Monotheism in the Qur’an and in the New Testament: Comparative Theological Explorations of the Role of Prophets and the Covenants

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Abstract

This thesis compares two variants of monotheism: the oneness of God in the New Testament and the oneness of God in the Qur’an. By demonstrating a diversity in the theological schools that deal with the oneness of God, it establishes the fact that in both scriptures the oneness is a complex teaching that is linked to the concepts of prophethood and covenants. Then by analyzing the character of God seen in the covenants and prophetic teachings of both scriptures, it juxtaposes YHWH in Jesus Christ with Allah of the Qur’an. Allah and God in Christ significantly overlap, but they also have significant differences stemming from the concept of the oneness described in each sacred text; in the New Testament the Eucharist adds a sacramental layer to the Shema, the oneness of God inherited from the Hebrew Bible. This thesis also argues that Jesus Christ could in some significant sense be seen as a Muslim, and his submission to God contributes to God’s oneness and humans’ oneness with God.

Accordingly, the first chapter is devoted to a review of the literature (addressing concerns of methodology) and a survey of the theological schools. This chapter also demonstrates the connection between the concepts of the oneness of God, prophets, and covenants. The second chapter focuses on the character of the one and only God as it is filtered through the prophetic teachings and covenants in the scriptures. Here the Eucharistic oneness is established as the uniquely Christian oneness of God, highlighting certain disparate implications to God’s character. The third chapter
addresses how as prophets, Muhammad and Jesus relate to the oneness of God in the context of the prophetic series. Moreover, in this chapter their submission to God and the resulting implications for the oneness of God are explored too.
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Introduction

Islam and Christianity are Abrahamic faiths that have captivated my mind for a long time for various reasons. Both of these religions invite humans to ask deep questions about God, the meaning of life, and wrestle with the answers they offer. One interesting issue is the oneness of God in Christianity and in Islam, and the reason for this research is to understand the oneness of God\(^1\) in depth. The oneness of God is very important for relating to other creatures as fellow creatures of God; to that end, this thesis explores how the descriptions and narratives of the oneness of God are similar to yet different from one another in two sacred scriptures — the New Testament and the Qur’an. So this research hopes to deepen a reader’s spirituality and let her glimpse into the depths of God’s mystery for personal growth into Christ, the One, God Incarnate.

In addition to personal motivations, this topic interests me from an academic perspective too. Believing in one God implies significant questions for theodicy, Christology, and a host of other beliefs. The three Abrahamic faiths insist that God is one despite differences in their conceptualizations of that oneness and their inabilities to pinpoint what this elusive teaching exactly entails. To find the connections between God’s oneness and the shared beliefs that both Christianity and Islam use to assert this oneness, I single out the concepts of prophethood and covenants and how they are described in the New Testament and in the Qur’an. Academically, this has practical

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\(^1\) I define God’s oneness as the uniqueness of God in such a way that no other being than God is worthy of worship.
implications for Christian-Muslim dialogue; in both religions prophets and covenants teach the oneness of God despite their disagreements about what that attribute means. The purpose here is to reveal the commonalities and differences between the oneness of God as it is defined through covenants and prophets of both faiths so that the future of Christian-Muslim dialogue may become clearer.

I proceed as follows: in the introduction, I survey the literature devoted to this topic and address methodological concerns. In the first chapter, I explore current schools or opinions of Christian theology and of Islamic Kalam\(^2\) as well as any theology that takes up the oneness of God. Then I introduce the concepts of covenants and prophethood and analyze their scriptural bases in Islam and Christianity.

In the second chapter, I take up the concept of God that emerges from the concepts of covenants and prophetic messages. Here I address similarities and differences between the Christian understanding of God and the Islamic understanding of God while demonstrating how prophethood and covenants contribute to the distinctive features of the oneness of God in their respective religions.

In the third chapter, I focus on Jesus Christ and Muhammad in order to understand where Jesus Christ fits into prophethood and covenants and what his role is in relation to the oneness of God. Although this paper does address the prophet Muhammad and his role in developing the oneness of God, the primary focus is on Jesus Christ. After that, I conclude with observations from the research.

\(^2\) *Kalam* is a traditional field in Islamic studies that deals with God and his attributes. It is similar to philosophical theology and apologetics in Christianity. In mediaeval Islam, God and his attributes were studied in this field.
Review of Literature on the Oneness of God, Prophethood, and Covenants

The literature on the oneness of God, taken together from both Abrahamic faiths, is vast, and when we add onto it literature on prophethood and covenants, the amount of literature that must be reviewed grows exponentially. Moreover, there is a growing literature on Christian-Muslim dialogue that addresses from a comparative perspective what Christian and Islamic theologies explore in isolation. To manage such a large amount of data, I sample a few representative members of each class of writing (the oneness of God, prophethood, covenants, and their comparative study) that address these concerns, relegating important articles and books to footnotes. The purpose of the literature review is not to analyze the material exhaustively — frankly, this is impossible — but to indicate where the scholarship stands.

In addition to sacred scriptures, I use several sources for understanding the oneness of God in both Christianity and Islam. For exploring Christian perspectives on the

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3 I use the terms “the oneness of God” and “monotheism” interchangeably because monotheism is concerned with the concept and belief in one God. For the rise and use of this term, see Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 82. The term "monotheism" is well established in the field. For an alternative approach, see Wilhelm C. Linss, Review of “Dynamic Oneness: The Significance and Flexibility of Paul’s One-God Language,” by Suzanne Nicholson. Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co, 2011, Currents In Theology And Mission 41, no. 4 (August 2014): 282-283.


5 See for example, John C. Reeves, ed., Bible and Qur’an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality (Boston: Brill, 2004), 1-23.
oneness of God in general, I employ Katherine Sonderegger’s first volume of *Systematic Theology* along with Richard Bauckham’s works on Christology and monotheism, namely, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* and *Jesus and God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity*. In these books, the authors define and address the oneness of God in Christian faith. Sonderegger’s approach is aligned with one of the traditional strands within Christianity. However, hers is a modern approach that, unlike the classical approach of Thomas Aquinas, indirectly confronts the identity-based monotheism developed by Bauckham. Sonderegger’s understanding of the oneness of God highlights abstract attributes of God deduced from the Bible like omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, starting from the *Shema* and using oneness as the unifying principle of theological exposition. Bauckham’s approach is more scripturally oriented and wrestles with the question of the oneness of God understood in relation to Jesus Christ. Bauckham privileges the identity of God (unlike Sonderegger who privileges the nature of God) and explores the oneness of God as the oneness defined in and through Christ, making Christ an element to God’s oneness. In addition, there are various articles that explore questions of monotheism and monolatry, biblical rhetorics of monotheism, the


Trinity and the oneness of God. To understand the oneness of God from the Islamic perspective, I refer to William Watt’s *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Fazlur Rahman’s *Main Themes in the Qur’an*, Emrullah Yüksel’s *Systematic Kalam*, and other various articles. Watt’s work demonstrates the developments in Islamic scholastic theology and the internal disagreements about God’s attributes. Rahman’s modernity-influenced interpretation of Islam helps us understand how traditional Islamic heritage on the oneness of God is appropriated by Islamic scholars who are sympathetic to modernity. Yüksel’s work guides us toward a systematic treatment of the oneness of God from the moderate perspective that is also sympathetic to modernity yet insists on the value of traditional teachings. Like the majority of scholars, Rahman interprets the oneness of God as the most important teaching in Islam, but he focuses on the contingency of God and the meaning of the oneness of God for creation. In his interpretation, God is that dimension that makes all other dimensions possible. Yüksel emphasizes classical

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arguments drawn from the Qur’an in order to show the relevance of the oneness of God in our tumultuous world.


Roehr argues that ancient covenants were not just unilateral but also bilateral. He also explores the implications of covenants for God-human relationships and the different kinds of covenants, such as a treaty, grant, contract, etc. Haber’s article deals with the transformation that the concept of covenants goes through when it is appropriated by the author of Hebrews. She shows how the author of Hebrews identifies the new covenant with the old covenant yet also distances it from covenants of the Old Testament. Stronstad’s article follows the trajectory of prophethood from Moses to Jesus and argues for the continuation of prophethood despite the break in inter-testamental times. He shows that prophecy expands and becomes more complex as it develops. Farnell’s article approaches prophecy as a gift and questions how this particular charisma is related to others.

For understanding the Islamic concepts of covenants and prophethood, I combine Joseph Lumbard’s “Covenant and Covenants in the Qur’an,” Bernard Weiss’ “Covenant and Law in Islam,” Wasim Ahmad’s “The Concepts of Prophet and Prophethood with Reference to Kenneth Cragg and W. M. Watt,” and William M. Watt’s “The Nature of Muhammad’s Prophethood” with other sources.¹³ Lumbard analyzes Qur’anic verses that expound on covenants and makes the case that the Qur’an teaches on pre-temporal covenant, prophetic covenants, and specific covenants made with various faith communities. Weiss demonstrates how covenants, oaths, and obligations in God-human relationships are connected in Islam and in what ways this understanding comes close to the Judeo-Christian understanding of covenants. Ahmad’s article breaks down two Western scholars’ analysis of prophethood in Islam and juxtaposes it with the traditional understanding of the Islamic doctrine. Watt’s article deals with the question of whether the personality of prophets in Islam is also part of revelations. In addition, he addresses whether Muhammad could be seen as a prophet according to Christianity.

Besides these sources, I engage books and articles dealing with the aforementioned concepts from a comparative perspective. For example, Guiseppe Scattolin’s article, “Between Monotheism of Isolation and Monotheism of Communion: A Reflection on Islamic Monotheism,” compares monotheism in Christianity and in Islam just as Ernest

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Hamilton’s article, “The Qur’anic Dialogue with Jews and Christians,” examines Qur’anic dialogues about covenants, the oneness of God, and prophethood.14 Similarly, Lamin Sanneh’s article, “Muhammad, Prophet of Islam, and Jesus Christ, Image of God: A Personal Testimony,” analyzes the functions of Muhammad as a prophet of Islam with that of Christ in Christianity.15 Other comparative articles or essays like Jon Hoover’s “Islamic Monotheism and the Trinity,” John P. Davis’ article, “Who are the Heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant?,” Mahmoud Ayoub’s essay, “Abraham and His Children, a Muslim Perspective,” and books like Kenneth Cragg’s The Weight in the Word: Prophethood: Biblical and Qur’anic also help to shed light on the oneness of God, covenants, and prophets from a comparative perspective.16

Methodological Concerns

All in-depth researches need to address issues of their methods especially when they explore connections between several themes. This research employs a comparative method of the relevant texts considered to be loci classici in Christianity and in Islam. These texts are both isolated and read together with secondary literature in order to understand what these texts say about the relevant topics and how the secondary literature interprets the texts. As to the legitimacy of comparing certain concepts of Christianity and Islam, this is a long established scholarly tradition.\(^\text{17}\) The theoretical reasons for comparing Christianity and Islam are based on the fact that both of these religions come from an ancient near eastern monotheistic tradition.\(^\text{18}\) In fact, they employ very close conceptual language that make claims about God, such as God’s names, attributes, or nature, covenants between God and humans, prophets who brought revelations, canonized sacred texts, etc. In recent years, some scholars have also tried to read the Qur’an in a biblical context.\(^\text{19}\)

Although this research focuses on the oneness of God or monotheism in Christianity and in Islam, this concept is explored through the concepts of covenants and prophethood. The primary question is what covenants and prophethood say about the oneness of God in Islam and in Christianity. Such an approach requires more attention to the breadth and synthesis rather than a narrower in-depth exploration of any


particular element. So this thesis looks at connections between these concepts in order to understand the oneness of God, and to do that, all three concepts — the oneness of God, covenants, and prophethood — are treated as a connected whole. Whether it is in the New Testament or in the Qur’an, the aforementioned concepts are assumed to be internally linked ideas supporting, informing, and conflicting with one another; behind these seemingly disparate concepts lies a deeper, patterned approach.

