

How Could God Have a Son?

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ
وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ، مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا
الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ
وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا
شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ
حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ



Surah 2. aya 255

Do Christians Worship Three Gods?

Both Christians and Muslims sometimes judge each other wrongly, and that is not good. At times we denounce beliefs that the other person does not even hold. Some Christians consider all Muslims guilty of supporting violent acts committed by some of their brothers, when this is not the case. Some Muslims severely condemn Christians in general for beliefs that true Christians have never accepted, or they may condemn Christian teachings without understanding them.

Christians and Muslims all worship the Supreme Being, the Creator of all things. We are all agreed on the duty of honoring Him, of knowing His will for men, of serving Him, of humbling ourselves before His greatness and of loving Him with all our hearts. On the other hand, we have differing ideas when it comes to His nature. The divergence is real, but it is not so great as people often think it is, partly because many Muslims do not know what the Christian faith teaches on this subject. (And again, we should not forget that quite a few so-called Christians are ignorant of the truths taught in their own Bible, even though it is available in their own languages. One should

not reject Christianity because of those who do not know or practice it well.)

“Do Not Say: ‘There Are Three Gods’”

Muhammad, just like us, had to deal with Christians who did not know the Bible very well. Among those who wore the name of Christian in Arabia at the time of Muhammad were people whose beliefs were very different from the beliefs of most of those who consider themselves Christians, and more importantly, very different from what the Bible teaches. It was surely of these heretics that the Qur’an was speaking in Surah 4, aya 171, “So believe in God and His messengers and do not say: ‘There are three [gods].’ Desist, it will be better for you. Indeed, God is the one and only God.” Or again, in Surah 5:116, Allah will say, “Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as two deities besides God?’” Even if these people in Muhammad’s time did not know what the Bible says and they believed in several gods, Muslims today need to understand that this is not what the first disciples of Jesus believed, and it is not what the vast majority of churches teach today.

Consider these passages from the Torah and the Injeel:

Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!”

Isaiah 45:21-22: “Declare and set forth your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”

Mark 12:29,30: “Jesus answered, ‘The foremost [commandment] is, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”’”

Romans 3:30: “Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”

James 2:19: “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”

You see then that the Christian Bible does not teach that there are three distinct

gods; there is only one God. We should add that the Bible nowhere authorizes men to worship Mary, the mother of Jesus. Men have done wrong to make her into a goddess. She rightly called herself “the servant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38).

“He Has Taken Neither a Wife Nor a Son...”

Another idea which the Qur’an condemns, an idea which was probably taught by certain false Christians in Muhammad’s time, is that God had had sexual relations with Mary in order for her to give birth to Jesus. What blasphemy! I do not know of any Christian who accepts such a horrible idea. The Qur’an says in Surah 6 – *Al-Anam*, aya 101, “the Originator of the heavens and the earth. How could He have a son when He has no consort?” and in Surah 72 – *Al-Jinn*, aya 3, “and exalted is the majesty of our Lord—He has taken neither a wife nor a son.” In passages like these, the Qur’an is speaking neither to the church of the first century nor to modern churches, for we do not believe that God married Mary or that he had sexual relations with her.

Actually, there is a striking resemblance between the story of the conception of Jesus as it is described in the Bible and the story contained in the Qur’an. Read both

of them, and you will see that the two versions agree:

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and

she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold, the bonds lave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.’” (Luke 1:26-38)

Now look at the account of the same event as it is told in the Qur’an:

“Recount in the Book how Mary withdrew from her people to an eastern place and kept herself in seclusion from them. We sent her Our angel, who presented himself to her as a full-grown human being. When she saw him, she said, ‘I seek refuge in the compassionate God from you; [do not come near] if you fear the Lord.’ ‘I am only the messenger of your Lord,’ he replied. ‘I shall bestow upon you the gift of a son endowed with purity.’ She said, ‘How can I have a son when no man has touched me; and neither have I been unchaste?’ [The angel] replied, ‘So shall it be; your Lord says, “This is easy for Me; and We shall make him a sign to people and a blessing, from Us. This has been decreed.”’” (Surah 19 – *Maryam*, ayat 16-21).

