

Title: 1. Expound on the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ as God Incarnate. You must show you are familiar with the concepts and issues regarding Jesus as human and divine. State the importance and significance of this doctrine in our Malaysian context. (3000 words)

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DECLARATION

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

Introduction:

Among the doctrines affirmed by orthodox Christians, perhaps none invites as much examination as the Incarnation – that God took on the full nature of man, yet did not cease to fully be God. The Incarnation is intertwined with another perplexing doctrine – that of the Trinity, for it was the second member of the Godhead who took on human flesh.

Yet Christians through the ages have never given up wrestling with these mysteries – for they are derived from the very pages of holy Scripture itself. Not only that, but as we shall see they are both crucial to the central event of all history – Christ’s Atonement on the cross.

The Necessity of Both-And

The history of humanity is one of repeated failure – from disobedience in the Garden, to rebellion at Babel, to unfaithfulness of chosen Israel. For YHWH to leave frail humanity to its own devices would be to guarantee our self-destruction.

Yet omniscient YHWH (Isaiah 46:8-11) knew that fallible mankind wouldn’t uphold their responsibilities – He was already *personally* prepared for this shortcoming. In the giving of the Ten Commandments, YHWH had both copies (Exodus 32:15) of the ‘contract’ placed within the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:16). Copies of such agreements were usually kept in the presence of the respective gods of each side – acting as witnesses, guarantors and enforcers of the compact.¹ Thus by holding both stone tablets, YHWH indicated that *He Himself* would uphold both ends of the Sinai Covenant.

Return further, to the promise YHWH made to Abraham (Genesis 15). By right, Abraham should have sworn upon himself and his descendants the bloody fate of the slaughtered animals (Jeremiah 34:18) if they broke the bargain – but Abraham did *not* step through the blood. Instead,

¹ For example: “A duplicate of this tablet has been deposited before the sun-goddess of Arinna, because the sun-goddess of Arinna regulates kingship and queenship. In Mitanni land [a duplicate] has been deposited before Teshub, the lord of the [sanctuary] of Kahat. At regular [intervals] shall they read it in the presence of the king of Mitanni land and in the presence of the sons of the Hurri country.” Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Laresen, *No. 56A Shattiwaza of Mitanni & Suppiluliuma I of Hatti*, in *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 2012), 1:391. Quoted in Carmen Imes, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (IL/USA: IVP Academic, 2019), Perlego Edition, Chapter 2, Written In Stone: Why Two Tablets?

supernatural fire passed between the gory pieces twice (Genesis 15:17) – signifying that YHWH and *YHWH²* guaranteed the promises.

For even if His people are unfaithful, God remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:11-13) – His ways are not ours (Isaiah 55:8-9); His word is unbreakable (Numbers 23:19, Judges 2:1, Psalm 89:30-35); His *chesed³* is everlasting (Psalm 138:8). Only YHWH Himself had the perfection needed to fulfill both ends of the Covenant.

YHWH would not, however, accomplish His mighty works *absent* the participation of humans – the very recipients of the Covenant promises. To replace humanity would signify not just their total failure, but also the failure of YHWH who had chosen humanity as His stewards: “An Edenic realization without human participation would mean that the nachash [Serpent] would then have won a victory— the abolition of humankind as God’s image. God need not change his plan in response to human weakness ... He need not remove humanity ... to accomplish what he wants.”⁴

YHWH’s promise was to the human Abraham, His Covenant with Abraham’s descendants, His righteous branch from David’s offspring (Jeremiah 33:14-22) – and YHWH would ensure that the Covenant is fulfilled through humanity:

In the trajectory of Biblical theology ... one of the necessities of the Incarnation is because we don’t have humans capable of fulfilling any of the covenants they entered into with the God of Israel. But those covenants were made with people, they were made with Israelites. And so, for those covenants to be repaired and resolved and fulfilled, you need a human being to fulfil them. Well, the demands of perfection – that’s impossible, so you need God to become a man to fulfil those things. Look at the Davidic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, call these terms the Law. So the Incarnation is, in an instance like that, necessary to sort of

² My phrasing here using ‘two YHWHs’ is intentional to draw the reader’s attention – see the explanation under the section Two Powers in Heaven further down this essay.

³ A term usually translated ‘lovingkindness’, but which I prefer to render ‘believing loyalty’; see: Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham/USA: Lexham Press, 2015), 164, 170.

⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *Facebook* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.facebook.com/378543178874562/posts/pfbid028mUentRqCDTyABKWD7iaJhwDxuzuyf3QA2LLU8TrE7Aw2KtmEbzDKZR3u3W7wql>

clean up the fulfilment of the covenants of the Old Testament. ... It demands that the Messiah be a human and also be this second Yahweh figure.⁵

Hence despite the need for perfect obedience, the fulfiller still had to be human – surely an impossible combination? It was thusly that the mystery of the Christ would eventually be revealed – a representative of humanity from humanity itself, yet able to perfectly fulfil the Law by His divine spark... Fully God and fully man.

For if Christ were only a man, then not only would He eventually fail like every other human – His substitutionary atonement as the suffering servant (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12) would be as finite as that of one mere mortal. It would be insufficient to reconcile the whole world (John 3:16) and all creation (Colossian 1:19-20) – past and present and future (Hebrews 7:27, 1 Peter 3:18).

Conversely, if the Christ were *not* a human, then it would not be a proper fulfilment of the human end of Atonement and Covenant – He would not be the first among many brothers (Romans 8:29, Hebrews 2:10-18), nor the greater Adam (Romans 5:18-19, 1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

And thus Christ had to be *both* fully God *and* fully man. But this of course leads to the question: How do we reconcile the apparent conundrums that arise? How can someone be fully God, yet also fully man – doesn't the term 'fully' exclude anything else? How can God in a sense be one, and yet also in another sense be more than one – without negating monotheism?

Narrow is the Way

Across the centuries of Christian thought, many theories have been proposed in order to more fully grasp the workings of the Incarnation. In attempting to tread the fine line between fully God and fully man, a careful balance must always be struck – both premises must ring true, and neither may be made false. It is thus easier to determine when a particular theory has teetered too far over the brink, than it is to say that any theory is certainly correct.

⁵ Michael S. Heiser, “Dr. Michael Heiser on Old Testament Binitarianism - trinities 098”, *khanpadawan* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p13AMS6-BfQ> [39:28 to 40:50].

Indeed, when the subject matter is YHWH “in his uniqueness and incomparability”⁶, any attempts to comprehend the infinite God by appealing to the created world are bound to fall short in some respect. The best way to approach the mystery of the Incarnation, therefore, is by way of *apophatic theology* – a process of negation to weed out inapt analogies⁷. Anything that detracts from fully God or fully man – or which contradicts clear Scripture – is inapt to fulfil our criteria.

Hence, we know that Christ is *not* merely human – that would be the view of atheism or Islam, contradicting the many passages that describe Christ as the very same Redeemer God of Israel (e.g. Corinthians 10:1-4 & 9, Jude 5 ESV).

At the opposite end, Christ is *not* merely a projection of the unipersonal God – that would be Modalism, and result in every conversation between the members of the Trinity being play-acting at best or schizophrenia at worst.

Christ’s human form was *not* a mere illusion – which the Docetism of the flesh-deriding Gnostics purports. That would negate the passages that portray Christ as true man who experienced hunger (Mark 11:12), tiredness (John 4:6) and pain (Luke 22:44).

Christ is *not* originally a human who was at some point elevated to the status of divine – that would be Adoptionism. *Nor* is Christ a created angel – that would be the belief of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Either view would contradict passages that describe Christ as God eternally preceding all creation (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:2-3).

Upon becoming incarnate, Christ did *not* lose one of the two natures – Monophysitism removing the man, or Nestorianism removing the God. *Neither* did the divine nature abandon the human nature to death on the cross resulting in a finite sacrifice, as in Ebionism. *Nor* did the two natures become indistinct or *too* distinct – Eutychianism’s human nature lost amidst overwhelming divinity, or Apollinarianism’s human body inhabited by a divine mind like some sort of fleshly puppet.

⁶ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 31, 35.

⁷ New World Encyclopedia writers and editors, “Negative Theology (Apophatic Theology)”, *New World Encyclopedia* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Negative_Theology_\(Apophatic_Theology\)](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Negative_Theology_(Apophatic_Theology))

Somehow or other, Christ retained *both* the full nature of God *and* the full nature of man – the orthodox view of Dyophysitism.

Not How – But That It Is So

After all this, we have come full circle: Christ is fully God (John 20:28) and fully man (1 Timothy 2:5), and *how* this is so we know not – only *that it is so*. Looking back at all the centuries of debate over the *how* of the Incarnation, would it not be far easier to simply appeal to the word of God for the answer?