The main texts addressed in this research are those that deal with the oneness of God in relation to covenants and prophethood whether directly or indirectly. So in the New Testament, the focus is on the Eucharist texts in the Gospels (Mark 14:22–25; Matt. 26:26–29; Luke 22:13–20), a kenotic text in Philippians (Phil 2:5–11), Hebrews, and to a lesser degree on the Pauline corpus. In the Qur’an, the focus is mostly on 7:172, 3:81, and Sura Al-Maida (fifth Sura). However, as the topic is developed, the nature of the research addresses other verses from both scriptures to a lesser degree. As to prophets, the focus is on Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, all of whom could reasonably be considered to be prophets by followers of both religions. Occasionally, other Old Testament prophets such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Isaiah are mentioned to explore the Old Testament background, which is vital for Christianity and Islam. Also,  

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20 The Letter to Hebrews is considered to be a locus classicus for the concept of covenant in Christianity. See Jesper Svartvik, “Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews Without Presupposing Supersessionism” in Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships, ed. Philip Cunningham et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 77-79.

21 I will not reproduce biblical texts in order to have enough space to write about the concepts. I’m assuming that the readers are familiar with them. However, I will reproduce the Qur’anic texts, assuming that readers may not be familiar with them as much as they are familiar with the biblical texts. But even with the Qur’anic material, I will limit myself to the most important texts, mentioning others for the reader to explore if s/he so desires.
general, minimalistic, and inclusive definitions are used for paired concepts in these religions. For example, I define God as the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Creator who is infinite in time and space but is also just, merciful, and forgiving. Both Muslims and Christians would agree that this definition is minimalistic and requires further additions. For example, a Christian may want to include Jesus Christ in this definition while a Muslim may want to bring in a more detailed understanding of God’s oneness. Those differences will be articulated in the second and third chapters. As to prophethood, it is defined as a divinely established office that mediates between God and humans for accomplishing God’s work. Again, a Christian may want to add a prophet’s representation of humans to God into the definition or incarnation while a Muslim may want to add the sameness of the major messages that prophets brought. But at this point these working definitions allow us to include prophets from both religions despite their differences. As to covenants, here they are defined as grant-like, treaty-like, and promissory agreements between God and humans to accomplish certain goals.

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Chapter 1: Monotheism in the Qur’an and in the New Testament

Theological Conceptualizations of the Oneness of God in the New Testament and in the Qur’an

Although mainstream forms of both Abrahamic faiths integrate scriptural teachings on monotheism or the oneness of God into a harmonized whole, the textual complexity of the Scriptures gives rise to various readings of the oneness of God. This section surveys traditional and modern readings of the monotheistic scriptural texts based on how scholars approach the diverse verses of the New Testament and of the Qur’an.

Traditionally in Christianity, God and his attributes24 (including oneness) are treated from an abstract and philosophical point of view. The Trinity doctrine, which has no explicit basis in the New Testament, also contributes to a multiplicity of readings. In the

24 For a detailed treatment of God’s attributes from a traditional Reformed perspective, see Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 29-76. On page 41, he defines attributes as “essential qualities in which the being of God is revealed and with which it can be identified.”

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twentieth century when Trinitarian teachings held a prominent position in dogmatic works, the oneness of God or monotheism was subsumed most often than not under the doctrine of the Trinity.25 However, in the last two decades scholarship has developed the oneness of God in the New Testament. This is due to the various approaches in biblical studies in which the biblical teaching on the oneness of God is challenged because of the verses that teach a multiplicity of gods.26 So far, there seems to be three main schools within Christianity that specifically address the oneness of God. One of these schools I call *Shema*-oriented monotheism. The second one had already been named Christological monotheism.27 *Shema*-oriented monotheism begins from the *Shema Yisrael* (Deut. 6:4–5) and subsumes the Trinity under the oneness of God or sees it as a “form of oneness.”28 This school has some historical precedence in traditional (patristic, Catholic, reformed) theology.

Sonderegger, the most recent representative of the *Shema*-oriented monotheism, begins her systematic theology with the oneness of God, which is the background issue in the New Testament and not the foreground problem or primary concern for the authors of the Gospels. In her *Systematic Theology*, Sonderegger defines the oneness of God as a starting point and aligns with Thomas Aquinas, who also started his *Summa*

with the oneness of God. Moreover, she defines this oneness of God as a formless, invisible, and unique attribute of God. In her exposition, the oneness of God is twofold: the affirmation of one God and the denial of idols. However, Sonderegger’s approach should be differentiated from the classical theological approach of Aquinas because the mediaeval theologian did not expound on the oneness of God in contrast to the identity of God. But Sonderegger differentiates between the questions of what God is and who God is (Qui sit et quid sit Deus). In addition, she compares the nature-based oneness of God to the identity-based oneness of God. She acknowledges the Christological and Trinitarian emphasis in modern theological treatises but sets her work against that trend. Interestingly, she treats Philippians 2:5–11 as expounding the oneness of God rather than the divinity of Christ, traditionally understood to point to the divinity of Jesus. True, she does try to integrate Christ into the picture, but central to her interpretation of Phil. 2:5–11 is that the whole passage is about one God whose manifestation is Jesus Christ. Because of this contrasting approach, I think her understanding of the oneness of God should be classified as the Shema-oriented monotheism that is close to classical doctrinal understanding. Yet, it differs from the

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29 Ibid., 8.
30 Ibid., 17.
31 Ibid., 19.
32 I coined the terms “nature-based oneness of God” and “identity-based oneness of God” based on the use of the terms “nature” and “identity” in recent theological literature. Here nature refers to divine nature and identity refers to divine identity.
33 Ibid., xi, xiii, xvii, xxiii.
34 Ibid., 136.
classical understanding because of its concerns and incorporation into the discussion of distinctively modern concepts.\footnote{Ibid., 36-45. Sonderegger compares Aquinas’ understanding of the oneness of God with the divine oneness in the Kantian tradition. This also makes her approach modern unlike Aquinas’ who was not concerned with concepts such as \textit{noumena} and \textit{phenomena}.}

In contrast, the identity-based oneness of God or Christological monotheism addresses the oneness of God without separating that oneness from Jesus Christ, and this is closer to the discernible concerns of the New Testament. In the Gospels and Epistles, the primary question is not whether God is one but who Jesus Christ is in relation to God and who God is in relation to Jesus Christ. The answer to that question is that Jesus Christ is God himself. Obviously, this has implications for one God, and the Gospel of John explores some of them, but one God apart from Jesus is not the focus of the Gospel writers. Christological monotheism was developed by Richard Bauckham\footnote{Richard Bauckham, \textit{Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).} and to a lesser degree by Nicholas T. Wright.\footnote{Nicholas T. Wright, “One God, one Lord,” \textit{The Christian Century} 130, no. 24 (November 27, 2013). In addition to Bauckham and Wright, there is another variant of the identity-based monotheism developed by Neil B. MacDonald. However, unlike Bauckham and Wright, he uses traditional theological-philosophical language to account for the ontological oneness of Jesus and God. See Neil B. MacDonald, “YHWH and Jesus in One Self-Same Divine Self: Christological Monotheism as an Experiment in Objective Soteriology,” \textit{American Theological Inquiry} 6, no. 2 (July 2013): 23-36. Also, see his “Christological Monotheism, Numerically the Same Divine Self, and John’s Gospel,” \textit{American Theological Inquiry} 6, no. 2 (July 2013): 3-22.} According to Bauckham, emphasis on God’s nature in classical theology comes from the ancient Greek philosophy, and this negatively affects the way we perceive the New Testament’s concern about the identity of Jesus and monotheism seen within that identity.\footnote{Bauckham, \textit{Jesus and the God of Israel} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 7.} Christological monotheism insists
that the Jews of Second Temple Judaism were strict monotheists, and Jews who believed in Jesus included Jesus in that monotheism by worshipping him, by praying to him, and by ascribing to Jesus divine titles. Christological monotheism expounds on the oneness of God in the Scriptures starting from Jesus Christ and not from an omnipotent and invisible God. Phil. 2:5–11 is treated as one of the central texts through which the divinity of Christ is emphasized. According to Bauckham, in Phil. 2:5–11 we see Jesus identified with God because of his surrender to the Father’s will. Wright, another representative of this school, emphasizes connections between the Shema and Christological monotheism by analyzing how Paul combines the Shema and the divinity of Jesus in 1 Cor. 8:6. Wright convincingly demonstrates that at least in 1 Cor. 8:6, Paul combines the fatherhood of God with the lordship of Jesus Christ, alluding to the Shema and establishing the divinity of Christ. That said, the main weakness of Christological monotheism is the lack of analytical rigor due to its reliance on narrative; it does not address the question of how Christ’s spatially limited body and flesh go together with the one, infinite, and immaterial nature of God. To brush away such questions as philosophical impositions on Scripture does not do justice to the theological thought and concerns of previous generations.

The third way or school of understanding the oneness of God in Christianity is the classical-theological oneness seen in the works of mediaeval and pre-modern theologians. One of the primary concerns of this school is how to reconcile oneness with

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40 Ibid., 197-210.
the Trinity.\textsuperscript{42} The classical-theological school operates within the Greek philosophical framework of essence, nature, attributes, and accidents. Unlike the modern variants of monotheism, this particular kind of oneness does not compartmentalize the oneness of God into a specific category isolated from the Trinity. Pre-modern sources did differentiate between \textit{De Deo Uno} and \textit{De Deo Trino}, but Augustine’s struggle to understand the oneness of God in context of the Trinity\textsuperscript{43} shows that the oneness and the Trinity were treated in relation to one another without separating them to the degree that modern theologians do. Also, in the classical exposition the problem is not the Trinity versus the uniqueness of God as modern theologians understand the oneness to mean. The problem is precisely the multiplicity within the Trinity versus the oneness of the Godhead which implies in the classical understanding of the oneness of God the idea that this oneness retained some element of quantity (one as opposed to many). Nevertheless, the classical-theological oneness of God is closer to modern nature-based monotheisms like the \textit{Shema}-oriented monotheism because of its emphasis on the nature of God. In this kind of theological thinking, Jesus Christ has two natures, divine and human, and their relationship was formalized in creedal teachings of the church. Such a language is not employed by Christological monotheism or by the

\textsuperscript{42} For a modern approach to the same problem, see Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” \textit{Calvin Theological Journal} 23, no. 1 (April 1988).

\textsuperscript{43} It is almost common knowledge among theologically aware Christians that in his work, \textit{On the Trinity}, Augustine uses various metaphors to explain the Trinity in such a way that the concept shows unity too. So unity becomes lover (the Father), beloved (the Son), and love (the Spirit). Love as relation is the central category in this metaphor that keeps unity within God. Augustine, as Pseudo-Dionysius, was influenced by Neo-Platonism, so it would be fair to say that the classical (especially patristic) understanding of the oneness of God demonstrates a strong Platonic influence until the Thomistic turn towards Aristotelianism.
Shema-oriented monotheism despite the fact that the Shema-oriented oneness school recognizes its importance.

As it is in Christianity, Islam also has at least three⁴⁴ schools that take different positions on the oneness of God. The first one I call the traditional school of the oneness of God and the second one, the school of the corporeal oneness of God. Although the corporeal oneness of God does not come from a Muslim or from within Islam, I still consider it because it makes an indirect claim about the oneness of God in the Qur’ān and argues for a radically new understanding of it. The traditional understanding of Allah in Islam is developed by classical Kalam schools of the Asharites and their opponents, the Mu’tazilites.⁴⁵ The Mu’ tazilites represent a rational approach to the oneness of God while the Asharites represent a more literalistic reading of the Qur’ān. Nevertheless, like in Christianity, neither the Asharites nor the Mu’tazilites could escape the question of how God is one vis-à-vis conceptual language that implied an element of multiplicity in God.⁴⁶ In classical Kalam, God’s attributes or His names and relation between God’s names and God’s essence were one of the major controversies

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⁴⁴ I say “at least three” because there are various teachings in traditional or modern Islam that have implications for the oneness of Allah. For example, Iranian dissident and theologian-intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush proposes that in Islam, Muhammad himself is revelation; such an approach has implications for the oneness of God, revelation, and its embodiment. However, I did not include these fringe teachings because in many of them, the oneness of God is marginal and is not developed. See Mohammed Hashas, “Abdolkarim Soroush: The Neo-Mu’ tazilite that Buries Classical Islamic Political Theology in Defense of Religious Democracy and Pluralism,” Studia Islamica 109 (2004): 147-173.

⁴⁵ I will not include the Maturidi school of Kalam in this survey because in matters of God and his attributes, they align with the Asharites. See Ahmad Kutty, “Kitab Al-Tawḥīd by Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī: A Report with Reference to His Role in the Development of Kalām,” Hamdard Islamicus 26, no. 4 (October 2003): 54.

