



MUSLIM APOLOGETICS – Responding to Christological Accusations

Those working among Muslims, where honor and shame are inevitable cultural values, frequently encounter standard arguments against the person of Jesus Christ. These issues are: God cannot BE a man, it is impossible for God to have a son, and God could not have died on a cross. As I tried to respond to these critiques from my vantage point as a Christian, the “logic” of my argument never seemed to carry much weight. Then I realized that such rejections of Christ were not rooted in theological contradictions or ontological impossibilities. In their view, Christian Christology was wrong because it violated traditional honor-shame values. As a result, I have tried to explain the significance of these three areas (incarnation, Son of God, and crucifixion) by appealing to social “logic” of honor-shame cultural values. Here are some initial thoughts.

THE INCARNATION

The concept of the incarnation seems to be rejected by Muslims because the idea of a completely honorable God becoming a defiled and shameful human is repulsive. There is something inherently wrong about such honor taking on such shame.

Firstly, God is all powerful and can do anything he chooses, he is not limited by our expectations of him. But more important, Jesus became a human without having the shamefulness of humans because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not an earthly father. Jesus was not a descendant of shameful Adam who was made from dirt, like all of us human being. Jesus was from heaven like pure rain, not from the dirty earth like other humans. God became a human being without any shame so he could take our shame upon himself. Although Jesus was completely human, he was the first human being to be completely without shame because he was born directly from heaven. Shamefulness is not an essential attribute of humanity; it is possible to be a human without shame, just think of our future existence when we will live in heaven as humans without shame. Jesus was the first human to live without shame so that we could follow his pattern and also become free of shame and full of honor.

THE SON OF GOD

When Jesus is called the “Son of God,” this does not mean that God had a physical child with a woman. “Son of God” is Jesus’ honorific title that communicates how Jesus was the only person to perfectly honor God as every son should honor his father by being perfectly pure and perfectly faithful. The expression means that he was God’s “Perfect” Son, or “Son” par excellence. Other prophets (Jeremiah), and even the nation of Israel, were called God’s son since the phrase refers to those who are called to honor God through obedience as his own children. But Jesus is God’s unique son because he was the perfect son who honored the Father with perfect obedience. Jesus brought honor to his father’s name by showing how great God the Father really is. Only because he

is the honorable “Son of God”, we also can become an honorable “child of God.” Because of Jesus, we can now be honorable members in God’s family.

THE CRUCIFIXION

Finally, people wonder how God could die on a cross. Again, God can do anything he wants, so we should not tell God what he cannot do. But more importantly, as God in human form, Jesus was shamefully killed not because he was a shameful human, but because we are shameful. Only because Jesus was rejected, excluded, and shamed, we can have our shame removed and honor restored. The shame experienced by Jesus (throughout his life, but climatically at the cross) was not his own; Jesus was not a shameful person. Rather, Jesus, from preexistence to resurrection and right through his entire life, always was and always will be a being of incalculable honor and worth. His moments of shame were fleeting instances in light of his eternal glory for the purpose of our redemption. Jesus willingly endured our shame to procure our honor. In essence, Jesus is an honored person who bore the shame of others so that shameful people could bear the honor of another. Jesus descended from honor to shame so that Christians can follow him on his return journey back to honor. The temporary shame of the eternally honorable one was redemptive and salvific.

