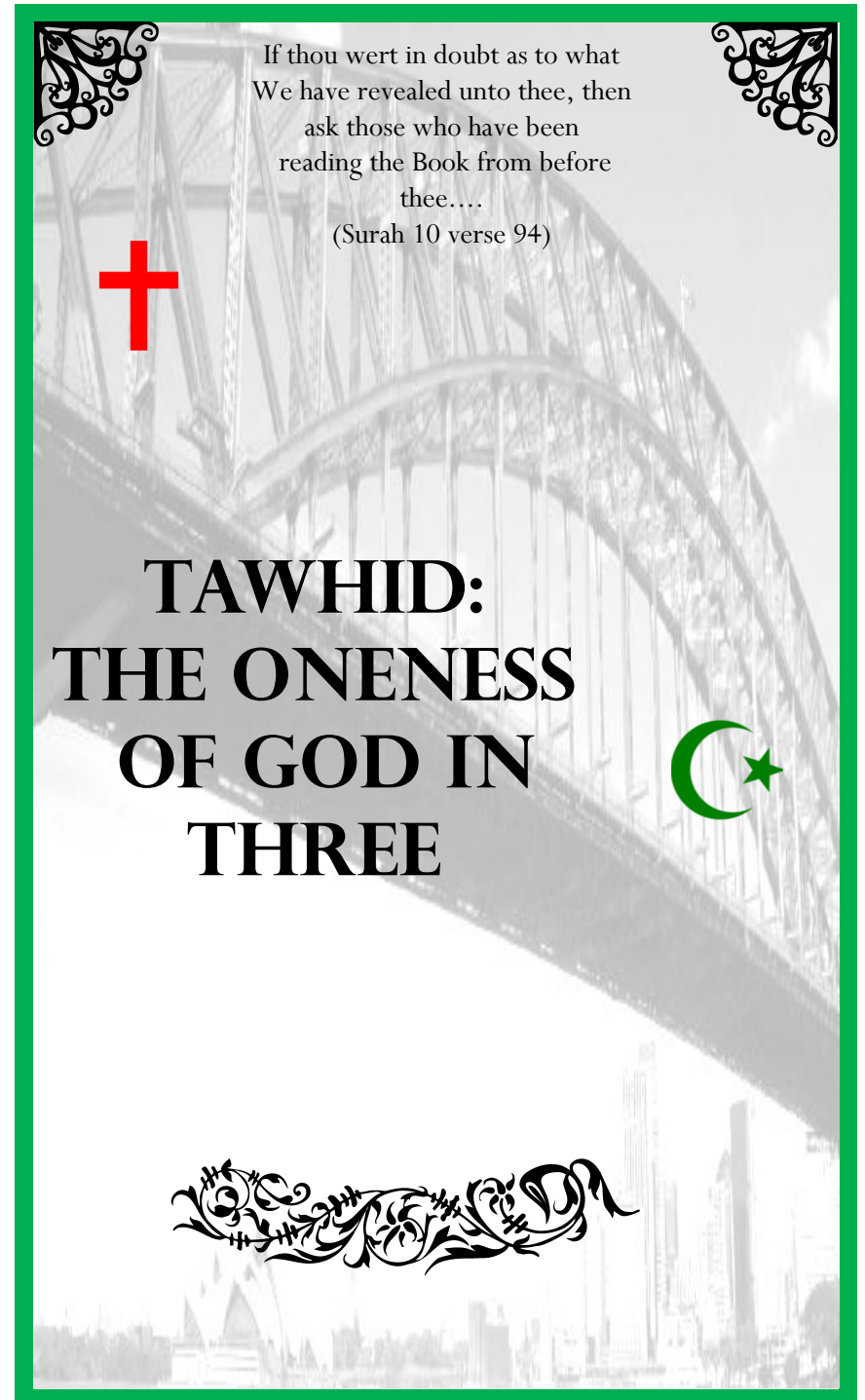




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For more information, for other booklets mentioned, or to discuss any questions, contact:

or



the divinity of Mary, or of any sexual union between God and Mary. Such ideas are blasphemous, and have always been rejected by Christians as heretical.

The challenge is: what is God Almighty like? Is He to be judged by any human logic or is He to be free to reveal Himself as He is, beyond all human understanding or imagination?