⁴⁶ Classical Islamic Kalam was influenced by Greek philosophy and used some of the philosophical concepts (essence, attributes, accidents, etc.) to interpret the oneness of God.
that ended with the victory of the Asharites. The Mu’tazilites believed that God is one and just, and his attributes are not different from God himself because believing that God’s attributes are real and different from God would lead to a multiplicity in the Godhead. So they indirectly denied the eternity of God’s word, the Qur’an.\textsuperscript{47} The Mu’tazilites affirmed that human reason has independent access to God’s oneness, and it could appropriate this oneness apart from revelation. The Asharites refused the Mu’tazila position on the oneness because to them the Qur’an spoke about God’s attributes in a very real sense without qualifying it as formal unreal attributes. In the Qur’an, God sits on the throne (2:255), has a hand that rules the world (39:67), does not sleep (2:255), hears (34:50), sees (24:64), and wills (13:11). Due to this emphasis, the Asharites recognized the reality of God’s attributes but did not go beyond that. They refused to engage the possibility for God to have attributes yet still be one. They developed the doctrine \textit{bi-la kayfa}, which literally means “without specifying how,” in order to affirm the reality of God’s attributes on the one hand yet deny possible multiplicity within the Godhead on the other.\textsuperscript{48} The Asharites believed that they affirm what the Qur’an affirms but leave to Allah what Allah does not reveal in the Qur’an, namely, how it is possible for God to have attributes and yet to be one. The traditional school of the oneness of God in Islam developed rigorous concepts that focussed on the oneness understood to be the oneness in God’s essence, attributes, actions, and will. To


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 66.
this day, traditional Muslims hold to this view.\textsuperscript{49} Also, the traditional oneness (or \textit{tawhid} along with \textit{wahid}, the unity) emphasizes God’s oneness in relation to some external concepts to God.\textsuperscript{50}

The corporeal oneness of God is a modern development emphasized by Wesley Williams.\textsuperscript{51} His approach would predictably be rejected by orthodox Muslims, but he convincingly argues that in early Islam there was a movement that understood Allah as having a body unlike any body yet nevertheless having a glorious body. Although he does not explicitly speak about the oneness of God, his approach has significant implications for the oneness of God in Islam.\textsuperscript{52} He states that classical Islamic understanding of the oneness of God was influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, and this marginalized anthropomorphic features of God, which according to the Qur’an should be taken literally – that is, early Muslims understood God to have a heavenly, glorious body. This is not to say that God is like humans but that humans had been

\begin{footnotes}
\item[A few months ago, I had a chance to talk to a Muslim. I asked him to explain what it means for God to be one, and he responded that the oneness means God is one in his essence, will, and actions.
\item[50]{\ldots}When applied to God this term [\textit{wahid}] means that there is no more than one God: God is one, in the sense that there is only one God, who has neither associate/partner (\textit{sharik}), nor simile (\textit{shibh}), nor opponent (\textit{didd})." See Giuseppe Scattolin, "Between Monotheism of Isolation and Monotheism of Communion: A Reflection on Islamic Monotheism," \textit{Islamochristiana} 34 (2008): 7. Understood in this way, the Islamic understanding of God emphasizes uniqueness and transcendence more than the Christian understanding of the oneness of God because of the implications stemming from incarnation.
\item[52]Wesley Williams, "A Body, Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam," \textit{Journal of the American Oriental Society} 129.1 (2009): 22, 24, 25. That said, we need to be careful not to identify this body with the human body or incarnated body. But this does open the door to see the human body shaped after the divine body.
\end{footnotes}
created in bodily form and shape like God’s. God has a glorious body veiled from creaturely eyes because no creature can stand in this body’s presence. Williams calls it “transcendent anthropomorphism” and identifies this glorious body with ancient Near Eastern concepts of the glory of God, known from the Old Testament, Assyrian, and Canaanite sources. Interestingly, in Islamic debates about the oneness of God, the Mu’tazilites refused any embodiment to God while some Asharites (and later Hanbalism, the conservative school of law,) recognized bodily-ness of God to some degree. In Wesley Williams’ interpretation, the Qur’an 42:11 prohibits an absolute likeness between God and creatures but recognizes a relative likeness. He also argues for the embodied Allah, grounding his argument in the Qur’an 112:2 where the word *samad*, which is a *hapax legomenon*, was used. Traditional translations and commentaries take the word *samad* to mean absolute or free from all needs. However, even they recognize that this is a difficult word to translate. Williams takes it to mean solid, massive, and not hollow, based not only on Greek sources’ earliest translation of the word but also on some Islamic theologians of the Asharite school. If his description is correct, then scholars have a very significant development in the Qur’anic

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53 Ibid., 23-24. If ancient Assyrian, Canaan, and Hebrew people believed in God with body, it is possible to see this tradition continue into the New Testament where this glorious body manifests in human form as Jesus Christ and gains a salvific dimension through the Eucharist.

54 Ibid., 32-35.

55 Ibid., 36-38.

understanding of the oneness of God because One God in Islam is not just one in an abstract way, but he may also be one just like any human being: materialized, embodied, individuated, and in a particular shape.

The third way of understanding God’s oneness or monotheism in Islam comes from Sufism, the spiritually-oriented segment of Islam. Although Sufism is somewhat marginalized within Islam, it has received noticeable attention in Western scholarship. Various schools of Sufism gave rise to most radical ways of understanding God-human relationships, seen as blasphemy by the orthodox religion. Mansur Al-Hallaj, a controversial Sufi of tenth century Baghdad, claimed to become one with God so much so that he used to say *Ana al-Haqq*, “I’m truth,” one of God’s names in Islam. However, the most formidable and grounded understanding of God’s oneness from the Sufi perspective comes from Ibn Arabi (d. 638/1240). In the Sufi order following in his footsteps, the terms used to define the Islamic understanding of the oneness took on a more precise and spiritual sense. For Ibn Arabi, the true oneness of God “consists in affirmation of both divine unity and infinite multiplicity of His self-manifestations (*tajalliyat*).” In Sufi understanding, *ahadiyya* indicates “God’s unity/oneness in respect

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to his transcendence," and "wahdaniyya or wahidiyya designates God’s unity/oneness in relation to the multiplicity of possible beings."\(^{61}\)

All these various ways of understanding\(^{62}\) God’s oneness indicate that scholars still wrestle with what it means for God to be one and which particular description of God’s oneness is faithful to the Scriptures. From the Christian point of view, the main issue in the oneness of God is the tension that arises between viewing Jesus as a God-human and believing that God — the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent one — is also one God. From the Islamic perspective, a theological emphasis on God’s transcendence and an extreme emphasis on the oneness of the Creator create tension between humans’ understanding of God and the Qur’anic description of it that do not always fit together.

The Oneness of God and Scriptural Teachings on Covenants and Prophets

The New Testament and the Qur’an teach not only directly about the oneness of God but also indirectly by teaching about covenants and prophetic office or prophets. This section mentions a few verses from both Scriptures that teach the oneness of God, however vague it may be. Then I single out some texts teaching on covenants and prophets in order to show how covenants and prophetic office are

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{62}\) The reader may notice that in my explication of the oneness of God, I rely on philosophically-inclined language to articulate the topic. Although I tend to favor Christological monotheism because of its closeness to Scripture, it seems to me that a systematic analysis using philosophically-oriented language yields more precision.
both similar and different in the New Testament and in the Qur’an and how this ultimately reflects on their understanding of the oneness of God.

Scholars observe the oneness of God in many verses of the New Testament, but the picture is not straightforward because of Jesus Christ. On one hand, the New Testament speaks about the oneness of God in and of itself (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4; Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19). On the other hand, we see Jesus Christ described either as God or as one with God to such a degree that the Scripture invites humans to worship him as God (John 1:1, 10:30; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8; Jude 1:25). I consider the divinity of Jesus Christ to be reasonably well established in the New Testament though scholars may disagree on the details. Complexity arises from the fact that Christianity insists on God’s oneness as the background belief and the commandment it received in the Old Testament, yet the New Testament invites people to worship Jesus Christ, who was perceived by people first and foremost as a human being.63 This “duplicity of worship”64 was noticed even by pagan writers of

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63 The New Testament does not indicate that Jesus tried to convince people of his own humanness. Everyone saw him and perceived him to be a human being. But he did teach and wrestled to convince people of his own divinity. Therefore, Jesus' humanity was beyond doubt, but his divinity was contested.  
64 Henrik P. Thyssen, "Philosophical Christology in the New Testament," *Numen* 53, no. 2 (2006): 133-176, especially 158. Thyssen credits Wilhelm Bousset for the term “duplicity of worship.” He calls it Bousset’s principle, which states that Christians worship both God and Christ. On page 136, he rephrases it as “reduplication of Godhead.” Thyssen tries to prove that the Logos concept originates from extra-biblical sources whose proper translation should be reason, not word. His approach fits very well with the Islamic charge that Jesus should not be divinized.
ancient Rome who found Christians’ denial of pagan idols and their worship of human beings to be inconsistent with their worship of Jesus Christ.

The Qur’anic understanding of the oneness of God is more intuitive because it does not have to wrestle with issues like incarnation or the Trinity. The Qur’an emphasizes the oneness of the Creator God more than the New Testament but also defines it over and against the Christian Trinitarian belief (2:163; 2:255; 6:102; 6:151; 7:59; 17:23; 17:42; 21:22; 23:91; 31:11; 35:3; 39:38; 51:56; 16:36; 42:11; 46:4; 112:1–4). Also, the scripture of Islam presents the oneness of God in such a way that it excludes the incarnation of God in human form and the worship of that God-human. In short, even if we agree that the Qur’an allows for God’s manifestation (tajalla) in another being, it qualifies that manifestation by teaching that only God qua God could be worshipped. This is the orthodox Sunni interpretation of the Qur’an. The main issue rising from the oneness of God in Islam boils down to how such a strict oneness is related to his eternal speech, the Qur’an. If the Qur’an is the eternal word of God, as orthodox Islam holds, that gives rise to another eternal thing alongside


with God that implies many-ness: God and his word. Moreover, the two distinct
scriptural articulations of the oneness of God (Christian and Islamic) have profound
implications for the concept of covenants and the concept of prophetic office.

The New Testament *locus classicus* on covenants\textsuperscript{67} doctrine is the Letter to
Hebrews. However, Hebrew’s peculiar and kind of stand-alone exposition of the
concept of covenants should be balanced with the Eucharistic texts. In Hebrews,
Jesus Christ is seen as a priest who brings sacrifice rituals to an end by sacrificing
himself, and this is the new covenant that replaces the covenant of the Old
Testament.\textsuperscript{68} It situates the new covenant in context of the Old Testament prophets
and their teachings by acknowledging that before, God spoke through prophets, but
later, God chose to speak through his Son who is “the radiance of God’s glory” and
“the exact representation of his being” (Heb. 1:1–4). By virtue of exposition, Hebrews
differentiates between God and his Son yet also ascribes to the Son a very high place
in God’s presence. The primary concern of Hebrews is not really whether God is one
or not though we see a hint to incarnation (Heb. 2:14) but rather what Jesus Christ
accomplished with his death on the cross. Christ’s accomplishment on the cross does
something that the Old Testament covenant could not do; by this, the Letter

\textsuperscript{67} For the definition of the covenant, see Walter R. Roehrs, “Divine Covenants: Their Structure and

\textsuperscript{68} For various readings of the covenant in the Letter to Hebrews, see David Echelbarger, “Dual Covenant
Theology,” *Journal Of Theta Alpha Kappa* 34, no. 2 (September 2010): 54-70; Elliott Johnston, “Does Hebrews
have a Covenant Theology?,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 21, no. 1 (2010): 31-54.
introduces tension into the covenants, one of which could not satisfy God with blood sacrifices, so God made another covenant through Jesus. The most important outcome of this covenant is that by sacrificing himself, Jesus opened for humanity a deeper access to God and guaranteed salvation to all who come to him. Hebrews’ exposition of covenants uses concepts absent from Islam such as the role of a priest, the order of Melchizedek, a heavenly tabernacle, a perfect sacrifice, etc.

