



**DID GOD
APPEAR
IN THE FLESH?**

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Question I

"What do you mean when you say that Jesus is God appearing in the flesh? If this is what you believe, why was the incarnation necessary?"

F.K., Tripoli, Lebanon

Answer I

1. The first fact we have to contend with is that the human soul cannot attain the state of perfection it desires on its own because the law of sin acts as a stumbling block.

The apostle Paul reveals this truth to us when he says: "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me" (Romans 7:18-23).

2. The apostle's word here illustrates the conflict between grace and corruption in the soul of man, between the law of God in which man delights and to which he wants to conform, and the law of sin which appeals to man, captivates and impels him to do that which he does not want to do. The apostle, however, anxious to liberate himself from the law of sin and death, raised his famous cry to heaven: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24). When he caught a glimpse of the Deliverer in the person of the incarnate Word he rejoiced saying: "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our LORD!" (Romans 7:25).

This secret had already been revealed to that man of God, Job, when he was continually overwhelmed by catastrophes and sufferings. From the depths of his great need for a mediator between him and God, he expressed his complaint, thus: If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot (Job 9:33-35). Hence, the second basic element of God (or person within the Godhead, Arabic: UQNUM) took human flesh. He met man's desperate need for redemption to restore him and to reconcile him with his God.

3. Everyone knows from personal experience that corrupt tendencies dwell in him to which he regrettably succumbs. We recall the apostolic saying: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Islam carries an admission of this truth, as in the Quranic saying: "If Allah were to take mankind to task for their wrong doing, he would not leave therein a living creature" (Sura al-Nahl 16:61). It is, therefore, evident to us not only historically, but also intellectually that natural man cannot reach the peak of this spiritual potential until he is united with and led by that which is superior to him and more than man himself.

4. Thus, we have restricted our study to a clarification of the shortcomings of man and his failure to rise to the status which Adam enjoyed before the fall. To stop here would be tantamount to defeat. We cannot imagine that such frustration serves the aim of an Almighty God. On the contrary, the LORD God is good and His mercies are everlasting. In His goodness God would not leave man, whom He created in His own image, in such a predicament as to perish. Since man failed to serve God's purpose, God would surely have preordained for him another being to make him whole. Who is that being? Is he a creature who has attained perfect holiness? Or is he God himself?

5. Let us strive to hold on to sure ground and not be distracted by our own theories, though based on principles rooted in certain religions. Let us also remember one fact, and that is, that no religion denies that man has a desire for direct communion with God. It is to God that people pray, from Him they seek help and guidance. He indeed helps and guides the feet of those who believe in Him in the paths of peace; moreover,

we will realise that the aim behind symbols, which are sometimes termed mysteries, is a complete interlocking of the soul with God. God's man Augustine, the scholar, said in his prayer: "O LORD! You have created us for yourself and our souls are restless until they find rest in you".

There is, therefore, no reason to think that there exists between God and man a created mediator, even though endowed with superhuman nature. In fact, proofs to the contrary are abundant. If creation were to attain that perfection which God intended for it and if man is to be redeemed, it becomes imperative that this be accomplished through the very work of God himself to whom be praise and glory forever.

For the purpose of achieving this end, it is preordained that the Deity consists of three basic elements of persons (Arabic: AQANIM), so that the incarnation may be fulfilled through the choice of one thereof, and none other. This was the divine pleasure: that the LORD should redeem our fallen and forsaken race because He alone is mighty enough for what salvation involves. The definition of incarnation in God's sight is to take on human flesh through one of the basic elements of the Deity or persons in the Godhead (Arabic: UQNUM).

I am by no means trying here to answer the question: Was God not able to save fallen humanity without incarnation? But I do affirm, in the light of the word of God, that the incarnation is an appropriate and suitable course; it is indeed adequate and unique in wisdom for fulfilling the required purpose. The very fact that the incarnation took place makes it likely that it was essential to fulfill the purpose of God perfectly in the word of redemption and that the state of fallen humanity demanded and needed it.

6. I am obliged to mention that God, to whom be glory, being desirous of bringing creation to the peak of elevation by somehow joining it to Himself, would do so not by a mere outward divine command: "Be, and it shall be", but by indwelling the highest levels of His creation or, in other words, by appearing Himself in the form of a perfect man.