In both accounts, then, it is emphasized that Mary would bear a child while still a

virgin, and that this would take place by the power of God, who is fully capable of doing even what appears impossible to men.

“He Begets Not, Nor Is He Begotten”

According to the Qur’an, Allah “begets not, nor is He begotten” (Surah 112 – *Al-Ikhlās*, aya 3). It is true that certain English translations of the Bible use the word “begotten” or “only begotten” in speaking of Jesus, but let us take the time to understand what the Bible is saying before we conclude that it is teaching on this point what the Qur’an categorically denies. As we have just seen, the Bible does not at all say that God had sexual relations with Mary and that it was in this way that he “begat” a son. Absolutely not. That is not what Christians believe. No, we are dealing with what is called in literature an example of “anthropomorphism.” This long word just means that in speaking of God we use expressions that attribute to Him, in a figurative way, a human form or human activities. Both the Bible and the Qur’an use this kind of language. For example, one might speak of the hand of God (Surah 48 – *Al-Fath*, aya 10), of the face of God (Surah 55 – *ar-Rahman*, ayat 26,27), of the eye of God (Surah 20 – *Ta-Ha*, ayat 38,29; Surah 11 – *Hud*, aya 37); we speak of Him as

being seated on a throne (Surah 57 – *al-Hadid*, aya 4), or as a warrior wielding a sword. In speaking of the Christ, it is written that He was begotten of God. We don't take all this language literally, but we do look for the ideas that these familiar expressions are intended to communicate.

So what idea would the Bible be expressing by the word “begotten”? It depends on the context. Let's take two passages where we find it. In Acts 13 Paul was preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. He was trying to convince his hearers that the resurrection of Jesus really was the fulfillment of the promises concerning the posterity of David, the Messiah. He quotes the second Psalm, a passage which had been used at the coronation of the kings of Israel. In this passage God says to the king, “Today I have begotten you.” The king obviously existed before his coronation. He had been begotten in the physical sense by his biological father. The word “begotten” in this passage did not refer to the birth of the king but to the fact that God recognized the new king as, in some way—figuratively, of course—his special “son.” The Jews believed this passage was partially fulfilled in the kings who followed each other on the throne of David, but that it

would be fulfilled in a deeper sense by the Messiah. Paul said that Jesus was “begotten” by his resurrection. This is therefore referring neither to a time before the foundation of the world when Jesus supposedly began to exist, nor to his physical birth at Bethlehem.

In other passages we find the expression “only begotten of the Father,” or according to the French translation, the “unique Son” (John 1:14; 3:16). The Greek word in these passages is the word *monogenes*, composed of “*monos*” (only, unique), and “*genos*” (kind, type), and meaning “one of a kind.” Some translations, following the Latin translation known as the Vulgate, translated this word as “only begotten,” but the word had long before lost its strictly physical meaning—the word simply speaks of the uniqueness of Christ as the only Son of God. Contrary to what Muslims think, God has deigned to call men and women his “children” to testify to the great love that He has for them. The fact that Jesus is called the “only begotten Son” clearly distinguishes him from these other “children.” The closest English equivalent to the Greek *monogenes* would be the expression “one of a kind.”

There are other ideas that we need to consider regarding the nature of God and

the relationship that exists between God and Jesus Christ, but hopefully we have corrected at least some misconceptions about what Christians believe: they do not believe in three gods; they do not believe that God had sexual relations with Mary, they do not believe that Jesus was “begotten” literally or physically.

Can God Have a Son?

There are ideas which some people oppose so strongly that they are outraged when these subjects are even raised. All it takes to set off the powder keg is to use certain phrases—they explode with anger and refuse to listen to another word. We see this kind of reaction among Jews in the first century. For example, in the book of Acts, in the New Testament, a disciple of Jesus named Stephen was preaching to a Jewish crowd. In his speech, he reminded these Jews that their fathers had often opposed the messengers sent to them by God, going so far as to commit murder in order to silence the prophets. When Steven pursued that idea by pointing out to his hearers that they had done the same thing in regard to Jesus, the Messiah, the Bible says that “they began gnashing their teeth at him.” When

he continued speaking to them about the glory of Jesus, “they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him” (Acts 7:54-58).