Unlike Hebrews’ teaching on covenants, the Eucharistic texts (Mark 14:22–25; Matt. 26:26–29; Luke 22:13–20; 1 Cor. 11:17–34) show how Christ enacted or ritually made the covenant.69 The familiar topic of Christ’s sacrificing himself by shedding his blood reappears here. But most importantly the reader also encounters Christ’s emphasis on his body which makes the Christian covenant very much connected to the flesh and blood of human beings. Jesus’ mention of his body and blood tie into God’s becoming a human and redeeming us. In the Gospel of John, the emphasis on the Eucharist is on service. Although service is not necessarily a covenant, it could be approached as an indirect and implicit affirmation of the new covenant because Jesus’ self-sacrifice could also be seen as service. Notice that so far, the scriptural

69 For covenantal mystery manifest in the Eucharist, see Marc Ouellet, “Trinity and Eucharist: A Covenantal Mystery,” Communio: International Catholic Review 27, no. 2 (2000) 262-283. On page 274, the author interprets the communion as a ritual that opens the Trinitarian unity of divine persons to believers. In his interpretation, incarnation gives “the most concrete and the most universal expression to the mystery of the covenant between the Trinity and humanity.”
teaching on covenants focuses on Jesus Christ rather than God *per se*. But of course, if Jesus is God, then it is possible to say that the covenant in the New Testament is God’s covenant with humanity too. Nevertheless, the Scriptures bring into focus not God in and of himself but God in Jesus as they focus on Christ’s actions or His self-sacrifice in the covenant. Unlike the covenant in Hebrews, the Gospels’ description of the covenant depicts Jesus as presiding over the Passover feast without emphasizing his priestly or prophetic role. But the very fact that it is Jesus presiding and sacrificing himself implies his role in the very least as a mediator between God and humanity. Moreover, because it is Jesus who we see as a human being, it both implies and amplifies the question of how God is one when we see God as Jesus on earth, walking with humans as a real human being. What are the implications of his humanity for our worshipping Jesus? Questions like this one have implications for the oneness of God, and it is not easy to answer them as the New Testament itself shows. Therefore, it is possible to claim that scriptural teaching on covenants maintains and amplifies the tension about the oneness of God precisely because it speaks first and foremost about the human Christ in covenants and not some invisible God.
The New Testament teaching on prophets\(^70\) is no less complicated than its teaching on covenants (e.g., Mark 9:11–13; 1 Cor. 14:1; Eph. 4:1; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 John 4:1). Prophecy is a gift or a charisma in the New Testament, and it is not as central to the Gospels’ message as it is to the Qur’an’s. Prophets, as Hebrews imagines, all lead up to Jesus Christ. Jesus himself is a prophet though his prophetic identity is not fully understood by people (Mark 8:28–30). Scripture describes a prophet as someone who does not just bring messages from God but who goes to God on behalf of human beings.\(^71\) Also, the New Testament employs the Old Testament’s prophetic utterances like the prophetic predictions of Jesus the Nazarene, and that gives the impression of a series of prophecies and prophets, which continue from ancient messengers of Israel all the way to Jesus. He is “the Prophet, the final Prophet who should ‘fulfill’ all prophecy at the end of time.”\(^72\) However, Jesus is more than just a culmination of


prophethood. In fact, his prophetic office is overshadowed by his other two offices and epithets (the second Adam, I AM, Lamb of God, etc.) that the Scripture ascribes to him. Unlike the Qur’an, the New Testament mentions prophetesses (Luke 2:36–38; Acts 2:17–18). The New Testament does not focus on the oneness of God, at least not to the degree described in the Qur’an. For example, Agabus prophesies on the famine (Acts 11:27–30), and Anna prophesies about Jesus Christ (Luke 2:36–38). If we consider Paul and the other apostles to be prophets because they were inspired by God, it seems some of their teachings on the oneness of God cannot be accommodated into the Islamic understanding of the prophetic office because they taught things (like incarnation and the worshipping of Christ) with which the Qur’an disagrees. In addition, Christ of the New Testament gives new laws or re-interprets them in radically new ways (Matt. 5:43; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), and he claims things about himself that no true prophet according to Islam would dare to say (John 10:30–33). Because of Christ’s teachings, the oneness of God is contextualized in the New Testament not just as truth (Mark 12:29) but as something that needs to be re-interpreted in light of Jesus Christ. Although Christ recognizes the oneness of God (Mark 12:28–31) as the Shema, he poses the question that threatens conventions of ancient Jewish faith about how to understand the oneness of God (John 8:55, 10:27–
36). Christ’s ambiguous and reaction-provoking attitude as a prophet could be taken as an unmistakable sign of blasphemy from an Islamic perspective.

The concepts of covenants and prophets in the Qur'an have their own complexity rising from different circumstances than those of the New Testament.\(^73\) The Qur'an uses various words for covenant, two of which are central — *ahd* (unilateral agreement) and *mithaq* (covenant).\(^74\) The *locus classicus* for the Qur'anic understanding of the covenant and particular covenants is 7:172, which says, “And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam from their loins,\(^75\) their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yea, surely, we bear witness.’” In another important verse (3:81), the Qur'an says, “And (remember) when God made the covenant of the prophets, ‘By that which I have given you of a Book and Wisdom, should a messenger then come to you confirming that which is with you, you shall believe in him and you shall help him.’


\(^{74}\) Lumbard, “Covenant,” 2-4.

\(^{75}\) Compare this taking from loins to Gen. 24:9 and 47:29. Also, compare 7:172 to Hebrews 7:10.
He said, 'Do you agree and take on my burden on these conditions?' They said, 'We agree'. He said, 'Bear witness, for I am with you among those who bear witness.'"

These two verses as well as some others (2:40; 2:63; 2:83; 2:119; 2:256; 3:103; 3:112; 31:22; etc.) together have been interpreted in several ways. Therefore, I will simply share the observations of some scholars, describe the understanding of prophethood in the Qur'an, and do some preliminary comparison with the New Testament. The scholars consider 7:172 to describe a pre-temporal covenant between God and human souls though some Shia sources disagree by saying that 7:172 describes an actual universal covenant that God makes with every individual on this earth.\textsuperscript{76} 3:81 describes the covenant specifically between prophets and Allah according to which Allah sends prophets and obliges them to help one another in sharing their messages with the people. These two verses form the basis for covenants that Allah made with Jews and Christians, the covenants the Qur'an mentions. In the Qur'an, the main message of the covenants is the oneness of God, and this focus on oneness distinguishes the concept from its OT and NT counterparts, retaining to some degree significant similarities.\textsuperscript{77} If understood in this way, all prophets are unified because of their message yet differ because of their circumstances, place, time, and details of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[77] Islam would agree with the \textit{Shema} and the prophetic condemnation of worshipping other gods or idols. In fact, the word used to mean God’s oneness in the Qur'an is the cognate word of the \textit{echad} in \textit{Shema}. See Deut. 6:4 "...\textit{Adonai echad}.” Compare to the Q.112:1. "...\textit{Allahu ahad}.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the message or the concrete laws they gave to the community. As such, the prophets form a chain in which every unit is connected to another by the virtue of revealing and reminding people the most important truths: the covenant that God made with humanity about his oneness, the testifying for former prophets, and the giving of the “glad tiding” (19:97) of the following prophet. Although details may differ, in general the connectedness of all prophets agrees with the Old Testament in which prophets are linked to one another either by shared beliefs, messages, or discipleship (as in the case of Elijah and Elisha). In the Qur’an, prophethood is the main contact vehicle between God and humans. The centrality of the universal covenant and prophethood should be clear if we take into account that Allah does not incarnate. But in the New Testament, God’s physical presence with humans implicitly marginalizes prophethood or makes it into a prolegomenon to God’s coming onto earth.

Moreover, the concept of covenants is used in the Qur’anic polemics against Jews and Christians. The Qur’an accuses the other two Abrahamic faiths of corrupting their covenants: Jews are accused of breaking the covenant that God made with them.

79 Lamin O. Sanneh, “Muhammad, Prophet of Islam, and Jesus Christ, Image of God: a Personal Testimony,” International Bulletin Of Missionary Research 8, no. 4 (October 1984): 169-174. See page 173: “God crowned the efforts of the prophets by offering himself in their place. God threw himself on our mercy, the last action of a Being who had wagered many times before: at creation, in the long series of prophets, in the history of human communities, and in the personal biographies and reflections of sages and thinkers. Finally, the wraps are taken off and he deals with us outside the veils.”
(Q. 5:12–13), and Christians are charged with forgetting their covenant (Q. 5:14).

Presumably, for Jews this is so because they did not believe in the messengers or prophets God sent and thus did not support them. Believing in the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ in context of the Islamic universal covenant on the oneness of God could be interpreted as forgetting the most important truth — which is to “believe in one creator, almighty, all merciful God and worship only him” — with one God. The main tension or internal conflict in the Qur’an’s concept of covenants stems from the human response to it: does Allah impose a covenant onto human beings, or do humans freely respond to the covenant? The philosophically minded theologians such as al-Razi refuse to grant humans independence in covenant-making even though the Qur’an itself seems to imply that. Nevertheless, in classic Islamic exegesis, some commentators took an alternative route, arguing from linguistic data in the Qur’an that humans do decide whether to agree or not agree to the covenant God makes with them. Muhammad has a special place in these covenants as the seal of prophets (33:40), as the prophet for whose coming Abraham

80 See the Qur’an 2:87 in which God accuses Jews of killing some of the prophets. This theme (refusing some messengers and killing some other prophets) could be seen as a continuation of themes from the Bible. See Neh. 9:26 and 1 Thess. 2:15. For analysis of this topic, see Frank D. Giliard, “Paul and the Killing of the Prophets in 1 Thess. 2:15,” Novum Testamentum 36, no. 3 (July 1994): 259-270.
82 Ibid., 73.
prayed to God (2:129), and as the prophet who restored the true monotheism of Abraham (16:123). But Muhammad is only a prophet in a long line of prophets and within classical Islam differs from other prophets, not in essence but in degree.

Prophethood in the Qur'an is understood to be an institution that connects God and humans and communicates the messages God sent to humans through people chosen by God.\textsuperscript{83} The Qur'an uses two different words (\textit{rasul} and \textit{nabi}) for the prophets, but they don't significantly differ from one another although there is some disagreement in Islamic exegesis about the exact meaning of these words.\textsuperscript{84} In Qur'anic descriptions, prophets reveal the oneness of God, and their main function is to mention that only one Creator God ought to be worshipped. There are several ambiguous issues in Islamic prophetology that are worth discussing, but this discussion will be limited to the prophet Muhammad and his functions to illustrate that even here, matters are quite complicated. One of the main disagreements about Muhammad's role in Islam revolves around his functions as a divine instrument for

\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{83} For an analysis of the prophets and prophethood in Islam, see Tottoli Roberto, \textit{Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature} (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2002); Fazlur Rahman, \textit{Major Themes of the Qur'an} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 80-106. On page 80, Rahman writes, "the Qur'an recognizes this as a universal phenomenon: all over the world there have been God's messengers whether or not named in the Qur'an (40:78, 4:164)." See also page 83: "All messengers have preached essentially the same message, that there is one, unique God to Whom alone service and worship are due, Who in the final analysis alone must be loved and feared." See also William M. Watt, "The Nature of Muhammad's Prophethood," SJRS 8, no. 2 (1987): 77-84; Kenneth Cragg, \textit{The Weight in the Word: Prophethood: Biblical and Qur'\textacuted{n}ic} (Eastbourne, England: Sussex Academic Press, 1999).
\textsuperscript{84} Yüksel, \textit{Sistematik}, 131-132.
\end{center}
revealing the oneness of God and his “devotional role as intercessor and comforter.”

Traditional mainstream Islam refuses any mediation between God and humans, but Muhammad’s intercession on behalf of others is recognized because the Qur’an implies so. This creates tension because as in Sufism and in folk Islam, Muhammad’s mediation brings him closer to divinization. Thus on one hand, Shiism, Sufism, and folk Islam develop the intercessory function of Muhammad to the point of his semi-divinization, and on the other hand, Sunni orthodoxy guards against or sometimes (in the case of Wahhabism) denies an intercessory function of Muhammad altogether. The prophets in the Qur’an are like the prophets of the Old Testament in that they suffered and denounced the injustices of their societies.