Yet therein lies the conundrum – for while the New Testament spills ample ink in describing Jesus as fully God and fully man, it does not seem to wish to solve the quandary of *how* this could be so. Why didn't its authors feel the need to address such a crucial issue? If only they had provided a detailed explanation about the intricacies of divine multipersonality and dual natures, centuries of disagreement and anathema⁸ could have been avoided!

Yet perhaps the Apostles did not feel any need to explain the Incarnation (or the related issue of the Trinity), because to them it was not a problem to be resolved – it was simply accepted as a given. It would be similar to how every Jew understood that YHWH created all else that exists – there was no need to explain *why* it is true through philosophical reasoning such as the Cosmological Argument⁹. To do so would be preaching to the choir, a waste of time and ink!

But this notion would of course entail that the Incarnation and the Trinity were already accepted in the First Century Jewish context of the New Testament. Jews, accepting Christian doctrines before the time of Christ? Surely an absurd proposition?

⁸ M. E. Williams, “Anathemas of Cyril”, *Encyclopedia.com* (accessed 24-Aug-2022):

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/anathemas-cyril>

⁹ William Lane Craig, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument”, *Reasonable Faith* (accessed 26-Aug-2022):

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-kalam-cosmological-argument>

Two Powers in Heaven

Any orthodox Jewish believer past or present would agree that the Tanakh testifies: “YHWH is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4) and He is incomparable (Isaiah 40:18). However, contrary to modern notions of what ‘the religion of the Jews’ entails, many Jews of the Second Temple period and even earlier affirmed that this one YHWH was at the same time *multipersonal* and able to become *embodied*.

The Old Testament is replete with examples of YHWH taking physical form – He walked audibly in the garden (Genesis 3:8); ate food served by Abraham (Genesis 18:8); wrestled with and hobbled Jacob (Genesis 32:24-32 cross referenced with Hosea 12:3-5); and was reckoned as human on multiple occasions (Genesis 18:1-2 & 32:24-25, Joshua 5:13-15, Judges 6:11-24 & 13:1-25).

Not only that, but among YHWH’s many messengers there was one in particular who was uniquely *Himself also* YHWH. This ‘Angel of YHWH’ appeared to Moses in the burning bush and declared Himself YHWH (Exodus 3:2-6); commended Abraham for offering Isaac to Himself (Genesis 22:1-2 & 22:11-12); and identified Himself as the God who appeared to Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:10-22 & 31:11-13).

Yet this Angel of YHWH, while *being* YHWH was also *distinct from* YHWH – for He could be sent by YHWH ahead of the Israelites (Exodus 20:20-21); stand in YHWH’s presence to defend Joshua against the Accuser (Zechariah 3:1-10); and engage in heartfelt conversation with YHWH (Zechariah 1:12-13). Note how these descriptions echo that of Jesus Christ – fully God yet distinct from the Father, sent by the Father to be our Mediator, who often engaged in intimate conversation with the Father, “the only God, who is at the Father’s side” (John 1:18).¹⁰

¹⁰ It is for this reason that many Christians historically and today view the Angel of YHWH as the pre-incarnate Christ. For example, see: Quotes from Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clemens, Origen, The Synod of Antioch, Cyprian, Hilary and Basil; in Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes: Or a View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity, Volume I, Third Edition* (London/UK: John Mason, 1829), 563-564; BibleProject Team, “Angel of the Lord”, *BibleProject* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgmf8bHayXw> [2:30 to 3:40]; and Anthony Rogers, “DEBATE: Is Jesus the Angel of the Lord?”, *Anthony Rogers* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91SEPNv6gdQ> [6:42 to 26:41]

It was through study and contemplation of such passages that the wholly Jewish doctrine of *Two Powers in Heaven*¹¹ was derived – especially those occasions where ‘two Almighty’s seem to appear at once, such as Genesis 19:24¹², Daniel 7:13-14¹³ and the various arrivals of the Angel of YHWH¹⁴. Indeed YHWH was *echad*¹⁵, but that did not preclude the Almighty from at once being everywhere yet also appearing in a localised manner – in burning bush, in tabernacle or temple, or in the form of a human. Is anything too hard for YHWH (Jeremiah 32:37)?