Later on, in the same city of Jerusalem, the apostle Paul preached to a different Jewish crowd. His audience listened with attention while he told them of his conversion. But when he said that God had sent him to preach the word to the pagan nations, everything changed. The Bible says, “They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!’... They were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air” (Acts 22:22,23). Such hostility toward the idea that God was concerned, not just for the Jews, but for all other people groups, as well! In reality, Paul could have shown them by their own Scriptures that God had always been interested in all of his creatures and had even announced ahead of time that the other nations would be blessed by Him. By their exaggerated reaction, the people in that crowd deprived themselves of the truth. They did not even have the op-

portunity to hear the arguments that Paul would have set forth to help them see whether or not they were wrong.

I ask you, my readers, to prove more noble and more reasonable than were those Jews so long ago. Do not get angry as soon as you read the expression that we want to explain, the words, “Son of God.” Follow carefully in order to be able to correctly evaluate what I am going to say.

The Word “Son”

The Qur’an says in Surah 2 – *Al-Baqarah*, Aya 116, “And they say: Allah has begotten a son. Glory be to Him! Nay!” The word for son in this passage is the word *walad*, which is almost always used in the physical sense. The fact that the Qur’an, in denying that Jesus is the Son of God, usually specifies that this would be impossible since God does not have a wife, shows that it is speaking of physically being a son. Christians would never say that Jesus was physically the Son of God; we have already clearly stated that the conception of Jesus, though miraculous, was not at all the result of sexual relations between God and Mary. The very thought is atrocious, and we reject it in the strongest terms. But as it happens, there is another Arabic word for “son,” the word *ibn*,

and this word is sometimes used figuratively. For example, in Surah 2 – *Al-Baqarah*, aya 177, we find the term *ibn-al-sabeel*, literally, “son of the road,” generally translated as “traveler.” Of course, no one thinks that the road literally had a child! It did not have sexual relations with anyone; it did not give birth. This is nothing more than a way of suggesting the close relationship between a person who travels a lot and the road that he travels on. In the same way, Egyptians are referred to as “the sons of the Nile,” without anyone drawing the conclusion that the river literally gave birth to human beings.

The Bible, also, uses the word “son” in a figurative or spiritual sense. It speaks, for example, of “Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement)” (Acts 4:36). This man apparently had the habit of encouraging or exhorting others; it was part of his character. The Bible calls people who disobey God “sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6); those who live righteously are called “children of light” (1 Thessalonians 5:5). In John 8:44, Jesus was speaking to unbelieving and hypocritical Jews. He told them, “You be-

long to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." The devil did not physically "beget" these wicked Jews, nor is he physically "the father of lies". To call someone the son or child of a person or thing is to attribute a character trait, an activity or a nature to one being described. It is not necessarily referring to his or her biological origin.

"Son of Man"

When Jesus spoke of himself, the expression he used the most was "the Son of Man." According to what we have just seen, Jesus was indicating in this way that he had taken on himself something of the nature of a man. Like every man, he lived in a physical body—which means that he could become tired, hungry or thirsty, he could be seen and touched physically by people, and yes, he could die. He was truly a man.

But this expression (Son of Man), meant something more than that for a Jew. Take for example the vision that the prophet Daniel saw more than five hundred years before Christ:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”
(Daniel 7:13,14)

In identifying himself as the Son of Man, Jesus was announcing that he was a very special person, someone of whom the prophets of God had spoken and for whom the people had been waiting a very long time. In addition, he was identifying himself as the one who, according to the prophecy, would be clothed with universal authority. In spite of his humble appearance, unbelievable glory lay ahead of him.

“Son of God”

Jesus, however, also accepted another title, still more surprising, not to say shocking. Whether we like it or not, this prophet of the Almighty God allowed himself to be called “Son of God.” For example, Jesus asked his disciples one day what they believed about him. “Simon Peter answered:

‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” Instead of rebuking him for having said something wrong, Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17,18). Right after that, however, we read that he “warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.” Another time, after Jesus had healed a man born blind, he asked him: “‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.’ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him” (John 9.35-38).