As to the differences between the concept of covenants in the Qur’an and the New Testament, the Qur’an does not recognize a God Incarnate who makes a self-sacrificial covenant through his blood that serves first and foremost to humans. The Qur’anic concept of covenants recognizes the covenants of the Old Testament, especially the Mosaic covenant, but there is no conceptual continuation through the

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85 Sanneh writes, “By stressing the mortality of the Prophet, official theology had still not succeeded in closing the gap between his authorized function as divine instrument and his devotional role as intercessor and comforter.” See Lamin Sanneh, “Muhammad, Prophet of Islam,” 169.

ideas of sacrifice, a new covenant, the role of a priest, etc., like there is in the New Testament. On the other hand, the Qur’anic idea of covenants is much more precisely spelled out and is more universal. Unlike the Old Testament teaching, the Qur’an doesn’t have election through a covenant where God chooses one ethnic group to establish the covenant.88

The prophetic office also has some similarities and differences. In the Qur’an, all prophets are unified because of the unity of their message; they teach the oneness of God and worship only Him (monolatry). Qur’anic prophets are mostly story-like allusions to Old Testament prophets. Qur’anic prophets have a specific covenant with God that sets them apart from the rest of humankind. On the other hand, the New Testament presents the prophetic office as a gift and sees it as an institution that culminates in Jesus Christ. Although the New Testament teaching does imply that their prophets believed in one God and were sent by one God, their teachings are more diverse; explicitly teaching on the oneness of God is not as central to their

87 The closest the Qur’an comes to sacrifice is Abraham’s attempt to sacrifice his son, in this case Ishmael, according to ahadith. However, in our times Muslims sacrifice animals only as commemoration of Abraham. Shedding the blood of an animal does not have a sacramental dimension in Islam, or it is not seen as a way of channeling God’s grace. As far as I know, a sacramental understanding of sacrifice is not central to traditional Islam. However, this is not to say that modernized or Christianity-influenced interpretations of Islam do not employ this concept. See Mahmoud M. Ayoub, “The Word of God in Islam,” The Greek Orthodox Theological Review 31, no. 1-2 (1986): 69-78, where he writes, “The five daily prayers of Islam may therefore be considered to be sacraments of Islam.”

messages as it is to the prophets in the Qur’an. The prophets of the New Testament prophesy about Jesus, threaten hypocrisy (like John the Baptist), and reveal things that from the Qur’anic perspective are definitely secondary (like Agabus’ revelation about drought).

Implications: Tawhid vs. Fulfillment of OT Promises in God Incarnate

This section explores the implications of the oneness of God in the Qur’an and the New Testament by taking into account what has been written so far. To do this, the focus shifts to five prophets and their covenants that the Qur’an and the New Testament mention. These prophets are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, all of whom together are considered to be great prophets in Islam. By exploring the messages of God in these five prophets, I will also comment on the implications of God’s oneness in the New Testament and the Qur’an.

89 My choice of these five prophets, named ulu 1 azm-anbiya (“great prophets”), are guided with the desire to be hospitable to the shared elements of Abrahamic heritage. Obviously, Noah is not as important in Christianity as Isaiah is, but Noah is spoken about in the Qur’an while Isaiah is not. So to be hospitable to what Islam has in common with Christianity, I took five great prophets of Islam rather than the major prophets of Christianity. However, Abraham and Moses have an important place in Christianity too while Jesus is the center of our faith.
Noah and his covenant are mentioned in the New Testament several times, but it is not as central to the New Testament as it is to Genesis or to the Qur'an. According to the Old Testament, Noah’s covenant with God is not about the oneness of God but rather God’s willingness to not destroy the earth again with a flood. In Judaism, the Noahic covenant is considered to be a universal covenant that includes non-Jews as well. In the New Testament, Noah is mentioned because of his faith (Heb. 11:7). He is kind of a symbol for God’s judgment of humanity (Luke 17:27). That said, we must take into account that the One who is talking to Noah is the one and unique God who created humanity and who had a right to judge human evil on earth. So the Noahic covenant indirectly implies the oneness of God in that only one, most powerful God could create and judge the world. The Noahic covenant reveals God’s uniqueness through the Creator’s moral character (as I understand the doctrine of God’s oneness to mean God’s uniqueness). In the New Testament, from the lips of

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Jesus Christ, Noah also turns out to be a sign of the end of times (Luke 17:26). By doing so, Jesus implies the validity of God's character revealed in the Noahic covenant. In the Qur'an, on the other hand, Noah calls to worship only one God (23:23) and later complains about people's stubbornness. The Qur'an hints that Noah prayed for God to forgive his people (71:5–7). The cause of the flood in the Qur'an comes from the people's refusal to believe in God's oneness. Because disbelieving in one Creator may alienate humans from other creatures of God and contribute to humans' unjust treatment of creation, it is possible to say that the evil for which God destroyed the earth could include the immoral and selfish behaviors towards other creatures that arose from disregarding the very existence and justice of one God, the Father of all.

Unlike Noah, Abraham stands tall in the Qur'an and in the New Testament. He is God's friend in the Qur'an, the first monotheist and progenitor of all monotheists.\(^\text{92}\)

According to the Qur'an, Abraham destroys idols and becomes a monotheist based on reasoning given to him by God. He was thrown into fire because of his preaching

\(^{92}\) Khalil Athamina, “Abraham in Islamic Perspective: Reflections on the Development of Monotheism in Pre-Islamic Arabia,” Der Islam 81, no. 2 (October 2004): 187, 190. According to the Qur'an and Islam, Muhammad did not bring new faith but tried to restore the true and original faith in one God that came down from Abraham. For an in-depth analysis of pre-Islamic Abraham and monotheism, which undoubtedly influenced the Islamic oneness of God, see Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, Paul, Monotheism and the People of God: The Significance of Abraham Traditions for Early Judaism and Christianity (London: Clark, 2004).
on God’s oneness and lordship, but God miraculously saved him (21:68–69). In the
New Testament, however, Abraham is remembered because of his trust in God. The
covenant made with Abraham in the Qur’an and the one made in the New Testament
differ significantly. In the Qur’an, Abraham’s covenant with God is the same as that
of other prophets: believe in one God and worship only Him. In the New Testament,
however, Abraham is singled out because he believed in God’s promise against all
odds, and God justified him because of his unconditional faith. Of course, it is
justifiable to believe that Abraham trusted in one God and not many gods, according
to the Bible. In the New Testament, believers are heirs of Abraham if they believe in
Christ (Gal. 3:29). In the Qur’an, Muslims are heirs of Abraham because they believe
in one God as Abraham did (3:67). According to the Qur’an, Abraham refused his
father’s faith in idols and denied the king’s demand to worship them (19:41–43).
Although the Qur’an tersely describes how these events happened, it could reliably
be assumed that during that process, Abraham suffered no less than when he took
his son to sacrifice. In the New Testament, the promise given to Abraham is fulfilled
in Jesus Christ through the righteousness that believers receive. Thus, in Abraham
the promise becomes visible and is acted out in history. Unlike the Qur’an, the New
Testament explicitly links Jesus to Abraham. In the New Testament, the covenant
God made with Abraham is about God’s blessings upon Abraham and the multiplying of his seed rather than about his oneness. But this does not mean that God’s oneness is unimportant in the case of Abraham’s covenant. Abraham had a very unique relationship with God, whom he knew as the one God, the Creator who visited him. Muslims do share in the biblical Abrahamic covenant because of Abraham’s belief in one God. Also, Abraham is described in the New Testament as the only prophet from whose children humanity received two covenants, one valid and the other invalid (Gal. 4:22–31).

Like Abraham, another prophet prominently mentioned in the Qur’an is Moses (Q. 5:44; 28:7; 28:30; etc.). The Qur’an alludes to the Mosaic covenant, the tablets, Exodus, and a host of other events in the life of Moses. As with other prophets, the covenant made with Moses — and through him with the people — was about the oneness of God. In the New Testament, Moses is referred to many times for various purposes. In the transfiguration (Matt. 17:3), Moses visited Jesus presumably to pay homage or to show disciples that Jesus belongs to the same line of prophets that Moses belongs. In John 1:17, Mosaic law or covenant is contrasted with truth and grace or the covenant of Jesus. This verse complicates the relationships between the

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covenants in the New Testament; not all covenants fit neatly into one larger scheme, and that is why there is some tension between them. Nevertheless, since Jesus Christ himself believed in one God, Moses and Jesus are unified in their belief in one God, YHWH, which matches the Islamic pattern of one universal covenant of and about one God.

Jesus as a prophet is described in various ways in the Qur'an and in the New Testament. In the Qur'an, Jesus is the only prophet who explicitly distanced himself from his disciples; according to the Qur'an, Jesus did not teach on his own divinity, which his disciples apparently later taught (Q. 3:49–53; 5:116; 19:30; etc.). In Islamic Scripture, Jesus’ covenant and central teaching on the oneness of God do not differ from other covenants and teachings that the Qur’an describes. But the holy book of Islam accuses Christians of forgetting the true covenant of Jesus which supposedly taught only the belief in one God and emphatically denied his own divinity. In the

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94 It seems impossible to fully harmonize all covenants with one another without violating the integrity of some of them and silencing the diverse perspectives in the scriptural image of one and only God that the writers created. Of course, harmonization is not the ultimate goal. A theologically justified and consistent image of God requires description that neither eliminates God’s freedom nor reduces the deity to a capricious creator.


96 The more progressively-leaning commentary on the Qur’an prepared by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and others makes this point explicit in the comment on 5:116 (the verse that says Jesus did not teach his own divinity). See Nasr, The Study Qur’an, 336-337.
New Testament, the covenant that Jesus makes is described in detail and has significant differences from the Islamic teaching on Christ’s covenant. The most important distinction is Jesus’ self-sacrifice, incarnation, and his end to all blood sacrifices. Also, by denying the divinity of Jesus, the Qur’an indirectly denies the efficiency of the Eucharistic covenant that is based on the redeeming power of God Incarnate.

As to Muhammad, the New Testament does not say anything about him for obvious reasons; Muhammad lived after the New Testament had been written. The Qur’an, on the other hand, speaks directly about Muhammad less than the number of times it mentions Jesus. According to the Qur’an, Muhammad is a prophet whose message is identical to the previous messages (on the oneness of God and worshipping him that is taught by all prophets), who is God’s beloved, and who was called by God to bring the glad tidings and warn people about disbelief. He has been sent as a mercy to the people (21:108). He has been called an excellent model in the Qur’an (33:22). But Muhammad as the prophet denied the divinity of Christ and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. These denials make it difficult to see him as a prophet from the point of view of Christianity.

97 There is a minority opinion in the Qur’anic studies claiming that the Qur’an does not deny Jesus death by crucifixion; if anything, the Qur’an chastises Jews who believed they killed Jesus. In fact, the Qur’an
One of the interesting features of prophets and covenants that the Qur’an and the New Testament describe is that all of the prophetic teachings and covenants have some moral implications for our behavior. Whether it is the Ten Commandments, the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), the Eucharist, or the Qur’anic calls to the oneness of God, all covenants in one way or another lay claim to the way we live. In the Qur’an, this aspect of covenants is much more noticeable.⁹⁸ Taking into account these features and our previous discussion of the oneness of God, covenants, and prophethood, it is possible to make some general observations on the oneness of God in the Qur’an and in the New Testament. Below I list and comment upon those features that unify yet also separate the Qur’anic understanding and the New Testament understanding of the oneness of God.

recognizes the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. This is a very peculiar reading of the Qur’an and goes against the traditional Islamic exegesis of the Qur’an. But I have to recognize that the author’s arguments from the Qur’an seem convincing. If this interpretation of the Qur’an is reasonable and if it becomes accepted, I think we have a major breakthrough in Christian-Muslim relations. But I believe even if this minority position is accepted, crucifixion in the Qur’an does not necessarily lead to the divinity of Jesus and/or worshipping him because of the underlying teachings of Islam. For the minority position, see Gabriel S. Reynolds, “The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?,” Bulletin of SOAS 72, no. 2 (2009): 273-258. For the refusal of the divinity of Christ and the prohibition of worshipping Christ as something that stands on its own apart from crucifixion or Trinity-related verses, see The New Encyclopedia of Islam New Edition, s.v. “Tathlith,” (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 373. For the theological difficulty of accepting the divinity and worshipping of Christ, see Mun’im Sirry, Scriptural Polemics: The Qur’an and Other Religions (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 202.

Both the Qur'an and the New Testament recognize that the oneness of God is a revealed teaching. The Qur'an and the New Testament teach that the oneness of God has ethical implications for our everyday life and our relationships with others.

Both of these sacred scriptures teach that the oneness of God is taught through prophets. In the Qur'an, this prophetic emphasis on the oneness of God is much more precise and explicit while in the New Testament, prophets assume that God is one who has been known as Israel's YHWH.

The oneness of God is given through covenants according to both the New Testament and the Qur'an. The New Testament builds upon the covenants of the Old Testament and assumes that God is one. This is so because the New Testament never falsifies the Mosaic covenant's central teaching and affirms in several verses that God is one in a way that it doesn't exclude elements of multiplicity within the Godhead.

