

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 Father, 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 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.