As we mentioned earlier, the word Trinity is shorthand for the concept of three and one. It is God the Father who loves and saves the world by God the Son through God the Holy Spirit.

If we say less than this we are guilty of unbelief in the words of the Bible. If we say more than this we are guilty of speculation, putting our own ideas into the Bible. We must not only say 'no' where God has said 'no' but we must also say 'yes' where God has said 'yes'.

We must not be misled by those who have not read or understood the scriptures. Do not be confused by false accusations. Examine for yourself the historical birth, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, following the story on into the Acts of the Apostles. Only then will you be able to judge the Biblical proclamation of one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

... Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature (form) of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself and became obedient to death-
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and
gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow
In heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord
to the glory of God the Father."
(Philippians 2:6-11)

Sura 5:73 They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in trinity, for there is no God except one God."

This is perhaps one of the most inflammatory and misunderstood issues between Muslims and Christians. The goal of this article is to provide better understanding of what Christians believe and their basis for that belief. The thoughts are developed along these lines:

The Muslim View

A Christian Response: Belief in One God

The history of the word - Trinity

Misconceptions and questions

Conclusion

THE MUSLIM VIEW

The first and greatest teaching of Islam is proclaimed by the Shahada: "La Ilaha illa-l-lah, Muhammadun rasulu-l-lah." ("There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah.") It is this very confession, which, once uttered sincerely, makes one a Muslim. This is the phrase all new converts are asked to say upon conversion. For those who take the pilgrimage, or the Hajj, it is requisite that they repeat this phrase with belief before they enter into the holy city of Mecca.

Allah, for a Muslim, is one (Wahid), and has no partners, no equal. In the Qur'an, Sura 28:88, we read: "And cry not unto any other god along with Allah. There is no god save Him." Thus, Allah is totally other, totally distinct, totally unique. He created and maintains the world. Since He is one, no one else can share even an atom of His Divine power and authority. The Qur'an makes it clear that Allah has no son, no father, no relative, and no associates.

An informal survey on the attraction of Islam amongst North American converts to Islam, found that the greatest attraction was this view on Monotheism, or the belief in the oneness of God. Alongside this belief must be included the problems Muslims have with the trinity, the fact that Islam has no intercessor, and the belief that "Each person has a choice in his/her salvation."

In the Hadith, Muhammad is reported to have related the ninety-nine names of Allah, to express some of His attributes. A number of these

are: that He is merciful (that he provides humanity with food, drink, the means of movement, and all the necessities of life), that He is all-powerful (omnipotent), that He is wise and all-knowing (omniscient), and that He is eternal (has no beginning and no end). The belief in the uniqueness of God (Tawhid) is repeated time and again in the Islamic institutions I have visited.

A number of my friends in an American mosque which I frequented questioned me as to why we needed an intercessor, and specifically one who was human? They felt that in giving Jesus deity we had diluted the power of God, in that God would then be dependent on someone else to fulfil His purposes on earth. "Islam," they felt, "corrected that perception, and put God back in His rightful place, where He belonged."

In my conversations, the relationship of Jesus to God caused concern as well. It is often asked, "How could you believe that God would ever let Himself be killed?" and "Where is Jesus now? If he is sitting at the right hand of God, then that would imply that there are two gods, and that Jesus never went back into his original form (one with God)." It seems clear that the belief in the uniqueness of God, and the rejection of Jesus as the Son of God have a strong appeal for Muslims.

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

From the outset, we need to say that perhaps no other category of objection is as important to deny, from the Christian perspective, as the Islamic misconception that Christians believe in and worship three separate gods. This accusation is one issue we must center all our energies on to condemn. It is this "polytheism" which disturbs the Muslims the most. How can God be both THREE and ONE? Is this not illogical? Yet, God is beyond all human reason. Too often humans have tried to reduce God to a level that they could understand for themselves. They try to make God like themselves. We must reject such thought as quite ungodly.

Because God is beyond all human understanding we should expect to find aspects of Him that seem strange to us. Any explanation of God which is fully clear to human understanding must be wrong because He is far more than our little minds can grasp. Therefore to best understand who He is we are dependent on revelation. In other words we must go to our scriptures, to our authority, to best understand who God is. It is

form of trinity, and were known to have frequented the Arabian peninsula during Muhammad's lifetime. Both groups, however, were small and insignificant in comparison to the larger Christian world at that time.