The Qur'an is much more explicit about covenants and their central concerns.

According to the Qur'an, all covenants teach the oneness of God, and this oneness is the cornerstone of God-human relationships.

As to differing features, in the New Testament the oneness of God is Christological; it has to account for the fact that Christ lived, died, was resurrected, and claimed to be the Holy One of Israel. In the Qur'an, Christ is not God, cannot be God, cannot be
worshiped as God, and God’s oneness is explicitly said to not include the worship of Jesus Christ. So, the Qur’anic understanding of God is not Christological since by Christological oneness Christians mean to include Christ in their worship of one God.

In the New Testament, the oneness of God is Trinitarian because it is qualified or affirmed vis-à-vis the element of multiplicity within the Godhead. This brings tension into the oneness of God but also keeps this teaching from becoming a mental idol in its own right. In the Qur’an, the oneness of God is free from all kinds of multiplicity and thus overshadows everything else. The closest concept that the Qur’an offers to multiplicity in the Godhead is God’s names or attributes and the status of the Qur’an because the Qur’an is considered to be eternal in Islam like God although the Qur’an is not worshipped. But even then it is far from the Trinitarian understanding of the oneness of God.

In much of the New Testament, the oneness of God is incarnational while in the Qur’an it is not. God’s oneness takes on flesh and therefore invites unending reflections on how it is possible for God to be one yet also be seen in the flesh, limited in time and space. The incarnational oneness of God means that God is willing to become one with us too. In the Qur’an, God simply does not take on flesh and is explicitly against being worshipped in an incarnated form. Whether it is beneath God’s dignity or simply God cannot, the Qur’an refuses to believe that one God can be unified with a human being to the point of incarnation that legitimizes the worshipping of a God-human.

In the New Testament, the oneness of God is Eucharistic. Eucharistic oneness means that one God is willing to make a covenant in such a way that He gives himself up for
us and lives in us, multiplied as seeds of his word without compromising his unity. It also means that in the New Testament, the oneness of God is sacramental. The Qur’an does not have this Eucharistic teaching and does not teach God’s enactment of sacrificial self-giving for the sake of humans. But the Qur’an teaches an eternal, universal message of the oneness as the unifying principle of all the creaturely world.
Chapter 2: The character of God as Seen in Covenants and Prophetic Teachings of the Qur’an and of the New Testament

The second chapter of the thesis focuses on what was mentioned in the first chapter: the character of God as seen in prophets’ teachings and covenants in the Qur’an and the character of God emerging from prophets’ teachings and covenants in the New Testament. Here the scriptural data will be analyzed in depth and after that, another understanding of Christian monotheism will be formulated, and its implications for the character of God will be articulated: the Eucharistic oneness. The chapter ends with preliminary conclusions. The main thrust of this chapter is that although God described in the Qur’an and God described in the New Testament are similar enough to identify them as one and the same God, they also differ significantly in terms of their oneness that is seen in prophetic teachings and covenants. The comparison of the oneness of God in these two sacred texts does not yield closure in terms of identifying or differentiating between Allah and YHWH.

Such a comparative task has a few methodological difficulties. On one hand, the Qur’an comes from Muhammad’s mouth and could be considered to be his teaching *par excellence*. On the other hand, the New Testament comes from numerous evangelists and is connected only indirectly to Christ. This poses the problem of how
much of the New Testament could be taken as Jesus’ own view. Also, the covenants and prophets do not have the same significance in the New Testament as they do in the Qur’an. The concepts of prophethood and covenants are the backbone of the Qur’an. They are what gives the Qur’an coherence despite seemingly disparate statements.99 Covenants have an important role in the New Testament also, but the center of the New Testament is Jesus Christ and the prophets or covenants (including God) that are filtered through the image of Jesus presented by evangelists. To lessen the methodological problems, this chapter analyzes mostly those verses or stories that either mention prophets, covenants, and God together or teach about at least two of these three concepts.100 In addition, the paper mostly focuses on shared prophets: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.101

God as Seen in Prophetic Teachings and Covenants

99 Rosalind W. Gwynne, Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an (New York: Routledge, 2014), Kindle edition, Accessed May 23, 2016, https://www.amazon.com/Logic-Rhetoric-Legal-Reasoning-Quranebook/dp/B000SY1IK?ie=UTF8&keywords=Logic%2C%20rhetoric%20and%20law%20in%20the%20Qur%27an&qid=1464008722&ref_=sr_1_fkmr0_1&sr=8-1-fkmr0. She writes, “The relation between God and humanity is called the Covenant, and in my view it is the logical key to the entire structure of Qur’anic argument.”

100 Although there are some difficulties in comparing these concepts from the two books due to differences in emphases, it needs to be recalled that we compare texts, passed down to us as books, which stand in the same tradition and originate from the larger Semitic religious world.

101 Muhammad’s position as a Christian prophet is not settled yet. In my experience, evangelical Christians tend to discredit the prophethood of Muhammad while progressive Christians tend to look at it positively. Either way, in this research Muhammad will be taken as a prophet of Islam who definitely taught certain truths that Christianity would agree with and certain ideas that historical and mainstream branches of Christianity would disagree with. The Qur’an will be treated as his prophetic utterances.
From the description of covenants and prophets in the Qur'an, God emerges as indivisibly the one and only deity who demands exclusive worship and servanthood, who is morally upright, concerned with human justice on earth, and who is merciful, forgiving, reliable, and faithful to his covenants and prophets. Most of these features could be deduced to some extent from the Qur'an 7:59–136 where the stories about several prophets and covenants were narrated to enforce one and the same point over and over again: God sent prophets and taught his oneness; humans forgot the covenants and mistreated his prophets; God sent prophets again to remain faithful to his promise and punished those guilty of injustice toward God, his prophets, and the covenants. For example, in vv. 7:59–64 it is Noah who calls his people to worship one God because as Noah says, “you have no other god than him.” Similar to Noah, Arab prophets mentioned only in the Qur’an and not the Bible (Hud, Salih, Shuayb, Muhammad) all do the same thing: they teach that God is one and demand the worship of the one and only God from their people (7:65–72; 7:80–84; 7:85–103; etc.). Only a few prophets in this cycle assume that God is one and explicitly teach something else. Lot teaches that homosexuality is wrong, and if

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102 For a representative sampling of verses from the Qur’an, see vv. 6:1 (creator); 13:30 (compassionate); 59:23 (holy); 6:73 (knower); 6:133 (self-sufficient); 27:78; 35:44 (mighty, powerful); 5:8 (just); 112:1-2 (one, “begets not, nor was begotten”); 4:171 (not Jesus, “not three”); 5:17 (not Messiah); 5:73 (not “the third of three”); 85:20 (all-encompassing); 56:96 (magnificent); 25:58 (living); 15:29 ([has] spirit); 2:116 (does not take sons, limitless in glory); 6:101 (has no mate, no child); 17:111 (“has no child,” “no partner in sovereignty”); 7:171 (covenanted with humanity); 2:40; 2:80 (covenanted with Jews); 33:7 (covenanted with prophets); 5:14 (covenanted with Christians); 7:59; 16:36; 17:23; 43:81 (the sole and undivided object of worship); 11:90 (affectionate/loving); etc. For more verses and listings of other names or attributes of God, see The Study Qur’an: A New Translation and Commentary, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1949-1958. All Qur’anic verses come from this edition unless noted otherwise.

103 For promises of Allah in the Qur’an, see vv. 3:152; 14:22; 30:6; 45:32; 73:18; etc. God makes many promises in the Qur’an. In general, God promises heaven to all who believe and hell to all who disbelieve. But there are also promises of victory in battle and promises of vengeance, etc.
people don’t refrain from it, God will punish them (7:80–81). Shuayb teaches economic justice by inviting people to be just in measurement and balance, truthful in trading, and by warning them to not “work corruption upon earth” (7:85). Moses not only teaches explicitly on the oneness of God (7:104) but also demands from the Pharaoh to let his people go free (7:105). Two elements stand out: first, all these prophets were sent to their own people who shared the same language and culture with that prophet. Moses was sent to the Hebrews, Shuayb was sent to the Midianites, and Noah was sent “unto his people.” This is true for most prophets. Second, almost all prophets mentioned in this cycle of 7:59–136 insist on their own truthfulness, sincerity, and skill to counsel the people in the matters of God (7:62; 7:68; 7:105; etc.).

However, unlike the Old Testament prophets, the Qur’anic prophets do not argue with God to save any particular group of people from God’s wrath by appealing to God’s justice, promise, or mercy. Only once does Noah insist that his son not be left out of the ark to die in the flood (11:42–46). God responds that “he is not from thy family... So question Me not concerning that whereof thou hast no knowledge” (11:46). So Noah repents. This element in which God’s justice excludes the unrighteous from his covenant — the ark and its rescue is part of the covenant too — is also seen in Abraham’s covenant with God. In vv. 2:124–125, God covenants with

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105 According to the Qur’an, one of the sons of Noah “remained aloof” and tried “to take refuge on a mountain.” The commentary characterizes this son as a disbeliever who had a false sense of security in the world. See Nasr, ed., *The Qur’an*, 574.
Abraham about making him a leader to nations and multiplying his seed. When Abraham asks God to make a leader from his progeny too, God answers that his covenant “does not include wrongdoers” (11:45–46). Here God’s character is revealed to be upright because in his justice, he excludes wrongdoers from his covenant. This element is in contrast to the new covenant made in Jesus Christ that includes wrongdoers’ salvation (1 John 4:10) because they cannot gain their own salvation (Eph. 2:8) and need a new covenant to be saved. According to the Qur’an, Jesus Christ himself teaches the worship of one Lord and disclaims that he taught his disciples to worship himself (5:116–117). Jesus’ story in the Qur’an, coupled with some other stories, is especially helpful in understanding the Qur’anic oneness of God portrayed in the covenants. All Qur’anic covenants insist on worshipping only one God (3:81; 7:172), and verses mentioning Christ repudiate the divinity of Jesus (5:72), his sonship (4:171; 9:30) (and filial relations between God and humans), and the worship of him along with God (5:72; 16:57; 16:149). In addition, Jesus prophesies about a prophet who would come after him and who turns out to be the prophet Muhammad, which strengthens the Qur’anic teaching on prophets’ affirming each other’s messages and the oneness of God. Taken together, the pattern observed in the Qur’an follows a strictly indivisible oneness of God in which God’s oneness and divinity cannot be shared in any way with another being. However, in the prophetic teachings of the Qur’an and covenants, this oneness is often expressed as monolatry and a denial of other deities.
Like God in Christianity, Allah also demands trust and submission, which are revealed in his covenants. Allah demands Abraham to submit to God’s will, and Abraham obeys (2:131). Moses asks his people to trust and submit by saying, “O my people! If you believe in God, then trust in Him, if you are submitters” (10:84). By submitting, Abraham becomes God’s friend, the one with whom God covenants. In one way or another, the demand for trust and submission to God’s will as an important element of God’s covenants with people is true for all covenants (2:43; 3:95; 5:77; 42:13). The will of God is for his people to establish regular prayer (5:13), to serve none but God (2:83; 17:2), to believe in messengers whom God sends and support them (5:13), to be good to kindred, orphans, the needy (2:83), to “speak kindly to people” (2:83), and to “pay the poor-due” (2:83; 98:5), etc. For various reasons the Qur’an accuses both Jews and Christians of forgetting the good part of their covenants (5:14). Perhaps this is so because Christians believe in the divinity of Jesus.