7. When we consider the teaching on redemption as contained in Holy Scripture we observe that the mediator between God and human beings must bear the following characteristics:

- a. He must be human. The apostle explains that the second basic element of God or Person in the Godhead (Arabic: UQNUM) took the form of humans rather than angels because He came to redeem humans. It was necessary that He should be born under the law which we have broken in order to complete all righteousness, that He should suffer and die as a sacrifice to pay the ransom of our sins, that He should partake of our human life to feel our weakness (Hebrews 2:14).
- b. He must be without sin. The sacrifice which used to be offered on the altar had to be without blemish as required by the law. In other words, it is impossible for the saviour from sin to be himself a sinner, otherwise he would not have access to God; neither can he be a source of holiness and eternal life to his people, if he himself is not righteous and holy. It was, therefore, imperative that our Chief Priest should be holy, blameless, undefiled and separated from sin (Hebrews 7:26).
- c. He must be God, because nothing can put away sin except the blood of Him who is greater than a mere creature. Christ, therefore, being God, by offering Himself as a sacrifice once and for all, has perfected forever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 7:27 and 10:14). Likewise, no one but a divine being can destroy Satan's power and save those whom Satan held captive. No one can accomplish the great task of redemption but He who is almighty, all wise and all knowing, in order to be the Chief Priest of His church and the judge of all. No one can be the source of spiritual life for the redeemed except one in whom all the fullness of the Deity dwells in the flesh.

8. All these attributes, which Holy Scripture stipulates as essential to qualify the mediator for the act of mediation between God and mankind, are united in Christ in accordance with the task which He came to accomplish.

It transpires from postulating these characteristics in Christ that His mediation, which includes all that He did and continues to do for the salvation of humanity, is the work of a divine being. All the works and sufferings of Christ in the performance of His mediation have been the works and sufferings of a divine being. The One who has been crucified is the LORD of Glory; the One who offered Himself to death is the second basic element of God or the second person in the Godhead (Arabic UQNUM).

The Historic Proof

9. A glance at history shows us that there dwelt on the face of this earth a man whose whole life has been a clear demonstration of both elements of which the perfect good of humanity consists. These two elements are a permanent relationship to God and an unparalleled love for his fellow men. He went about preaching the good news, doing good and healing those afflicted by the devil. He revealed a new concept of God to mankind, saying that God has a concern for every person individually as a father is concerned for his own children. God accepts every repentant sinner as warmly as a father would welcome a straying son returning to his bosom.

10 and 11. In addition to His teachings of love and His works of mercy, He called a group of disciples to be with Him to learn from His teachings and His example. Day by day these disciples grew in their knowledge of Him and deepened their insight into His way of thinking and the inner meaning of His parables. They drew upon the riches of His Spirit, learned from His confidence and shared in His communion with God. Nevertheless, the evil world shook with fear of Him. Those who closed their eyes to the truth and relied on their own righteousness rebelled against Him and dragged Him to trial, accusing Him of blasphemy and breaking the law. They were able to have the death sentence passed against Him. But how did He react? He refused to defend Himself, knowing fully well it was in His power merely to say a word and have a dozen armies of angels rally around to exterminate His enemies. He chose not to fall back on any means of deliverance available to Him. In order to proclaim the meaning of God's love, He gave Himself up completely. In order that the enormity and extreme hideousness of sin in God's sight may be impressed in people's minds, He allowed sin to inflict punishment on that perfect human body of His. In order to conquer evil, He withstood its assaults and onslaughts unto death, sharing thereby all of mankind's struggles and paving the way for His eventual victory.

12. On the third day He arose. He had earlier said: "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10:17,18). That was precisely what He did. He finished the work and the Divine revelation was complete. Love was shed to its utmost, and the power of evil, mighty as it is, was fought and defeated. Good triumphed over evil.

13. What about the outcome? The effect has been noticeable in His disciples, who gained an intimate knowledge of Him and a conviction that grew out of their association with Him. It blossomed when He appeared to them after His resurrection. To them, He was not merely a man or a being of a species higher than man. They saw in Him the attributes of God Himself. He claimed things which would be a blasphemy for anyone other than God. Every claim He made had been proved in earnest, including the fact that He was worthy of their worship and was indeed God living the life of man and, at the same time, reigning over the universe from His throne in heaven.