The fact that Muhammad used the word "trinity" in Sura 5:73 shows that he must have heard it from a group who were close at hand. Had Muhammad been literate, he would have read the scriptures and probably would not have made such an erroneous claim concerning the trinity.

Is the concept of trinity not borrowed from a pagan source?

Many Muslims contend that early Christian writers merely borrowed their view of the trinity from surrounding pagan beliefs. The two most popular examples which have been suggested are: the ancient Egyptian pantheon, and the Neo-Platonic philosophy.

The ancient Egyptians believed in the three gods: Osiris the father, Isis the mother, and Horus their son, who rose up to killed his father Osiris. Obviously this is not at all like the Christian trinity. The Egyptian three are quite separate gods (one even killing another), and remain simply a gross pagan polytheism. The Biblical Jesus (God the Son) has always existed equal with the Father, in loving relationship. Athanasius, a great leader of the early Christian church, in 318 A.D. condemned the worship of Osiris, Horus and Isis as "straining impiety to the utmost... worshiping pleasure and lust, as do the pagan Romans and Greeks".

Platonic Philosophy stated that God (the one) was totally distinct from matter and could have no contact with the material world. Thus an intermediary (the demiurge) had to emanate from him to give form to the material world, which then was given life by another emanation, the world-spirit. Again, this bears no resemblance to the Christian trinity, as neither the Demiurge nor the world-spirit are divine, and have no equality with the one. Whereas in the Biblical trinity God the Father loves the Son in unity with the Spirit, there is no sense of unity in the Platonic scheme.

CONCLUSION

Christians have only ever believed in One God. Yet, the Bible tells us that this One God has acted in history, showing Himself to be God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There is no question of

assumed is polytheistic. The prophet Muhammad had similar circumstances during his tenure in Mecca, where the polytheistic practices of the local religion caused him to speak out clearly and often against idolatry. Therefore, it stands to reason that the reactionary concept of God as one unit would be the focus of the Muslim evangelistic thrust.

Is Mary God?

A further problem arises with the Qur'anic misconception concerning who exactly makes up the godhead. In Suras Ma'Idah 5:73; and 5:116, we find Jesus questioned as to why He and His mother are to be worshipped, inferring their divine status by Christians. In Sura 6 (Cattle) line 101ff. it is said that there are those who believe that God has produced sons and daughters, as if God had a consort. Here is a distortion of what Christians believe. It must be made clear that God the Son was not produced by a sexual union of God the Father and Mary (as was mentioned above). Such an idea is as blasphemous to Christians as it is to Muslims.

The Bible teaches that God the Son has always existed, yet He became a human person by means of the virgin birth through Mary. Though she is highly honoured as the vehicle by which God used to come to earth, it is quite wrong to afford her divinity, which the Qur'an erroneously states Christians have done.

Muslims, mistakenly believe that Christians consider Mary to be "God the Mother", who produced God the Son, by God the Father. This is completely false, as the Bible NEVER says anything remotely like it. According to the gospels, Mary was not at all divine, but was an ordinary sinful human who was used by God to bear Jesus Christ into the world as a human.

Somehow the "author" of the Qur'an got it awfully wrong, claiming something which the scriptures never even alluded to, while at the same time contradicting the theology of the church both before and after Muhammad's time. This obviously puts suspicion on the veracity of the Qur'anic sources. If these were direct revelations from the all-knowing God, why did He not know what His previous revelations said, or at least what those who received it believed?

So how did this misconception creep in to the Qur'an? Though there is evidence of certain Maryamiyya cults in the 5th and 7th century who believed this doctrine, the Choloridian sect is the group which is more likely to have had influence on Muhammad's thinking, as they espoused this

there that we find the trinity revealed.

What the Scriptures say.

Christians and Muslims, alike, worship the God of Abraham. Furthermore, Muslims and Christians, alike, are Monotheistic, believing in only one, righteous, and transcendent, creator God. Muslims must understand that we echo them on this point.