106 The words “submit,” “submitter,” “Islam,” and “Muslim” all come from the same root in the Qur’an (s-l-m), and the wordplay between these words is part of the larger picture and argument in the sacred text. So when Allah demands from prophets or people submission (lit. islam) by saying, “submit!” (“aslim!”), and they answer, “I submit,” (“aslamtu”), they become “submitter” (“muslim”). See verses 2:131–132; 3:19–20; 5:3. Also, in 3:52 apostles call on Jesus to be witness that they are submitters (muslimuna pl. of muslims). So, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and other prophets are all submitters or muslims in this sense, and anyone who accepts the oneness of God and surrenders to the one and only creator God thus becomes a muslim. According to a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra, children are born muslim in this sense because to believe in and submit to one God is in human nature; but as children grow, their education or parents make them become followers of other religions. For the hadith giving rise to this view, see http://www.searchtruth.com/searchHadith.php?keyword=child+born&translator=1&search=1&book=&start=0&records_display=10&search_word=all, Accessed June 3, 2016. For the interpretation of the word fitrah in 30:30 (translated as primordial nature) to mean submission (islam) to one God and another hadith supporting submission as human nature, see Nasr, ed., The Qur’an, 991. For the conceptual link between covenant, male circumcision, primordial nature (fitrah), and Jewish influence, see Kathryn Kueny, “Abraham’s Test: Islamic Male Circumcision As Anti/Ante-Covenantal Practice,” in Bible and Qur’an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality, ed. John Reeves (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2004), 161-182. Historical development of this once common word in pre-Islamic Arabia that came to be the technical name for a follower of the religion that Muhammad brought is beyond the scope of this paper, but for some hint, see the comments on the verses 2:128; 3:19; 3:52; 3:85; 5:3; 5:111; 7:125–126 in Nasr, ed., The Qur’an.
and use filial language about God. Verse 5:14 says, “And with those who say ‘We are Christian,’ We made a covenant. Then they forgot part of that whereof they were reminded.”

In the Qur’anic covenants, God emerges as someone who calls humanity back to its original relationship with God. Since the most important covenant made between God and humans is pre-temporal, God’s attempts to bring humans back could be seen as his way of “fixing” humans according to the design in which he created humankind. Jews are also accused of forgetting their covenant with God, but here the accusation is a refusal to accept Muhammad as the prophet in the Qur’anic schemata whose coming is in accord with the special covenant God made with all prophets (3:81; 33:7). In this covenant, prophets honored an obligation to support the messengers who came after themselves whose messages confirmed their own teachings. As God urges Jews to accept the prophethood of Muhammad, he appeals to Moses and their exodus from Egypt, mentioning that had God not been merciful to them, they “would have been among the losers” (2:40–59; 2:64). This appeal to past events implies that God is faithful while Jews (and by implication most humans) are not. The accusation also includes calling Ezra the “son of God” (9:30).107 As such, covenants in the Qur’an guard God’s justice and are primary vehicles for dealing with people. This is made explicit in verse 173, which implies that a pre-temporal

107 For an interpretation of this verse, see Nasr, ed., The Qur’an, 514. “It is said that Ezra is the son of God was the opinion of one Jew, a certain Finhas ibn Azura, or that it was the belief of some Jews at one time, but that this belief eventually disappeared (R, T).” The commentary refers to al-Razi and al-Tabari for these interpretations.
covenant was made so that humans would not accuse God of being unjust by holding
them accountable for not believing in one God.

The same pattern of protecting God’s justice through covenants is visible in
verses 2:80–81. According to the Qur’an, in 2:80 some illiterate Jews claim that the fire
of hell would not touch them except for a few days.\textsuperscript{108} In verse 81, Muhammad is
commanded to counter their words by saying, “Have you made a covenant with God?
For God shall not fail to keep His Covenant. Or do you say of God that which you
know not?” In this verse, the concept of covenants is called upon to resolve the
conflict about the illiterate Jews’ beliefs (2:78), but this concept also clarifies a
falsehood that is attributed to God. The verse implies that unless there is a covenant
between Jews and God about limited punishment in hell, there is no reason to claim
that the punishment for refusing Muhammad or manipulating revelations will be as
illiterate as the Jews claim it to be. The Qur’an also suggests that breaking the
covenant is equal to working corruption on earth, which is a human injustice not
only towards the earth but also towards God. In 13:25, the Qur’an teaches that “As to
those who break God’s pact after accepting His covenant, and sever what has
commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth, it is they who shall have
the curse, and theirs shall be evil abode.” As the commentary states, “Elsewhere,

\textsuperscript{108} This Qur’anic polemic on certain Jewish views may arise from religious literature of Judaism. See
He writes, “God is quick-tempered; He is also quick to recover...but there is no doubt about the main
thrust of Judaic teaching on this point. The punishment of the wicked in Hell does not exceed twelve
months (\textit{Shabbat} 33 a) – infinitely less than eternal damnation. Elsewhere Talmud denies that in the World
to Come there is any Hell at all – a bright sun shines, healing the righteous and burning the wicked
(\textit{Avodah Zarah} 3 b); man lives in Heaven or Hell of his own making.”
working corruption is implicitly or explicitly connected to physical violence; often it implies a combination of moral or worldly corruption.”109

All these teachings about covenants, prophets, and God’s character as just, indivisibly one, merciful, forgiving, and God as a somewhat personal deity could be attributed to Muhammad too since the Qur’an is spoken directly by Muhammad as a revelation dictated to him by God.110 However, there are a few verses in the Qur’an that teach about the prophet Muhammad himself; two in particular stand out. In one of them Muhammad is said to be the seal of prophets (33:40). By this title the Qur’an implies that no covenant will be made after Muhammad and that he is the last prophet to come after whom no new prophet will be sent. Muhammad is prophesied in the Qur’an directly from the lips of Jesus, where he gives the glad tiding of the next prophet after him whose name is Ahmad (61:6), another name for Muhammad. In another verse (21:107), Muhammad is said to be sent as “mercy unto the worlds.”

Muhammad is represented in the Qur’an not as the new prophet with a new message and new covenant but as the prophet who reminds people of the one universal message that other prophets had brought and who calls them back to the covenants God made with humanity.

Also, God emerges from all these covenants as a universal deity that is more impersonal or less personal than God in the Old Testament (because of the name

110 For this view of revelation in Islam, see Ahmad Muhammad al-Tayyib, “The Qur’an as the Source of Islamic Law,” in *The Study Qur’an: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1704. He writes, “[The Qur’an] is an intact and sacred text. According to the Islamic faith, it is the record of the very Speech of God – may He be exalted – not the speech of some mortal, including Muhammad, who had no role in its wording, composition, or stylistic construction.”
YHWH\textsuperscript{111} and God in the New Testament (because of his incarnation\textsuperscript{112}). Despite Allah’s having a hand, a throne, being merciful, forgiving, and just, Allah refuses to be characterized with filial terms such as “father” or “mother,” which are explicitly repudiated in the Qur’an as unfitting for God\textsuperscript{113} (6:100–101; 19:92; 16:57; 17:111; 23:91). Comparatively, less person-like elements of God could be seen from various verses of the Qur’an to stress how unlike God is to creation (42:11; 112:4). In addition, not a single verse in the Qur’an characterizes God within a social role that is observed in intimate creaturely relationships among humans. God is a seeing, hearing, wise, all powerful, forgiving, merciful, compassionate, and relenting creator lord with a face; but no creaturely names such as lion, father, shepherd, or Emmanuel are applied to God in the Qur’an like they are in the New Testament. This, however, should not imply that Islam did not develop such terms later.\textsuperscript{114} Moreover, God characterizes

\begin{itemize}
\item Incarnation heightens the personification of God; to be in flesh and to be embodied in human is to be visibly a person, touchable, limited in time and space, and concrete.
\item For an alternative opinion that argues in Islam God could be characterized as “father” or “mother,” see Nancy Roberts, “God as Father-Mother, and More,” \textit{The Muslim World} 99, no. 1 (2009): 102-123. However, she does not address the title denying verses in depth but mentions them in passing and attributes the denial of titles of “father” or “mother” to the context (idolatry) in which the Qur’an was revealed. Her supporting arguments come from Sufism, the implications of some divine names, and hadith. Yet she leaves unexplored beyond-the-context theological implications of the verses I mentioned, some of which actually weaken her arguments such as 19:92–93 that says, “It is not fitting for the Compassionate to take a child. There is none in the heavens and on the earth, but that comes unto the Compassionate as a servant.” Be as it may, the difference between an implied metaphorical fatherhood of God in Islam and God the Father of the begotten Son in Christianity is that they signify different theological concepts; God the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ (not metaphorically), and through Christ he is our father. He is more so because of Christ than simply being our parent due to his love or mercy.
\item Later in Sufism, God was seen as “beloved” and Sufi as “lover,” which indicates an intimate relationship between God and the mystic.
\end{itemize}
himself in the Qur’an as more of a creator or universal God rather than a god with a specific, personal, and unique name like that of human beings. In 27:8–9, Moses meets God by the burning bush. God talks to him and characterizes himself as “mighty,” “wise,” “forgiving,” and “merciful,” but the description in the Hebrew Bible omits a personal name from the scene. Nevertheless, since this is the same God who covenanted with Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and others and talked with prophets, it is impossible to deduce that Allah is totally impersonal. Therefore, God or Allah is less personal in Islam than in the New Testament due to the refusal to be characterized by relational terms, the names that God receives in the Bible, and the incarnation of God in Jesus.

The emphasis on transcendence and lordship or sovereignty of God in the Qur’an could also be discerned from his relationship with humans. The arch-relationship or primary connection between God and humans is overwhelmingly characterized by the language of servanthood in which the epitome of worship is embodied by the surrender or submission in the bodily movements of salaat. Such language is alien

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115 See Nasr, ed., Qur’an, 5 and 1579: “God renders Allah which according to some is a unique word with no root and according to others derives from the al-Ilah, or ‘the Divine.’ (Tb) The Qur’anic usage of Allah indicates that it was already known to the pre-Islamic Arabs...” In the traditional exegesis, the word could be understood as “the Essence with the totality of Attributes” (5). On the other hand, on page 1579, the word Huwa (he) is explained traditionally to mean God’s greatest name; it indicates “the undifferentiated Divine Self or Essence (Ka, R).” The fact that the third person singular pronoun could be interpreted as God’s greatest name points away from Allah or God in Islam, revealing to humanity a personal, unique name asserted within the covenant like that of YHWH. For a somewhat dissenting voice emphasizing names and especially the word Allah, see Annemarie Schimmel, Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam (New York: State University of New York, 1994), 119-120.

116 Salaat is Islamic ritualized prayer/worship. Sunnis do salaat for five times a day while Shias do three. In one of the required actions of salaat, Muslims kneel, then bend to touch their forehead to the earth. Kneeling, bending forward, putting oneself in a spatially lower position are wide-spread signs of submission seen in many cultures. The New Testament word for worship (proskuneo) also emphasizes
to the Qur'an, but the New Testament uses language that indicates there is variety to the types of relationships between God and humans. These variations (observed not just in Lord-servant relationships but also in Father-child, God-Temple, Shepherd-sheep variants) connote a certain intimacy or symbiosis, which is shown through the adoption of believers as children of God, temples of God, or ambassadors of Jesus in whom the Spirit dwells.117 All prophets, messages, and their covenants in the Qur'an emphasize worship and servanthood due the Lord creator.118 Abraham calls his father to worship or serve not Satan but God (19:44). Jesus is described as a servant (abdullah) of God (19:30), which implies that he worships and serves God as 5:117 pictures his enjoining people to “Worship God, My Lord and your Lord” in the context of denying his own divinity. Of course, the New Testament’s descriptions agree to some extent with the Qur'an’s about servanthood and worship although the underlying patterns and the effect of this relationship between God and humans differ.

All the aforementioned verses of the Qur'an and their interpretation in Islam yield to some important observations about oneness and the character of God

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117 Although in verse 50:16, the Qur'an says, “We are nearer to him than his jugular vein,” with reference to Allah’s proximity to humans, the surrounding verses suggest that this is more of a threat than a comfort. Here God says that he knows everything humans have in their hearts, and Nasr takes it to be God’s immanence (The Qur'an, 1267). In vv. 50:13 and 50:25, enclosing v. 50:16, Allah threatens humans with the agony of death and hell for their refusal of prophets, their disbelief, doubt, and their hindering good.

observed in both the prophetic teachings and the covenants mentioned in the holy book of Islam. Among these observations is the character of God, who is the one and only transcendent creator and lord of the universe, who created humans and covenanted with them, who sent prophets to mention this covenant and bring them back to right the relationship with himself. This God sent many prophets to demand servanthood and worship from humans and punish those covenant breakers who worked injustice on earth. Although Allah could be characterized as a person-like God, this deity’s personhood is not developed in the Qur’an as it is in the New Testament. This is so because Allah does not incarnate\textsuperscript{119} and considers creaturely terms ascribed to him (father, mother, son, husband, shepherd, lion, eagle, lamb, etc.) as unfitting or blasphemous.