14. This was not the experience only of those disciples of the LORD Jesus who had direct contact with Him, but spread speedily to many others as the disciples passed on the good news upheld by the might of His Spirit whom He sent in His place.

The conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was both God and man did not disappear with the death of those who had known Him in the flesh. Why? Because it was based not on a religious error or dogma but on the personal experience of Christians throughout the ages and on the strong conviction that Jesus is still alive and maintains a personal relationship with all those who seek Him. This relationship does not stand as an obstacle between them and God, but is in reality a communion with God Himself.

15. This Divine person (Arabic: UQNUM) Jesus Christ is not an inanimate and imperfect being, but now fills the whole universe; He is here, there and everywhere. He touches man and says: "Follow me!" Struck by awe, man rejoins: "LORD! Your service is hard and burdensome I cannot bear it and am unable to follow in your footsteps. Leave me alone LORD, for I am a sinner". Jesus answers: "Give Me your life, entrust it to Me, have faith and believe in Me for My grace is sufficient for you". Man may respond to His call and become a disciple. Christ is still along the road calling out: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.... Look unto Me you ends of the earth, and be saved". Many hear His call and come to Him attracted by the grace of His Divine personality. He is popular today in black Africa, where masses of people join His ranks and find deliverance from the power of evil spirits and the grip of sorcerers and magicians. In every nation, tribe and class there are people who have been transformed by Jesus. They live a different life. They used to live in sin, lust and pride. Now they live worthy of His gospel, in righteousness and holiness of

truth. If you ask them about the root cause of such a transformation, they would reply: "All this is by virtue of the knowledge of Jesus our LORD".

We can therefore say with full confidence that the life of Jesus of Nazareth has crowned the work of God in creation and lifted it to the peak of sublimity and perfection. In Him this work reached full perfection; in Him life and spirit attained the purpose of God; in Him all who accept Him in love are established and filled to the fullness of God. In other words, the soul that believes in Him has reached the supreme goal of its existence, namely, union with God Himself and the uplifting of creation to God its Creator.

16. This is the verdict and conclusion of history. Yet with regard to Jesus Christ the meaning of 'perfect man' is not merely of the Divine essence of the universe, the reflection of the Divine essence and the link between God and His creation. Rather, He is the perfect man because He is at the same time perfect God, "for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). He is not only the mirroring of the Divine substance shining brightly through a human life, but "is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Hebrews 1:3). "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3). He is therefore worthy to receive all power, dominion, wisdom, might, honour, glory and praise. Amen!

Question II

"It is well known that God is not in need of the world or those who dwell in it, that every relationship He has with His creatures restricts Him, the Most High as He is, to the bounds of time and place and consequently attributes passivity to Him, which would be blasphemy. Does not the incarnation in which Christianity believes mean a translocation of a portion of God to the body of Christ?"

A.S., Beirut, Lebanon

Answer II

1. Dear inquirer, if you stop to think you will find that Islam, which you hold, also puts God in the realm of relationship with His creatures and within the scope of time and place. You believe that God sent a messenger to men. This means that God established a relationship with His creatures. The Qur'an says: "Lo! We have sent unto you a messenger as witness against you, even as We sent unto Pharaoh a messenger, whereupon We seized him with no gentle grip" (Sura al-Muzammil 73:15-16). Moreover, the Qur'an exhorts man to establish a relationship with God, his creator, and states that God loves this, as illustrated in Sura al-Ra'd 13:159, which says: "And when you are resolved, then put your trust in Allah. Lo! Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him)".

You might argue that such expressions are symbolic. This would be reading into the exegesis and would collapse in the face of the facts. There are many instances of this kind in which mention is made of persons who have been commissioned by God to perform certain task as, for example, in the Quranic saying: "We sent Noah unto people, and he said, 'O my people! Serve Allah. Ye have no other God save Him. Lo! I fear for you the retribution of an Awful Day'. The chieftains of his people said, 'Lo! we see you surely in plain error'. He said, 'O my people! There is no error in me, but I am a messenger from the LORD of the worlds. I convey unto you the message of my LORD and give good counsel unto you, and know from Allah that which you know not'" (Sura al-A'raf 7:59-62). Such verses cannot be taken symbolically because they refer to specific events.