The key verse of the Torah of the Prophet Moses states that: "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 might" (Deuteronomy 6:4). God is one and He commands us to love Him totally.

Muslims are quick to point out that the Hebrew word ELOHIM, used in Deuteronomy 6:4 must not be translated "Gods," as this is an example of a 'royal plural.' Yet, anyone who is trained in linguistics will tell you that in both Hebrew and Arabic, there is no such thing as a royal plural. Elohim can only mean "Gods," which is plural. We find this plurality of God expressed in Genesis 1:26; and in Genesis 11:7 as well. In the Deuteronomy 6:4 passage it is especially clear, where we read, "Jahweh Eluhenu Jahweh echad," which literally translated means, "The Lord our Gods, the Lord is one." Because this is not acceptable in English grammar, we leave the "s" out in our English text. But that does not take away from the fact that the plural tense is there in the original Hebrew text.

Jesus Christ, speaking more than one-thousand years after the prophet Moses says:

"The Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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" (Mark 12:28-30 and Matthew 22:37).

Remember that this is the man, Jesus, who claims to have equality with God who is speaking.

The New Testament provides us with only small clues to the mystery of God as THREE in ONE. In John 1:18 we find that the only-born God who is Jesus Christ, is in the heart of God. God is in God! The Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-12) is also in God. So, God the Son, is in God the Father, and God the Spirit is in God the Father. As strange and mysterious as this is to the human mind, yet the Bible, as the very Word of

God, tells us these things. Thus, both the Torah and the Gospel (Injil) agree that God is one. We are commanded to love one God. Only He has the right to require our ultimate loyalty. All other gods which man invents are totally false (Hosea 13:2,3).

The history of the word 'Trinity'

What is the correct definition of the trinity? To our Muslim friends we say, that from the scriptures we find revealed a Divine unity of three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These make up the trinity.

We must say from the outset that the word "Trinity" never appears in the Bible. Not Once! It is a word which did not even exist at that time. The word trinity is in fact a theological term adopted later by Christians to define what the Bible teaches concerning God. The word "trinity" in the early church simply meant "three persons", but was always undergirded with the unity of God.

To correspond with Biblical revelation, the Christian must equally emphasize that God is one and three. Today the church has adapted the word to mean three in unity (or tri-unity). Though God is immensely complex, and cannot be exhaustively known, He has so revealed Himself in scripture that He can be truly known. The early church theologians wrestled with the difficulty of defining God from what is revealed in scripture with the limitations of the human language which had no word to express the reality of one God, who is three (even this definition in English seems illogical, and illustrates my point).

For centuries theologians adopted many words to try to express God's revelation of Himself as three in one (for instance, words such as three prosopon, hypostasis, and trias), yet they were all inadequate. As an example of the difficulty which concepts like these engendered, the early church theologian, Tertullian (145-220 A.D.) created 590 new nouns, 284 new adjectives, and 161 new verbs to help explain this and other theological ideas found in the scriptures; ideas which because of their sophistication needed new terminology for us to understand them. It was Tertullian who came up with the word "trinity" over five hundred years before the writing of the Qur'an, the very book which tried to dispute its validity. Over the years the word trinity became the accepted definition.

Beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" (2 Peter 1:16-17)

Therefore it was God the Father who called Him His son, not later Christians. For this reason the virgin birth is a unique birth, described in both the Bible and the Quran alike.

Where was God when Jesus was on earth?

Many Muslims have difficulty understanding who it was that ran the universe while Jesus (as God) was on earth. The question by its very nature presupposes that God's omnipresence is limited, an idea which is contrary to their own beliefs. When God was in Christ, being omnipresent, He was still everywhere else, much as the Holy Spirit, who is God is amongst us and yet everywhere. One must remember that it was God who became Christ, and not the other way around. It might be helpful here to point out that this was not the first time that God, the son, (whom some delineate as the second person of the trinity) came to earth. There are other recordings of His appearance in the scriptures, such as God's appearance before Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3), or the angel of God who appeared to Abraham and told him of the impending ruin of Sodom, and of the miraculous birth of his son Isaac (Genesis 17-18).

Though the reasons for His appearances were different, they were nonetheless examples of God appearing on earth to man in time and in space, while simultaneously remaining as God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit. The fact that God as Son came before helps us accept that He also came in the form of Jesus the Christ 2,000 years ago.

