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The Qur'ān, Method, and Meaning: Interpreting Men's Authority Over Women

In this paper, I consider the relationship between method and meaning taking as an example Qur'anic *tafsīr* that a male God prefers men, has made them superior to women and given them unilateral authority over their wives. That such *tafsīr* has Islamized discrimination and violence against women is obvious enough. What is less so is that it masculinizes God, in violation of the Qur'an's testimonials about God. I substantiate this critique by reviewing three readings of the text: its patriarchal, which portrays it as the male-privileging word of a putatively male God; my own, which recuperates its antipatriarchalism by reading it in light of God's self-disclosure, and the secular-/feminist, which takes its patriarchal *tafsīr* as a reason for disputing the Qur'an's sacrality. My overall intent is to identify some basic theological and methodological problems with gendering God and claiming that the Qur'an mandates the gender hierarchies that sustain men's rule over women.



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Professor Asma Barlas is a leading scholar in Islamic hermeneutics, comparative politics, and women's studies. She earned degrees in English, Journalism, and International Studies, culminating in a PhD from the University of Denver. In 1976, she became one of the first women in Pakistan's Foreign Service but was dismissed in 1982 for her political views and later sought asylum in the U.S.

She joined Ithaca College in 1991, where she taught in the Politics Department and served as the founding director of the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity. In 2008, she was awarded the Spinoza Chair in Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam.

Professor Barlas is best known for her groundbreaking book *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān*, which has been translated into several languages. Her scholarship challenges patriarchal readings of Islamic texts and advocates for gender justice within Islamic thought. She retired in 2020, leaving a lasting impact on contemporary discussions about Islam and gender.