2. What do you have to say of the traditional prophetic saying concerning the ritual of prayer enjoined upon Muslims? This purports that Ibn Ishaq cited Ibn Mas'ud as quoting the messenger of God (Muhammad) saying, in the chronicle of the night of ascension: "Gabriel finally brought me to the presence of my LORD who ordained upon me fifty prayer rituals daily. On my way back I passed by Moses son of Imran, and what a friend you had in him! He asked me how many prayers the LORD imposed on me and I replied, 'Fifty daily'. He said: 'The prayers are burdensome and your people are weak; return to your people'. I returned and begged my LORD to lessen the burden on me and on my people. He relieved me of ten. I left and passed by Moses who said the same thing to me. I returned and begged my LORD who relieved me of ten. Then I left and passed by Moses who said the same thing to me. I returned and implored God and He relieved me of ten. He (Moses) kept repeating to me every time I returned to him: 'Return and implore your LORD'. I ended up with the LORD relieving me of the burden except for five ritual prayers every day and night. This time I replied: 'I have implored my LORD and begged to Him so much that I am ashamed of Him. I will not return! Therefore, whosoever of you performs them by faith and action he shall have the reward of fifty prayers'" (The Prophet's Chronicles by Ibn Hisham 3:276).

3. I leave you with traditional prophetic quotations to make up your mind in the light of them, whether or not God does have relationships with His creatures who, likewise, have a relationship with Him. Furthermore, in an expression of love, I put it thus to you: If you hold on to the belief of "absolute elimination of anthropomorphic elements from the conception of deity" (Arabic: TANZIH), you are believing in a God about whom you know nothing and from whom you are consequently separated totally. Thus, you are implicitly denying prophecy and the Qur'an. A prophet cannot be called so unless he is inspired and sent forth to establish a relationship between God and the creature.

4. The traditional prophetic saying reads: "God, blessed and exalted be His name, descends every night to the lowest heaven, where He remains for the last third of the night, and calls: 'Is there anyone praying to me and I will answer him? Anyone who repents before me and I will forgive him'" (Bukhari 4:68).

I believe that the "absolute elimination of anthropomorphic elements from the conception of Deity" (Arabic: TANZIH) which asserts God's total detachment from created beings, makes Him an isolated God (exalted by His name). This leads to dislocation in spiritual matters. Man cannot repent and experience regeneration in isolation from God. All efforts by man to lift himself from the state of sin to that of righteousness prove of no avail if man has no contact with God. Christ, in His "Sermon on the Mount", said: "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" (Matthew 6:27). It follows, that "absolute elimination of anthropomorphic elements from the conception of deity" (Arabic: TANZIH) acts as an obstacle to many in the way of accepting the concept of incarnation. These persons have, therefore, deprived themselves of the benefits of redemption. In defence of their rejection of the teaching of incarnation they offer a number of objections, including the following:

5. They argue that Divine incarnation exposes God to a change in the essence of His Deity at the specific time and place, thus measuring God by the measure of imperfect minds. In fact they are indirectly attributing impotence to God, an inability to become incarnate and appear without at all changing His essence. The truth is that incarnation does not necessarily involve a change in the Divine nature. Our proof of this is that the second basic element of God or person in the Godhead (Arabic: UQNUM), when He took on human nature, did not forfeit His deity, but remained the same mighty God who raised the dead, cured the blind and the lepers, forgave sins and silenced storms and waves by His command. The Gospel tells us that He appeared in the flesh in a supernatural way, because He is the creator of the bodies and of human nature and has no difficulty in being united to them. Any belief in the contrary is an admission that the creator of bodies and nature is not God but some being.

6. We know by experience that any wise and sane person can adapt to his environment and circumstances. How much more likely is it that an All Wise, Almighty God should be capable of incarnation without any change occurring in His essence?

Remember the sun sends its rays and warmth to the earth and, in uniting with other beings on earth, gives them life and helps them grow without any change occurring to the sun's composition. Is it reasonable that the sun should have the potential of uniting with other elements and influencing them without being affected, while God the Creator of the sun and the elements should have no such potency?