In calling himself Son of Man, Jesus recognized, of course, that he possessed the traits of a man. When Jesus called himself the Son of God, he was indicating that he also possessed traits of God. He was, for example, without sin. The Qur’an says in Surah 19 – *Maryam*, aya 19 that Jesus was pure. According to Hebrews 4:15, he “has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” According to Mark 2:10 he also had the authority to forgive men’s sins. John 2:25 says, “He did not need anyone to testify concerning man,

for He Himself knew what was in man.” To determine in what other ways and to what extent Jesus had both the nature of God and the nature of man, one must read everything that God says about him in the Gospel. Please understand before you begin, however, that the Bible does not use the expression “Son of God” in a literal, that is, a physical sense. Jesus was not the Son of God in the same way that I am the son of my human father.

What This Meant According to the Jews

Jesus allowed himself to be called Son of God; yet, in general, he did not publicly say that he was the Son of God. As is the case today, some people reacted violently. In John 5:17,18 we read, “He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.’ For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” (Notice that they did not think that Jesus was claiming that God had had sexual relations with his mother and had thus begotten him biologically. No, they were angry because they thought Jesus was claiming to have the same nature as God and to be equal with Him.)

When the Jewish leaders formally condemned Jesus to death, it was for the same reason. “The high priest said to Him, ‘I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?’ They answered, ‘He deserves death!’” (Matthew 26:63-66). They made no effort to determine by the prophecies if Jesus was right to say that he was the Christ. They had decided in advance that he could not be.

When Jesus had been hung on the cross, passersby mocked him, saying “He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:43). We see here another meaning of the expression “Son of God”: Jesus was claiming to enjoy a special relationship with the heavenly Father. In John 8:29 he said, “He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things

that are pleasing to Him.” The night before his death, he prayed, “You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Jesus had a relationship with God which was superior to that of anyone else in the world, like that of an only son, an obedient and beloved son, with his father.

A Complex God

The Oneness of God

We have already quoted several Bible verses that clearly state the oneness of God; there is just one God. But there are different kinds of oneness. Islam teaches a simple kind of oneness in God. Christianity teaches that God is characterized by a complex oneness. Muslims use the word *Al-Tawhid* to speak of the kind of unity they have in mind; some Christians use the word Trinity, which means a triad, to evoke the complex unity of a single God who exists eternally in three persons. It is interesting to remark that the word *Al-Tawhid* is not found in the Qur’an, just as the word Trinity does not appear in the Bible, so let us not allow these words to disturb us or obscure what God has revealed about Himself.

The one God, can He be one and at the same time be three persons? It is true that

such an idea may seem impossible to grasp, but should we be surprised if man has trouble comprehending the Supreme Being who is infinitely greater than we are in every way? Whether it be difficult or not to understand, let us try to consider certain truths that God has made known about Himself.

We have already emphasized that God says clearly and categorically that he is unique, that there is just one God. This is taught not only in the Qur'an, but in the Torah, by the prophets of the Old Testament, and in the Gospel.

The Eternal Word

A second truth concerns the Word of God. It is written in the Injeel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3). What (or who) is this "Word" John speaks of? Verse 14 of the same chapter makes it rather clear: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." The one who was made flesh, who lived among men, and who had the glory of the only Son come from the Fa-

ther, is without any doubt Jesus-Christ. Scripture thus says that the Word, Jesus, already existed at the beginning of all things. He did not begin to exist, he was not created—he was already with God. Besides, verse 3 clearly says that nothing that was created was created without him, that is without Jesus, the Word. Plainly, Jesus is not among those things that were made, since he could not create himself or participate in his own creation. Not being among the things that were created, he is therefore eternal.

It is worth pointing out that according to most Muslims, Surah 85 – *Al-Buruj*, ayat 21,22, which speaks of “a glorious Qur’an, written on a preserved Tablet,” means that the Qur’an was not created and that it has existed with Allah from the beginning. In the time of Muhammad, this eternal word took the form a book, the Qur’an. Can one not ask, “If the Word of God, the Qur’an, is eternal and was not created, how is it a problem to say that Jesus, the Word of God, is eternal and was not created?” Is it just a coincidence that even the Qur’an, in Surah 4 – *An-Nisa*, aya 171, calls Jesus “a messenger of God and His word, conveyed to Mary, a spirit from Him.” According to the Qur’an,

Jesus is the Word of God. The Word of God has existed from eternity.

