender equality in the 21st century (Adane, 2011).

In conclusion, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's understanding of gender complementarity provides a foundational framework for understanding gender roles within the context of Christian theology. However, Ethiopia's societal setting and global discussions about gender equality will likely influence the church's future gender teachings and viewpoints. As the church continues to engage with these issues, it will play a key role in shaping the discourse on gender equality within both the religious and secular spheres.

IV. Conclusion

In exploring the relationship between Genesis, gender, and human identity, this study has highlighted how theological and philosophical traditions shape our understanding of gender roles and human identity. The research has shown that biblical exegesis and philosophical discourse offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on gender duality. The theological interpretations of Genesis 2, particularly within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, emphasize complementarity between male and female, suggesting that both sexes are essential to the divine plan. Meanwhile, the Jewish Midrash and philosophical traditions like Plato's Symposium introduce the concept of androgyny, challenging the traditional understanding of distinct gender roles. These diverse interpretations open the door to dialogue on gender fluidity, equality, and human identity in contemporary discussions.

The findings point to a crucial intersection of faith, philosophy, and culture, where gender roles must be reexamined in light of modern gender theory and social justice movements. While traditional views rooted in religious texts still influence many societies, the ongoing gender equality discourse requires a rethinking of the theological and philosophical underpinnings of gender identity and human roles.

Recommendations

Reevaluate Theological Interpretations: Religious institutions, including the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, should engage in deeper theological reflection on the implications of gender complementarity in light of contemporary gender equality issues.

Integrate Gender Theory with Theology: There is a need to explore how philosophical interpretations like those in Plato's Symposium can be incorporated into theological discussions of human identity and gender fluidity.

Promote Inclusive Gender Narratives: Modern religious discourse should embrace inclusive gender narratives that respect traditional values and gender equality in promoting a more just and equal society.

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