You believe that God created the first man of "clay, like the potter's" (Sura al-Rahman 55:14). This implies that God stood at a definite time and place because He held with His hand clay from a given spot with which He made man at a given time. If you say that His standing at a given place and given time does not confine Him because He is Almighty, I would put it to you that His incarnation at a given time and a given place does not confine Him either because He is Almighty. Christ, therefore said: "What is impossible with man is possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

7. Tradition quotes Muhammad as saying: "When the believers seek their God's intercession on the day of resurrection, they come to me and I go forth and ask for an audience with my God in His house which is given to Me. When I see my God I lie prostrate before Him" (Bukhari 4:18).

A question arises here: "Why is a Christian accused of blasphemy when he says that God appeared in the flesh, while such an accusation not hurled at the one who says that God is contained in a house?"

In Sura al-Hadid 57:29, it is written: "The bounty is in Allah's hand to give to whom He will. And Allah is of Infinite bounty". In Sura al-Fath 48:10, it is written: "They swear allegiance only unto Allah. The Hand of Allah is above their hands". In Sura al-Mulk 67:1 it is written: "Blessed is He in Whose hand is the Sovereignty, and He is able to do all things".

It is written in Sura Hud 11:37, that God said to Noah: "Build the ship under Our eyes and by Our inspiration". It is written in Sura al-Tur 52:48 that God said to Muhammad: "So wait patiently for your LORD's decree for surely you are in Our eye". It is written in Sura Ta Ha 20:39 that God said to Moses: "When We inspired in your mother saying: 'Throw him into the ark... and there an enemy to Me and an enemy to him shall take him'. And I endued you with love from Me that might be trained according to My will".

Tradition quotes Abu Hurairah quoting Muhammad as saying: "God created the creation and when relationship on the female side stood, they held to the waist of the Merciful One" (Bukhari 3:114).

All the above quotations say that God has a face, a hand, an eye and a waist, all of which are components of man's body. If the incarnation of God is a blasphemy how can the foregoing verses be explained?

8. How does the Holy God dwell in the womb of a woman, in the midst of blood and the uncleanness of conception and childbirth? And how can He dwell in a human body, eating and hungering, drinking and thirsting, urinating and excreting?

Perhaps those who say so do not comprehend the statement of the angel of God: He who is conceived by Mary is by the Holy Spirit. If God is holier than to come into contact with the blood of a woman, how do they believe that God took a rib of Adam and made the woman out of it? How do they explain the traditional Prophetic saying quoted by Aisha when she said: "The Prophet used to rest in my bosom during my menstruation period and recite the Qur'an" (Bukhari 1:44)?

If blood were unclean and the Qur'an were the eternal word of God originating in the very essence of God and inseparable from Him, how does Muhammad make it lawful for himself to read it while lying on the bosom of Aisha in her menstruation, and yet it is unlawful for the Word to indwell and be incarnate in the womb of Saint Mary? Sura al-Hijr 15:28 states: "And when your LORD said to the angels: 'Lo! I am creating a mortal out of dry clay made out of stinking mud'" Jalalan interpreted this type of mud as "black mud". If coming into contact with black mud is not regarded a degradation to the Holiness of God and does not defile Him, how much more appropriate it is, after God had made out of it man and crowned him over His creatures, that He will not disdain to dwell in him? Praise be to God for His word through the apostle Paul who said: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). If the Holy God sees no harm in abiding by His Spirit in a believer, how much the body of Jesus who knew no sin and who was not born of human seed?

9. Sura al-Qasas 28:29 states: "Then, when Moses had fulfilled the term, and was travelling with his household, he saw in the distance a fire and said unto his household: 'Bide you (here). Lo! I see in the distance a fire, peradventure I shall bring you tidings thence, or a brand from the fire that you may warm yourselves'. And when he reached it, he was called from the right side of the valley in the blessed field, from the tree: 'O Moses! Lo! I, even I, am Allah, the LORD of the Worlds'".