At the risk of getting too philosophical, consider this dilemma: most Muslims agree that the Word of God is eternal but it is not a part of Allah. If they say that the Word was not created, then two things exist eternally, and such a statement constitutes, according to Islam, an intolerable blasphemy. If, on the other hand, they say that the Word of God was created, it is as if they were saying there was a time when Allah did not speak or could not speak. As soon as He spoke, He would have changed from one state to another, an intolerable violation of the Muslim doctrine of the immutability of God, the doctrine which teaches that God does not change. If one recognizes that the Word, which was made flesh in the person of Jesus, has always existed and that the Word is a part of God, one of the three divine persons who together form a single God, then the dilemma is resolved. There is nothing apart from God that has always existed, and God has not changed at any time in history.

The Word Was With God, and the Word Was God?!

We have just mentioned the three divine persons who form a single God. (Let

us point out first that these three persons are NOT God, Jesus and Mary. Even if the Qur'an evokes this idea in Surah 5, aya 116, perhaps because some heretics in the time of Muhammad did believe this, Mary is not eternal, is not a divine person, is not to be worshipped, and is not part of what people call the Trinity.) Just as Islam speaks of the 99 perfect names of Allah, the Bible uses more than one term for the three persons that make up the Godhead. There is the one we call the Father, God the Father or simply God; there is the one we the Son, God the Son, the Word, the Lamb or the Christ; and there is one we call the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Comforter or the Holy Spirit. When we read in the gospel that "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), the word "God" in the first part refers to God the Father; the Word was not God the Father but was "with" God the Father. In the second part, the word "God" means Deity, the Supreme Being: the Word was God. As the Father is God, the Word is God, also.

Jesus Is God?

Several passages show us that Jesus, the Word, is God: the Bible says of Christ in Colossians 2:9, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The apostle also

says that Christians should have the same attitudes as Jesus Christ, “who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6,7). So, before becoming a man, Jesus existed in the form of God and was equal to God the Father. However, he did not cling to this equality with God. He emptied Himself for a time in order to become a man like us so that he could save us.

But in addition to the direct statements affirming the divinity of Jesus, there are also prophecies in the Old Testament which, placed together with their fulfillment in the New Testament, clearly teach that Jesus is God.

In Isaiah 40:3, we have this messianic prophecy: “A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.’” We notice here that the voice cries that a highway must be prepared before the Lord. The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Matthew 3:3, where it is said that the voice which was to cry out these things was that of John the Baptist. Now, for whom was John the Baptist to prepare the way? For Jesus Christ.

Consider the prophecy of Malachi 3:1: “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me...’ says the Lord of hosts.” This messenger did come, and He cleared the way before... Jesus Christ.

Zachariah 11:13 attributes these words to the Lord: “Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.” Zachariah continues, “So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.” God here clearly identifies himself with the one who would be betrayed and sold at the price of 30 pieces of silver, that money that was thrown in the temple by Judas and eventually served to purchase the potter’s field according to Matthew 27:8-10. The one who was sold for 30 pieces of silver was none other than Jesus Christ. This prophecy cannot be understood if the Messiah was not God on earth.

Jesus Is Not the Father

Now here is something to complicate the picture a little: the same Bible which says Jesus is God also clearly teaches that Jesus is distinct from God the Father. Jesus is God; the Father is God; but Jesus is not the Father. It is not true, as some people think,

that “Father” is simply one of Jesus’s title, a role that he plays or a mode in which he manifests himself to men. The Father and the Son are two distinct persons, and there is personal interaction between them. Consider the following passages:

“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son... I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:22,30). “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him” (John 5:43). “So Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him’” (John 7:16-18). “Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, “He is our God”’” (John 8:54). “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they

may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Obviously, none of these passages would make any sense if Jesus and the heavenly Father were the same person.