In understanding The Trinity in this way, the criticism leveled that Jesus is a being totally other than God is neutralized. The function of Jesus the Redeemer, as intercessor, rather than diluting the power of God, brings into context the price of sin - that we cannot pay for the consequences of sin. That, only God can do for us. Jesus, the Christ, by taking on Himself that substitute responsibility, not only proved Himself to be deity and to be equal with God, but proved Himself to be worthy of our thanks and worship, in that He has now eradicated the consequences of sin.

Perhaps the problem between Muslims and Christians has been accentuated due to the "Christian" environment in which transplanted Muslims find themselves; an environment which Muslims have incorrectly

Was Jesus begotten?

Along this same vein, Muslims ask how could Jesus have been "begotten" of God (Sura 112:3, 19:35,88-92)? In John 1:18 the New Testament describes Jesus as the Only-born Son of God. The Greek word used is Monogenes. What does this word mean? It is one of several Greek words used to translate the Hebrew word Yahid. In the Septuagint, an early translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, Yahid is sometimes translated Agapteos (beloved), and sometimes it is translated as Monogenes"(unique or special child). For instance, Isaac is Abraham's Yahid son (in Arabic the word Farid, meaning unique, is used). How can such a term be used of Jesus of Nazareth? When was Jesus produced by God as Abraham produced Isaac?

In the Old Testament one of the most famous of all prophecies reads: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given (this presupposes that He was already existing, as one cannot give something which is not existing). And His name will be wonderful, counselor, mighty God" (Isaiah 9:6). A Son would be given. That presupposes that the son already exists. Jesus Himself prayed to the Father that He be given the glory that was His before the world began. Christians do not believe that in some way God gave birth to Jesus, or that God had some female partner who gave birth to Jesus.

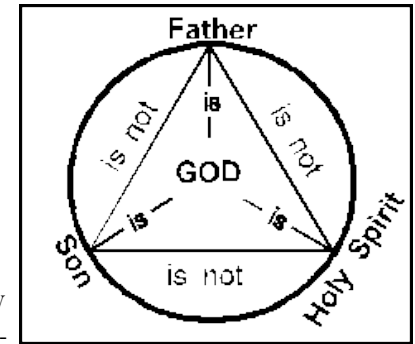
No, Christians believe that God the Son became a human being, was born as a human being, through the work of the Holy Spirit upon the Virgin Mary. Jesus was not the illegitimate offspring of God, produced by an associate: NO! This idea is blasphemous to both Christians and Muslims alike.

God has no consort and He does not produce children by any kind of reproductive activity. He is not like some Greek or Roman god who is mixed up with sordid and sinful human relationships. That is not the claim of the Bible. Of course we produce sons and daughters in a physical union. But we are not God! His Son has always existed; yet, became human through the power of god the Spirit.

"For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and caring of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, the following utterance was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This my

Trinity' defined.

It is impossible to fully define the mystery of God as "triune." That there is only one God, yet that the One God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the most basic Christian belief of all. All Christian beliefs depend upon the truth of that single statement. The word trinity is simply used to express what the scripture delineates as God comprised of three Persons, who are infinite, yet personal, in complete unity of will, purpose, action and love, yet who cannot be separated though they have different functions. This diagram is not a representation of God, but only an illustration of one aspect of the relationships within the Trinity



The scriptures speak of God the Father who is the co-Creator with God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; who blesses (Ephesians 1:3-4), initiates (John 17:2-9) and sends (John 17:3,18). The scriptures also speak about God the Son, who speaks-out the creation (John 1:1), and acts into history, both during the time of the prophets (Genesis 32:25-30; Exodus 3:2-5; 13:21; 33:9-11; Judge 2:1), and later when He was physically incarnated as the savior, the historical Jesus Christ (John 1:14). And finally, the scriptures speak of God the Holy Spirit, who is resident within the disciple of Jesus Christ, who guides, instructs and empowers them (John 14:16-17), and who mediates Jesus Christ and His atoning work (John 15:26).