The same story recurs in Sura Ta Ha 20:9-12: Has there come unto you the story of Moses? When he saw a fire and said unto his folk: 'Wait! Lo! I see a fire afar off. Peradventure I may bring you a brand therefrom or may find guidance at the fire'. And when he reached it, he was called by name: 'O Moses! Lo! I, even I, am your LORD. So take off your shoes, for lo! You are in the holy valley of Tuwa. And I have chosen you, so hearken unto that which is inspired'.

The episode is explained by Imam Fakhrudin Arrazi in the following manner: "Moses, peace be on him, took leave of Shuaib to return to his mother and was granted it. As he went out a son was born unto him by the road on a wintry Friday night. He had strayed. Moses, peace be on him, struck fire but the flint bore no flash. As he made further attempts he observed a fire at a distance on the left side of the wayside". Assaddi is quoted as saying: "Moses thought it was a fire by some shepherds". Others relating the story said that Moses saw it in a tree. "When he saw it, he proceeded towards it and told his household: 'Wait! Lo! I saw a fire, peradventure I shall bring you a piece of burning wood or flint'. When he reached it", relates Ibn Abbas, "he saw a green tree from stem to top as if it was white fire. He stood in amazement at the bright light of the fire and the deep green tree. Neither did the fire change the green tree, nor was fire changed by the plenteousness of water in the tree; Moses heard the angels singing hymns of praise and saw a strong light. When Moses beheld this he placed his hand on his eyes and was called by name: 'O Moses! Lo! I am your God'. He responded in obedience saying: 'I hear your voice but cannot see you. Where are you?' He (God) said 'Lo! I am with you, before you, behind you, around you and nearest to you... Take off your shoes for lo! you are in the holy valley'" (Attafsir al Kabir Volume 22, p.14, 15).

In the Holy Bible the story is related thus: "There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up". When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am". "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:2-5).

My respected friend! If God, in order to speak to Moses and commission him to carry a message to mankind, chose to dwell in a bush and appear in the form of fire, is it not unfair to accuse Christians of blaspheming because they believe that God, in order to reveal Himself in love, appeared in Jesus Christ? Is the bush in which God appeared more significant than Christ?

10. I now put it to you, if Jesus, while in the flesh, ate, drank and digested, that does not impair the fullness of the Deity who dwelt in Him bodily. This is illustrated in the Holy Bible thus: "I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the LORD Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean" (Romans 14:14).

11. Dear friend! Anyone who ponders deeply over Holy Scripture cannot fail to observe that the way God chose to reveal Himself and communicate His intentions has been in the nature of appearance and incarnation. It does not matter whether such appearance and incarnation took place in the cloud, in the fire, through the body of the Angel of the Covenant or the body of Christ in whom He appeared full of grace and truth.

In the epistle to the Hebrews 1:1-2, we read the following statement which is regarded a key utterance concerning God's contact with mankind: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe". Here are other examples of God's appearances and methods of speaking to mankind, as recorded in the Holy Bible.

Genesis 18:1-5 says: "The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my LORD, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say". Here God appeared to Abraham in the form of man who sat, ate and drank.

Genesis 32:22-30 says: "He appeared unto Jacob in the shape of man and wrestled with him until the break of day and when He asked Jacob to let Him go, Jacob said: 'I will not let you go unless you bless me'. The man blessed him saying: '...because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome'. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying: 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared'".

Exodus 24:9-11 states: "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli... But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites!. Here God's appearance took the form of man with hands and legs, but He did not lay His hands upon the nobles because they were sinners and in need of a mediator who has the nature of God and the nature of man.

Question III

"Is it not within the power of the Merciful God to save mankind other than through sending His Son, presuming that God has a son as you claim, to take a human body, be tempted like us and be killed at the hands of wicked men?"

S.A., Damascus, Syria

Answer III

1. The Holy Bible teaches that God created man in His own image and in His likeness (Genesis 1:26). And God, Glory be to His name, intended that man remain in an uncorrupt state. But man, drawn by his pride to break God's command, deliberately disobeyed and went astray. He thus became a sinner and liable to God's judgement which declares: "The one who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekial 18:20). The apostle Paul referred to this fact when he said: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

The word of God teaches that humans, by refusing to keep God in their knowledge, fell into disobedience like their first parents. They lost the image of righteousness and holiness of truth in which God created them. They became corrupt as Solomon the Wise said: "This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). The apostle Paul said: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21,22).