We will more easily understand some passages of scripture if we recognize that the word “God” often refers to the Father alone. In John 16:27,28, for example, the two terms are used interchangeably. “... You have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” In other passages, the word “God” has a broader meaning of “the Divine Being” or “Deity” and includes both the Father and the Son. In 2 John 9, the apostle writes, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.”

We have already spoken of the fact that Christians believe in just one God, but that His nature is more complex than the Muslim conception of God. He is one God, but this one God exists eternally in three persons. You and I are complex beings. Each of us has a physical body as well as a soul and a

spirit. A person having a body and a spirit is not two different people; these are simply two distinct elements that compose his being. Man is not as simple as he appears; he is physically complex, his body having numerous components. He is spiritually complex, his spirit and his soul being difficult to define and impossible to measure. Our limited intelligence has trouble understanding everything there is to know about human beings. We should not be amazed that the infinite God is more complex than we are, more difficult to grasp. So let us be humble when we speak of Him.

What we have said here does not at all mean that there are three gods, whereas we had thought there was only one. Not at all! Instead we have learned that the one God is more complex than what we could imagine. If we have trouble fully grasping what He has revealed about Himself, let us not be surprised. He is so great, and we are so small; so let us be humble enough to accept that what He has revealed is true, and do our best to understand better.

The Danger of Trying to Limit God

Islam has set for itself the noble task of always defending the honor of God. Can one

find a greater proclamation of the grandeur of God than the one that we find in Surah 2 of the Qur'an – *Al-Baqarah*, aya 255 (known as the *Aya ul Kursee*):

“God: there is no deity save Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belong whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all that is before them and all that is behind them. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; and their upholding does not weary Him. He is the Sublime, the Almighty One!”

We Christians totally agree with this high conception of the almighty God. He is infinitely greater than all that we can conceive.

Unfortunately, in wanting to defend the honor of and proclaim the glory and the majesty of God, people sometimes end up limiting God in a way. On one hand, they reject what God Himself has revealed about Himself. On the other hand, they presumptuously say things about God that we cannot know. He alone can make known to us His true nature.

“God Could Not Become a Man”

We all know that God is powerful, majestic and glorious, beyond what we can imagine. He is completely holy, righteous and pure. His royal authority is absolute, and his knowledge is perfect. When we try to take into account all His greatness, we may find that it would be unreasonable, even unthinkable, that He might divest Himself and humble Himself in order to take on the form of a contemptible, mortal human being, in order to live in the midst of sinners, in order even to suffer for them. It is not fitting for the Supreme Being to lay aside His dignity and humble Himself in this way. But that is not all. According to what Christians say, God supposedly allowed wicked men to mistreat Him, unjustly, of course. They supposedly tortured and finally killed Him. We may naturally conclude that this is simply not possible.

We believe, however, that since God is totally free, sovereign and all-powerful, He can do whatever He wants to do. The only thing that would be impossible for God is to sin. The Bible says, for example, that it is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). It would be contrary to the nature of the God of truth to engage in lying. It is the devil

who is “the father of lies” (John 8:44). God remains true to His own holy, righteous and faithful character. “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:12,13). Let God be praised, for He does not sin and He cannot sin; the reason is that it is not in His nature to want to sin.

But it is not a sin to be a man. Why should one say, then, that God could not become a man if He chose to? If God the Son became a human, He would have to accept the limitations of existence in a human body, but He would not stop being God. According to Surah 27 – *Am-Naml*, aya 8, when Moses came near to the burning bush in the desert of Sinai, “he was called: ‘Blessed is whosoever is in the fire, and whosoever is round about it! And glorified be Allaah, the Lord of the “Alameen (mankind, jinns and all that exists)”’” (translation of Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan). If Allah condescended to manifest Himself in a fire, can He not manifest Himself in the form of a man; a human being is, after all, greater than a fire. Notice that the Qur’an specifies, and rightly so, that even if Allah was in the fire of the burning bush, he continued to be all around it and the

Lord of the universe. Similarly, though God was in the body of Jesus, He was at the same time in every place and still the Lord of all that exists. Even when the body of Jesus was in the tomb, God still reigned and still filled the universe.

What we must understand is that God can do whatever He wants to do. The question, then, is not “How could God become a human being?”, but

“Why Would God Decide to Become a Human Being?”