Hence, it was not some bizarre, unheard-of doctrine that YHWH could come to earth in visible human form (as Jesus did), while still being YHWH invisible in heaven (as the Father remained). YHWH the multipersonal and embodied – to many Jews of the Second Temple period, that was a *given* and not an innovation. Rather, what was disputed was the *identity* of this ‘visible YHWH’ – there was rampant speculation that the Second Power was somebody impressive like Melchizedek or Yahoel¹⁶; or Jacob, Adam, Enoch, Moses or Michael¹⁷.

What was unbelievable to Second Temple Jews was that the Second Power could ever be “the carpenter’s son” (Matthew 13:55) whom they had recently rejected, mocked and crucified – surely foolishness and a stumbling block to any self-respecting Jew (1 Corinthians 1:23)! The High Priest thought as much when he condemned Jesus for blasphemy; Jesus had just quoted Daniel 7:13-14 for

¹¹ For a brief summary of this doctrine, see: Michael S. Heiser, “Michael Heiser - Two Powers of the Godhead”, *Yesod Bible Center* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrY-uAblOeQ> [9:49 to 11:55]; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (N.p.: Brill, 1977), ix; and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (IL/USA: Crossway Books, 2013), 116-118.

¹² Anthony Rogers, “THE “HEAVENLY” & “EARTHLY” YAHWEH: A PROTO-TRINITARIAN INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 19:24 Part I,” in *Our God is Triune: Essays in Biblical Theology*, edited by Michael R. Burgos Jr (N.p.: Church Militant Publications, 2018), 34-76.

¹³ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 35-36.

¹⁴ Michael R. Burgos Jr, “JEWISH PROTO-TRINITARIANISM,” in *Our God is Triune: Essays in Biblical Theology* (N.p.: Church Militant Publications, 2018), 106-120.

¹⁵ It is telling that the term used in Deuteronomy 6:4 signifies composite one, rather than absolute one; see for example Genesis 1:5 & 2:24 at: Bible Hub, “259. echad”, *Bible Hub* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/259.htm>

¹⁶ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature” (Ph.D Thesis, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, 2004), 20-21 (28-29 of PDF). Available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁷ Michael S. Heiser, “Jesus Christ and the Old Testament: Holy Trinity- Michael S. Heiser”, *HaibaneXIII* (accessed 30-Aug-2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sMQa78fY3Y> [7:18 to 15:05])

Himself, making Himself the divine Son of Man¹⁸ – one of the Two Powers in Heaven¹⁹ as contemporary rabbis recognized of this passage.

As Michael Heiser points out: “... it’s amazing how first-century Jews could embrace Jesus as Yahweh and not feel as if they were betraying the God of Israel. In fact, these same Jews were willing to die instead of worshiping the gods of the Greeks and the Romans.”²⁰ Alister McGrath similarly notes: “Within the Jewish context in which the first Christians operated, it was God and God alone who was to be worshiped. Paul warned the Christians at Rome that there was a constant danger that humans would worship creatures, when they ought to be worshipping their creator (Romans 1:23). Yet the early Christian church worshipped Christ as God—a practise which is clearly reflected even in the New Testament.”²¹

But if Jesus were indeed the very God of Israel, then not only is it permissible – it is *expected* that devout Jews loyal to YHWH would embrace the teachings of Jesus and worship Him, for this man was also YHWH incarnate: “Divine plurality is not a denial of monotheism. There’s a reason why a Jew who loved God in the first century could be willing to be put to death rather than say ‘Caesar is god’ and then in the next breath say ‘I’m going to pray to Jesus’ and not feel at all like he violated monotheism.”²²

This is therefore why the New Testament authors spilled no ink explaining *how* it was possible that YHWH could be one, and yet more than one – invisible in heaven, yet at the same time embodied on earth. Why convince the reader of something they already affirmed? Instead, the Apostles’ emphasis was on arguing forcefully *that it is so* – that Jesus is God in the flesh. And not

¹⁸ To the high priest, there was no ambiguity that Jesus was claiming divinity – he viewed Jesus’ words as clear blasphemy. In the Old Testament, the one who rides the clouds/heavens appears four other times apart from Daniel 7:13-14, and is clearly YHWH in each – Deuteronomy 33:26, Psalm 68:33 & 104:3, Isaiah 19:1. Additionally, ‘cloud rider’ was a well-known appellation of the pagan deity Baal which was polemically coopted for the one true God; see: James S. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (Edinburgh/UK: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018), Perlego Edition, 86-88.