It should have been possible for man, who was created in the image of God, to avoid corruption and decay and live in purity had he obeyed God. God not only created us from nothing and gave us the breath of life, but He also endowed us with the possibility of living in communion with Him. But as men moved away from the life of God and accepted Satan's temptation, they brought about their own decline.

2. Is it worthy of God to have man whom He created in His own image and in His likeness destined to perish forever? What would the Creator do, who is righteous and whose mercy is everlasting? Would His rich loving kindness allow corruption to efface His image from mankind? Would His glorious Divinity rejoice at the perishing of the human community whom He created in perfection? If He were to leave them to such a wretched fate would that not be neglect? But is negligence worthy of the glory of a Holy God? Has He not said: "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?" (Ezekial 33:11).

3. It is true that God, out of His bounteous love, has willed that man be saved. How? Is it through repentance? But repentance cannot overrule judgement and, consequently, lift punishment because this would not meet the demands of God's justice. It is true that while repentance stands between the repenting person and the committal of further sin, it does not eradicate the effect of preceding sin and the judgement of God therein. In view of this predicament one would ask again: What possible course of action is left for God, "who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). God wants to justify man in order to restore such a corrupt being into a state of incorruption and, at the same time, meet the demands of the Divine justice. This accords with the Divine counsel pertaining to sacrifice. Therefore, the Logos (Word) who "in the beginning was... with God", and the Word was God is alone worthy to bring about the regeneration of all things by taking on a human body and bearing the punishment prescribed by Divine justice on behalf of man. This is precisely why He came down to our world and "became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

4. Assuredly, ever since the beginning, the Word was preparing Himself for the flesh. That godly man, Tertullian, declared that Christ was preparing Himself for incarnation throughout the ages that preceded His appearance. The truth is that anyone contemplating the Holy Bible can see that the LORD the Redeemer was the password whispered, by inspiration, to the ears of God's prophets in the Old Testament. Prophecy spoke

of Him by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: "Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.... which means 'God with us'" (Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23).

The inspired word tells us that "when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Galatians 4:4,5).

The gospel of redemption reveals to us that all have come under the punishment of death which cannot be abolished except by the death of One righteous, who knew no sin. The Word volunteered by taking on human flesh, that the judgement of death might be fulfilled in Him on behalf of all who believe. This secret is revealed to us by the apostle Paul who said: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4). This means that the LORD and Redeemer, in offering that body which He took upon Himself as a burnt offering and sacrifice with no blemish, did away with the judgement of death upon all on whose behalf He acted. Thus He was able to meet the demands of Divine justice because He is exalted above all and is without sin.

5. You might face some difficulty in understanding the secret of redemption. But when you contemplate the teaching of the Gospel concerning God's love and abundance of mercy you will find that such work is in harmony with the compassion attributed to God. Below are some of the texts in the New Testament inspired and written for our teaching. By reading through them you would see to what extent the love of God went for your own salvation:

- "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).
- "And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished" (Romans 3:24-25).
- "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:8-9).
- "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

6. Prophetic Proof of Divine Incarnation

- "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I'. All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations" (Isaiah 65:1-2).

This verse refers to the incarnation of Jesus Christ because Paul quoted it when he spoke on the subject thus, And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" (Romans 10:20-21). It was Jesus who indeed stretched forth His hands on the cross.

- "It will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you". Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped" (Isaiah 35:2-5).

This prophecy not only explains that God dwells here, but declares the signs of His coming and describes His works as quoted in the Gospel exactly, thus: He sent them to the LORD to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent

us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'" At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind?" (Luke 7:19-24).

- "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. "Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens', and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble" (Daniel 9:24-25).

In this prophecy we find not only a reference to Christ but a clear declaration that the One who will be anointed is not merely a man but the Most Holy. Actually when Christ came, the revelation and prophecy centred on the Jewish people among whom monarchy had come to an end. It was to be expected that their kings be anointed until the time of the anointing of the Most Holy One. Jacob prophesied that Kings among the Jews would last until the coming of the Messiah when he said: The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his (Genesis 49:10).

- "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire— but my ears you have opened burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:6-8).