Even more, why would God accept to suffer unjustly and be put to death to save humanity. We can respond with a single word: love.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5.8)

“We love Him because He first loved us.” (1 John 4.19)

If we do not understand the love of God, it may be because our own great pride prevents us from grasping the divine love which is described this way in 1 Corinthians 13:4,5: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud... it is not self-seeking.”

On the night Jesus was arrested, he was alone with his twelve apostles. For three years he had taught his disciples and shown them how to renounce one's own interests in order to serve others. According to Luke 22:24-26, however, his disciples had still not learned the lesson. This passage tells us:

“Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called “benefactors.” But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.’”

Then Jesus did something to teach his disciples once again this important lesson. In John 13:1-5 we read:

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper... Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got

up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.”

Washing others’ feet was a sign of hospitality and love, but it was a very humble task, generally carried out by the least important person, the one with the lowest rank. Among the disciples of Jesus who were present that night, no one had thought of rendering this lowly service to his comrades. But Jesus himself, the Master, humbled himself in order to do it for his disciples. The reading in John 13 goes on:

“So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, ‘Lord, do You wash my feet?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Never shall You wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’ Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.’ Jesus said to him, ‘He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.’”

We can certainly understand Peter’s reaction. It did not seem normal for the Lord to do for his disciples that which was consid-

ered to be the job of a slave. John the Baptist had said that he was not even worthy to be the slave of Jesus, not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals in order to wash his feet. If he was unworthy to serve Jesus, he was even more unworthy to have Jesus serve him. That was Peter's feeling, as well. For him, as for men today, a great person, a very important man, should not have to do very humble jobs. Others should be the ones to serve such a person. That is one of the rights that come with high position. How much more this would be true if we were speaking of God.

The first verses of the chapter reminded us that Jesus was very conscious of his position as Son of God. He knew that he would soon be glorified, that he had come from God the Father and that he was going back to God the Father, who had put all things into his hands. But he did not cling to his rights. As Philippians 2:7,8 tells us, He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." For Jesus, there was no conflict between greatness and service to others. He

said in Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

When Peter wanted to refuse having his feet washed by Jesus, the Lord told him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (John 13:8). Next, he spoke, not of having clean feet, but of being entirely pure. He was not thinking of Peter’s feet but of his soul. Jesus washes his disciples and makes them pure by his blood, by his death on the cross. Washing his disciples’ feet might seem too humiliating for him to stoop to doing it, but being arrested, insulted, beaten and nailed to a cross would be a hundred times more humiliating. Yet Jesus was ready to endure all of that. Whoever is unwilling to let Jesus suffer in his or her place can never be purified of sin. There is no other solution. If Peter could not accept Jesus washing his feet, how could Peter accept Jesus dying for him? We must allow ourselves to be served, we must allow ourselves to be saved by Jesus, who is the Son of God.

A fundamental teaching of Christianity is that the greatest thing a person can do is to serve others, even to the point of dying for them. This selflessness, this humility, this

self-denying love, is at the heart of God. He is so great that he humbled Himself in order to be a servant. The Creator of the universe showed his greatness in humility, service and love.

Conclusion

We have already said this: in their desire to defend the honor of God and to proclaim His majesty, men end up limiting God in a way. He alone can make known to us His true nature.

It is for Him to tell us if His oneness is simple or complex. We must not be astonished to find out that the infinite God is more complex than we are, more difficult to comprehend. So let us show some humility when we speak of Him.

We must also be very cautious about declaring what God cannot be or do. Are we, with our limited intelligence and knowledge, qualified to be the judges of what the Almighty can do? Who are we to say that God cannot, if He so desires, take on the form of a man? Could we not end up being guilty of blasphemy? God is free to reveal Himself as He is, beyond what man understands or imagines. As the Qur'an says, "He knows all that is before them and all that is

behind them. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills.”

Ibn DAOUDA

For many other studies on what God has revealed to us through his prophets, visit:

www.RevealedToUs.com

French World Outreach

4806 Trousdale Dr. – Nashville, TN 37220 – USA

www.frenchworldoutreach.org

Printed in the United States – © All rights reserved

M-11-EN