¹⁹ This passage with its two divine figures worked handily as a prooftext for the aforementioned ‘Two Powers in Heaven’ belief, hence after the rise of Christianity the rabbis took pains to steer Jews away from such ‘heretical’ interpretation. See: Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 33-36.

²⁰ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 134.

²¹ Alister McGrath, “Christian Theology: An Introduction,” Oxford: Blackwell (1994): 280, quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (TN/USA: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 144-145.

²² Michael S. Heiser, “The Jewish Trinity - Dr. Michael Heiser - A Walk Through The Old Testament Concerning The Trinity”, *A Victorious Church* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS22MPVFngs> [3:30:49 to 3:31:13]

merely any divinity, but the very YHWH of Israel! This was the necessary argument, for the post-exilic Jews had a renewed emphasis on “fierce monotheism”²³ and Torah observance in order to “win back God’s favour by adherence to the rules of his covenant”.²⁴ If Christ were anything less than YHWH, they would not risk God’s wrath once again by worshipping merely “the man Jesus Christ” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Islam – A God Other Than YHWH

We turn now to our Malaysian context where Islam is the majority religion, given special rights and protections by law. In discussions with Muslims, the coherence between the New and Old Testaments is of especial importance to Christians.

Islam’s denial of the Trinity and Incarnation (Sura 4:171) is used by Muslim apologists to portray their religion as the true successor of the Old Testament. After all, do not those first recipients of God’s revelation – the Jews – similarly affirm that God is unipersonal²⁵ and not one who became a man? It must be Christians who have abandoned the true faith with their ‘pagan’ notions of divine plurality and gods taking on flesh!²⁶

However as I have already demonstrated, Jewish religious beliefs preceding Christianity already accounted YHWH as multipersonal and embodied. There is thus a clear congruity in the view of God from the Old Testament, to Second Temple Jewish beliefs, to the New Testament and Christianity.

The break from ‘true faith’ is instead found in Islam and modern Judaism – which in a sense is repeating the same term twice, for Rabbinic Judaism is heavily influenced by unitarian Islam.

²³ Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (MI/USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 36.

²⁴ David Novak, “Judaism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism/The-Babylonian-Exile#ref35184>

²⁵ “Now Muslims also resemble Jesus in beliefs, unlike the Christians. What do I mean by that? Jesus worshipped a unipersonal God when he was walking the earth. He worshiped a unipersonal God. Not only that, he confirmed the Jewish conception of God which was unipersonal. Jesus was not a trinitarian. Therefore Muslims are not trinitarians, Muslims follow and worship a unipersonal God.” Adnan Rashid, “**Full Debate** Adnan Rashid Vs James White | Who Resembles Jesus Muslims or Christians”, *SCDawah Channel* (accessed 21-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seQLAWQoxY> [14:08 to 14:38]

²⁶ Site Team, “The Trinity in Ancient Paganism”, *Knowingallah.com* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://knowingallah.com/en/articles/the-trinity-in-ancient-paganism/>

Jewish scholar Benjamin Sommer states that Judaism allowed the possibility of an embodied God up until the medieval Jewish theologian Maimonides – who spent about seventy-five chapters of his tome trying to explain away all evidence of such from within Judaism.²⁷ As a major influence on modern Judaism, Maimonides himself was strongly influenced by the surrounding (strictly unitarian) Islamic thinkers.²⁸

Sommers explains: “The only significant theological difference between Judaism and Christianity lies not in the trinity or in the incarnation...”²⁹ In this admission, he is joined by many other Jewish scholars.³⁰ Christians can hence stand firm and with full confidence that their doctrine of God as revealed through the Incarnation has been consistent from the time of Adam to Moses to Christ.

Not only that, if – as the Quran testifies – the Torah and Gospel are Allah’s own words (Sura 3:3) that he will preserve (Sura 18:27), then Islam faces a major quandary. The Old Testament portrays a multipersonal God who can become embodied and delights in directly interacting with His creation. The New Testament further specifies that the second person of the Godhead became incarnate as the human Jesus Christ – fully God and fully man.