7. When comparing these verses with those quoted in Hebrews 10:6-10, we observe that this glorious psalm applies fully to the person of Jesus. Our glorious LORD exhibited the sacrifice and offerings of the Old Testament such as the sacrifices of safety, the burnt offerings and sin offerings, and after reviewing them wisely pronounced: They were not what the Most High required.

Holy Scripture reveals to us that it was in the everlasting counsel of God to prepare a better sacrifice. As we bow our heads in reverence, the Holy Spirit takes us back to the eternal past which we cannot fully comprehend because of our human limitations, but which we understand from God's revelations in His Holy Book and visualise that "the basic elements" of the Deity or three Persons in the Godhead (Arabic: AQANIM) looked down on our human race which was to come into being and upon the sin that was to enter into the world, and with it death, and ordained that the redemption should take place. We visualise God the Son volunteering to undertake the sacrificial task, saying: "Here I go to make atonement for a world that has fallen back".

8. In the interest of mankind the Incarnate LORD was not content that God's redemptive will be restricted to a nation that considered itself the sole heir to the Promises of God, but wished it to embrace the whole world.

One might be tempted to ask: Why was redemption accomplished through the cross rather than by some other means? In answer to this, I would say that it was the pleasure of God to redeem us Himself and there is no way better for us and more worthy of the LORD. It was good that the Incarnate LORD bore this type of death for our sake. For if He had to justify us from sin under which the law pinned us down, how else would it be possible for Him to be sin for us, had He not died carrying our sins on the cross?

And if the death of the Incarnate LORD became an atonement for all, and the middle wall of partition was broken by His death, i.e. the enmity (Ephesians 2:14) so that the call might embrace all nations then how would it have been possible to call us to be reconciled to God, had He not been crucified? Thanks be to Him that this was His joy and that He saw fit to bear this humiliating death and stretch forth both hands on the cross in order to draw the saints of the Old Covenant with the one hand and, with the other, those from among the gentiles in order that all be united in His glorious Person as He said: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).

QUIZ

If you are interested in checking your understanding of this book, please answer the following questions. You can copy and paste these questions into the contact form and can write the answer below each question.

1. Why is man unable to be good and perfect on his own?
2. What is the only way of reconciliation with God?
3. What are the three proofs mentioned for the fact that man is a complete sinner?
4. Is it God's will for us to remain sinners? What is the means of our salvation?
5. What is the deepest longing in man's heart?
6. By what means can man be lifted to the level of God?
7. What are the essential qualifications for a mediator between us and God?
8. How have the necessary qualifications for a Divine mediator been fulfilled in Christ?
9. What are the two elements indicative of the perfect good for humanity?
10. Why did Christ gather the disciples around Him?
11. How did Jesus react to His arrest by His enemies?
12. How did Christ's victory become clear?
13. What is the result of Christ's death and resurrection?
14. How was the world convinced of Christ's Divinity?
15. How can man's life be transformed at the root?
16. What are the attributes given to Christ in the Holy Bible?
17. Does Islam establish a relationship between the Creator and His creatures?
18. How does prophetic tradition indicate a direct relationship between God and mankind?
19. What is implied by the conception of the absolute elimination of anthropomorphic elements from the conception of the Deity (Arabic: TANZIH)?
20. What does prophetic tradition say about God's descent every night?
21. How can you prove that God's incarnation does not change the essence of the power of God?
22. Was God able to be incarnate and realize His will?
23. What is meant by the text of the traditional prophetic saying that God is contained in a house?
24. How did the Holy God dwell in the womb of a woman?
25. What is meant by God appearing to Moses in the burning bush?
26. What is unclean?
27. What about God's contact with worldly matter in His revelations, without being defiled? Is that not an indication that God was able to be incarnate without suffering loss?
28. How did men lose the image of God?
29. Is it reasonable to suppose that God would leave His creatures to remain corrupt?
30. Why is man's mere repentance not enough for salvation?
31. What are the proofs, from Divine inspiration, of Christ's incarnation?
32. What are the prophetic proofs of the LORD's incarnation?
33. What is the most favoured sacrifice in God's view?
34. Did Jesus aim to redeem all mankind or just the Jews?

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