Jesus referred to this 'Trinity in Unity' when He commanded His apostles to go everywhere and to persuade men to become His disciples, and to baptize believers "...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

It is important that God as "Father" must not be viewed within a biological context. Christians share with Muslims the prohibition against conceiving of God in the form of an image (made by man). God as "Father" refers, rather, to a relationship; a description of the covenant and fellowship relationship between God and humanity.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Can 1+1+1=1?

Possibly the greatest criticism against Christians by Muslims is the false view of the plurality of God. Christians have often been accused by Muslims of worshipping 3 gods (Sura 5:73). Many Christians have been asked the question, "how can 1+1+1 equal 1," assuming that 1 represents a separate god. Obviously this is not what Christians believe. God is not made up of three separate gods, but three "functions" expressed in the one God. It would perhaps be more correct to ask, "can 1x1x1 equal 1"?

All Christians strongly believe that there is but ONE God, and He alone must be the object of our worship and service. The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly tells us that there is only ONE God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29; Romans 3:30; 1 Timothy 1:17; James 2:19). Perhaps 1 Corinthians 8:4 says it best, "There is no God but ONE".

Is Jesus not merely human?

Muslims state emphatically that Jesus was merely a human. They point to Suras 4:171; 5:116; and 6:101, which maintain the impossibility of God having a son, or that any human could be divine. Our scriptures also speak emphatically of Jesus's humanness. They speak of His powerless in Mark 13:32, 11:12-13, and John 5:30. They point out that He was tempted in Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:13. Mark speaks of His humanness quite plainly in 1:35, and 6:3. In other passages we find that Jesus was violent, that He was fearful, helpless, and that He could and did die.

Yet our scriptures are also replete with examples of Christ's uniqueness. The book of Matthew speaks of his genealogy in the Davidic line in Matthew 1:1; that He was the Son of Man in 8:20, and 11:19; that He had wisdom and miraculous powers 13:54-56, and 17:24-27; and that He was a King in 21:5. Luke mentions fulfilled prophecies in His miraculous birth in 2:21; and that He was more powerful than John the Baptist in 3:16. John states clearly that Jesus, the Word was God in John 1:1; that He created all things in 1:2; and that He was the fulfillment of the many prophecies concerning the Messiah in 1:45, 12:15, and 19:23-24.

Ironically, the Uniqueness of Jesus is found in the Qur'an as well: the

virgin birth is mentioned in Sura 19:16-35; that Jesus is the Spirit of God is referred to in Sura 4:171; that He was the Word of God is found in Sura 4:171; that He is faultless can be seen in Sura 19:19; that He is illustrious both here and in heaven is spoken about in Sura 3:45; that He would be taken to heaven can be found in Sura 4:158; and that He will come back to judge is quoted in Sura 43:61. Even the resurrection of Jesus is mentioned in the Qur'an, in Suras 4:157, and 19:15,33.

There are many more Biblical scriptures which we could refer to that point out Jesus's uniqueness. What is important, however, is to note that our scriptures (like the Qur'an) points to both His natures, His humanity and His divinity. This can be best summarized by Philippians 2:6-8, which speaks specifically of His Godly nature, as well as His appearance as a man.

The ignobility of God's humanity

A further stumbling block for many Muslims is the implications which this doctrine entails. The fact that God the Son, who is fully God, became a human being, and lived in all the limitations and restrictions of human life, finally dying a human death, in all the pain and suffering associated with crucifixion is too much for them to comprehend. How would the almighty God allow such a thing to happen?

This is not so much a question about Jesus, but about the very nature of God himself. Christians believe that God is totally free, All-powerful, and able to do anything He wants to do. The only thing impossible for God to do is to sin, because by His very nature He cannot sin. It is not, however, sinful to be a human being. For God to be a human being He must accept the limitations of human life, but He does not have to stop being God. When God the Son became a human being, according to Philippians 2, He changed from being in the form ("shape") of God and took the form ("shape") of a servant (i.e. a human being). One of the basic Christian teachings is that the greatest action a person can do is to serve others, even to the point of dying for them. This selflessness, humility and self-sacrificial love is at the very heart of the God who is trinity. God is so great that He humbled Himself and became a servant, washing the feet of His disciples. The Creator of the Universe showed His greatness in humility, service and love. While that may sound threatening, the implications of that act alone are life-changing and eternal.