This means that either Islam is wrong about God’s very nature and Jesus’ ontology; or Sura 3:3 & 18:27 are wrong and the Torah and Gospel were somehow corrupted to have contrary information inserted. It is self-caused contradictions such as these which give rise to ‘the Islamic dilemma’.³¹

Meanwhile, there is no contradiction for Christians – only confidence that we worship the same unchanging God (Psalm 55:19 & 102:25-27, Malachi 3:6) who appeared in the burning bush as both YHWH and the Angel of YHWH (whereby even Sura 27:8 states that Allah was *in* the fire,

²⁷ Benjamin D. Sommer, “The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel”, *Sentinel Apologetics* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtSm-InTL0A> [4:38 to 9:15]

²⁸ Sommer, “The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel” [1:35:38 to 1:36:56]

²⁹ Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge/UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 136.

³⁰ Scott Thong Yu Yuen, “Modern Jewish Scholars on the Embodied, Multipersonal Old Testament God,” *THE SCOTTTCAST* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://scottthong.wordpress.com/2020/05/29/modern-jewish-scholars-on-the-embodied-multipersonal-old-testament-god/>

³¹ David Wood, “The Quran, the Bible, and the Islamic Dilemma (David Wood)”, *Hatun Tash DCCI Ministries* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNAS0aaViM4>

contradicting orthodox Islam which denies that Allah could enter creation); the same Redeemer who carried out both the first Exodus with Moses and the greater Exodus as Jesus³².

Islam – Without *How*

A Muslim may still object that the specifics of Trinity and Incarnation have not yet been fully explained. To which the Christian may legitimately respond: “*Bila kayf!*” This is not a Hebrew or Greek phrase, but rather an Arabic one – thus, some explanation is in order.

In Islam, the Quran is not just a written manuscript – all earthly copies of the Quran are but copies of the Quran in heaven (Sura 43:3-4 & 85:21-22) which is with Allah (Sura 13:39). This heavenly Quran is the literal word of Allah, uncreated and eternal^{33 34}.

However, this lofty description of the Quran causes an immediate conundrum – for isn’t Allah himself the only uncreated and eternal one (Sura 11:1-2)? Is the Quran in some sense Allah, yet in another sense not-Allah? If the Quran is Allah’s word, would that not definitionally and logically require Allah to come first so that his word can proceed from him – thus making the Quran neither eternal nor uncreated? (For the discerning theologian, one immediately notices the parallels to the Christological puzzle – Jesus as the Word of God, who is at once God yet also somehow *with* God as John 1:1 states.)

This philosophical quandary came to such heated debate that bloody inquisition was waged – the Mihnah³⁵. By the end of the conflict, a resolution for the question of the Quran was finally reached – they resolved to *not* resolve it. *Bila kayf*, which means ‘without asking how’³⁶ – declaring it a

³² Anthony Rogers, “Dr. Dale Tuggy Vs Anthony Rogers: The Book of Mark Teaches Jesus is the One True God? EP 158”, *The Gospel Truth* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6vH3G0kf-c> [9:39 to 24:42]

³³ Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, “Ruling on describing the Quran as the eternal word of Allah”, *Islam Question & Answer* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/100585/ruling-on-describing-the-quran-as-the-eternal-word-of-allah>

³⁴ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “mihnah”, *Britannica* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mihnah>

³⁵ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Mihna”, *Encyclopedia.com* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/mihna>

³⁶ Wikipedia, “Bila Kayf”, *Wikipedia* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bila_Kayf

question not to be further touched, lest the flames be sparked anew³⁷. They dwelt no longer on the *how*, but merely accepted *that it is so*.

Islam's philosophers avoid addressing questions surrounding the nature of the Word of God – hence, is it not hypocritical for Muslims to fault Christians if none of the myriad Christological theories and Trinitarian models are perfect? At least we have tried our human best!

Conclusion

Like unchanging YHWH, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) – and if Christ is YHWH, then one would expect that YHWH has always been a Trinity who sometimes enters His creation in bodily form. And indeed, He is so – as has been revealed through the unanimous testimony of Scripture and comprehended by YHWH's faithful believers through the ages.

Perhaps the true nature of the Trinity and Incarnation are among those secret things that belong to YHWH (Deuteronomy 29:29), something we can never fully comprehend *how* while upon this mortal coil... But we can rest assured that now and forevermore, *it is so*.

Hence let us have confidence that whatever men may say, we put our trust in the One God who is (and always has been) multipersonal and embodied... YHWH who took on flesh to be Immanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:22-23) – Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.

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³⁷ Nabeel Qureshi, "DEBAT Shabir Ally vs Nabeel Qureshi | Seperti Apakah Tuhan itu- Tauhid Atau Tritunggal?", *menjawab muslim* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHK-h_bc-fk [9:54 to 11:08]

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