The New Testament presents a similar yet different image of God that emerges from the covenants described in Christianity’s holy book and the prophets spoken about in the Gospels and the letters. According to the New Testament covenants and prophets, God is seen reasonably\textsuperscript{120} as one, saving, universal, moral, just, personal deity with a proper or personal name who becomes human so that humans could participate in his divinity.\textsuperscript{121} This God is also a fair, faithful, and reliable creator of

\textsuperscript{119} Muslims would agree that if Allah chooses so, he could incarnate because to deny it would be denying God’s omnipotence. However, Allah does not incarnate, and the Qur’an seems to suggest that it is below God’s dignity to incarnate in humans.

\textsuperscript{120} I use the word “reasonably” in comparison with the Qur’an. The New Testament is less clear and more elusive when it comes to God’s oneness and monolatry than the Qur’an. The very fact that Christians still argue about the Trinity and try to reconcile it with the oneness of God or the Shema — from the perspective of the Qur’an — could be seen as a sign of corruption of Christian scriptures in the most important matter about God.

\textsuperscript{121} For a representative sampling of verses, see Mark 12:29–34 (God is one); Matt. 4:10 (worship only God); Luke 1:35 (has son); Eph. 4:6 (Father); John 4:24 (Spirit); Rom. 2:4 (kind, tolerant, patient); Rom.
all the universe demanding of their obedience. God’s demand for submission in the New Testament is reciprocal, and his oneness is all-inclusive as we shall see. In the New Testament, the prophets emphasize not God in and of himself but God filtered through Jesus Christ or Jesus Christ himself. This fact — the mention of God and Jesus in relation to one another — complicates the New Testament picture of God and Jesus, which makes the description less consistent or less clear than the God that the Qur’an presents. In Matt. 3:1–3, John the Baptist indirectly prophesies about Jesus, but his prophecy is actually a prophecy about God mentioned in the Old Testament (Isa. 40:3). In Luke’s birth narratives, we see Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah function as prophets. In Mary’s song (Luke 1:46–55), God is said to be the mighty one, the savior with a holy name, merciful in remembering his promise to Abraham.

Although these statements are about God, they also apply to Jesus Christ because of some titles and words that God and Jesus share throughout the New Testament.

Thus, from the beginning, God and Jesus are entangled with one another to an extent that invites readers to reinterpret God’s oneness. Abraham’s promise (Gen. 12:19–21)

12:19–21 (has wrath, avenges); 1 John 4:8 (love); John 3:16 (sacrifices his son); John 1:1 (Word); John 1:14 (incarnate); Col. 2:9 (fully dwells in Jesus); Phil. 2:6 (empties himself); Matt. 1:23 (is with us [in Jesus]); Rev. 4:8 (holy); Tit. 2:13 (God/Savior/Jesus Christ); 1 Tim. 1:17 (eternal, immortal, invisible, wise); John 10:30 (one with Jesus); John 14:8 (visible in Jesus); 1 Cor. 1:9 (faithful); Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:15 (covenants through Jesus); Rom. 3:29 (God of gentiles, saves them via faith); 2 Pet. 1:3–4 (calls humans to participate in divine nature); etc.


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12:7, 17:7, 22:18) refers to the one he received in a covenant that the Pauline letters interpreted to mean salvation for the Gentiles too (Gal. 3:7–9). Elizabeth also prophesies when she sees Mary, and she uses the word “Lord” (Luke 1:43) in reference to Jesus. However, the word “Lord” is used in the Gospels in reference to God too. Later, Zechariah prophesies about John, but his prophecy also implies Jesus. Zechariah characterizes God as the blessed one, who raised up a mighty savior, who spoke through the mouths of prophets, who “remembered his holy covenant, the oath he swore to...Abraham,” and who would save people from their enemies so that they can serve God. According to Zechariah, the next prophet John the Baptist will go before the Most High or the Lord. These prophecies relate Jesus and God to one another in such a way that it becomes difficult to conceptualize either one of them without reference to the other. Two more prophets specifically prophesy about Jesus later in the temple, but their prophecies imply certain characteristic elements about God (Luke 2:25–38). Simeon takes Jesus in his hands and says that “my eyes have seen salvation...prepared in presence of all people, a light to the Gentiles and glory to your people.” Anna, a prophetess, comes and praises God for the child Jesus. In either one of these prophecies, God is the one who saves, and Jesus is presented as praiseworthy since he is the “light of revelation” and “glory” to Israel. In the birth narrative in Luke, coupled with Jesus’ visit to the temple, the prophetic line of ancient Jewish messengers is extended to Jesus to include him. None of these verses characterizing God or Jesus focus on the omnipotence or creative power of God as they do in many Qur'anic descriptions.
As the Scripture shows, the center of God’s characterization is on his image as Christ the savior and as the faithful who remembers his covenant. Some prophets in the New Testament are peripheral and prophesy about concrete events rather than about God. For example, Agabus prophesies about Paul’s difficulties in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10–11). In Agabus’ prophecy, God emerges as the one who is concerned for Paul’s safety (or at least so was implied). Jesus as a prophet himself also teaches about God. On one hand, he teaches about God’s justice (Luke 11:42), love (John 15:13), and forgiveness (Matt. 18:22), implying that God and he are two different entities. On the other, he says or implies things that make the Pharisees question whether he blasphemes by equating himself to God (Luke 5:21; John 8:58). Above all, Jesus recognizes the validity of the Mosaic covenant and its central teaching — the oneness of God — by proclaiming it to be the most important commandment (Matt. 22:36–40). Also, unlike the Qur’anic prophets, Jesus teaches about his own death, resurrection (Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22), and how the Scriptures prophesied about him (Luke 4:21, 24:25–27).

Therefore, from New Testament verses, one can conclude that like the Qur’an, the sacred book of Christians recognizes the prophetic series where prophets are connected to one another by bringing the message of God’s oneness, his justice, and his covenants with the Israeli people, some of which predicted the inclusion of the Gentiles. This is especially so for the Old Testament prophets. Like the Qur’anic prophets (7:69), the New Testament prophets refer to other prophets (Matt. 11:14) who

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came to pass before them. However, in the New Testament the picture is more complicated because of passages that sometimes seems to contradict one another. For example, Jesus Christ teaches that John the Baptist is a prophet and “more than a prophet” (Luke 7:26) while John the Baptist himself denies being a prophet (John 1:21). Jesus also teaches that his body is temple (John 2:19) and that he is God’s son (Matt. 16:15–17; John 11:4), which is in contrast to the Qur’anic teachings. Unlike the Qur’anic prophets, in the New Testament, the messengers focus more on the coming savior of God or the savior himself rather than the oneness of God. Even Jesus, who explicitly recognizes the Shema, does not dwell on it as much as the Qur’an dwells on the oneness of God or the worship of the one and only God. Somewhat clearer teachings on the divinity of Jesus are recorded in the Pauline letters and the Gospel of John, yet they also recognize that the divinity and sonship of Jesus did not eradicate his humanity. They sometimes revise words and phrases used for God in such a way that unmistakably implies that Jesus is somehow divine or is God, and as God, he is incarnated to save humans.

For both of these authors, human submission to God is reciprocated by God’s submission to humans in Jesus (even unto death on cross) for the sake of salvation. Paul develops this understanding in Philippians while John uses the language of love and being one to make the point.\(^{125}\) In addition, the crucifixion is used extensively to qualify God’s character revealed through the life and resurrection of

Jesus Christ: “It seems that for Paul the word ‘God’ entails a relation to ‘son’. And so the God who can be actualistically defined as the one who raised Jesus from the dead can also be defined relationally, as ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 15.6; 2 Cor. 1.3; Eph. 1.3; variant forms in 2 Cor. 11.31; Eph. 1.17).” John identifies Jesus Christ with God. The language he uses is different from Paul’s. As Lori Baron writes, Jesus “chooses his own people and issues his own commandments; he is the object of love. In Deuteronomy, God pledges ‘steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love and keep my commandments’ (Deut. 5:10). Jesus declares, ‘If you love me, keep my commandments’ (John 14:15).” These clearly show that in the New Testament the relationships between prophets, God’s oneness, and Christ are more complex and elusive than the way the Qur’an portrays them. On one hand, this seems to be justified since the New Testament deals with incarnation, agapic love of God, and salvation in a humble (rather than politically powerful) Messiah. On the other hand, the New Testament’s expression of God’s oneness lacks the precision, rigor, and clarity that the oneness of God shows in the Qur’an.

Compared to the Qur’an, the New Testament’s description of covenants is no less complex, vague, or at times contradictory than in its treatment of the divinity of Jesus and the oneness of God. The picture of God emerging from these covenants is blended with or dependent on Jesus’ descriptions and cannot be fully separated.

127 Lori Baron, “Interpreting the Shema,” 57.
without violating the integrity of both images. On one hand, the covenant’s promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, making at least one of the Old Testament covenants indispensable to the image of Jesus. On the other, Hebrews insists that the Mosaic covenant is replaced by the new one.128 This makes God somewhat inconsistent from the Qur’anic point of view since in the Qur’an God makes only one pre-temporal covenant. If the Old Testament covenant were inefficient, why was there one in the first place? Paul wrestles to answer to this question, and his answer reduces the Torah to its essentials, dispensing with details of the law.129

Yet Jesus emerges both as a prophet who recognizes the validity of the Mosaic covenant and as the priest who self-sacrifices for the new covenant. But this leaves a question about the divinity of Jesus: to whom is Jesus sacrificed? To himself? To God? Then in what ways is he God if he could be sacrificed to God? In this chapter, the focus will be on the Shema because the Shema is a statement where covenants, the oneness of God, and Jesus’ own identity cross. There seems to be a strong suggestion in literature that the oneness of God declared in the Shema as part and parcel of the covenant recognized by Jesus should not be understood to be a

numerical or metaphysical oneness.130 The oneness of God declared in the Shema includes God’s personal name and is often interpreted to mean God’s reliability, faithfulness, and his demand for unreserved faithfulness or devotion. Because the second commandment is often joined to the first one, the Shema is also interpreted inclusively to relativize the “boundaries of a community.”131 Paul also “seeks to relativize Torah by appealing to the Shema.”132 But in all this, Jesus qualifies the oneness of God; first, as Kim Huat Tan demonstrates, Jesus interprets the term “neighbor” in such a way that love includes the Samaritan, and this love is the same love spoken in the Shema.133 Second, Paul argues that “since God is one (εἷς ὁ Θεός), justification of the circumcised and uncircumcised must come through only one means: faith. It is to be noted that that the phrase (εἷς ὁ Θεός) is often a shorthand way of referring to the Shema.”134 Also, according to Gal. 3:13–14, the death of Christ “allows blessings given to Abraham given after the Aqedah (Gen. 22:18) to flow to the εθνῆ through Jesus Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). The movement of v. 13 to v. 14 is structured on the Aqedah itself, where the binding of Isaac επανῶ τῶν


132 Ibid., 194.

133 Ibid., 190.

134 Ibid., 195.
ζευλον merits from God a covenant oath to bless εθνη through Abraham’s seed.”\textsuperscript{135} As these interpretations show, the oneness of God is multilayered in the New Testament and is inclusive;\textsuperscript{136} it is not about a metaphysical oneness of God although that aspect of the oneness is not excluded. Instead, it is about God’s uniqueness and fidelity revealed in his love\textsuperscript{137} to the Hebrew people through which Jesus Christ came; through incarnating in Christ, God drew Gentiles into the covenant. But compared to the Qur’an, this is a new understanding of God and the covenant. The Old Testament also does not explicitly mention incarnation despite the fact that some verses (Isa. 9:6; Ps. 110:1) could be pressed into service of this peculiarly unique Christian concept among Abrahamic faiths. Instead, in the New Testament God reveals himself anew — yet in accordance with his previous covenants and the Shema — in which God this time becomes one, in-flesh, living, and individual as in Jesus Christ. God becomes one with a particular, unique, and contingent instance of Imago Dei, Jesus.

\textsuperscript{135} Scott W. Hahn, “Covenant, Oath, and the Aqedah,” 93.
\textsuperscript{136} Based on the incarnation, one may argue that the oneness of God in Christianity is hospitable to humans to the degree where one God becomes a human. This is a somewhat different kind of inclusiveness than the one seen in the OT Shema. In the Shema, as it is understood in Judaism, inclusion of humans in God’s love does not make God to become one with humans or incarnate in human shape and form. But in the incarnation, the love of God for humans is epitomized in that God becomes human or resides in human beings to the degree that contrary to the prohibition of idolatry it becomes legitimate to worship Jesus.
\textsuperscript{137} Abraham Kaplan writes that Joseph Albo used gematria “to establish an equivalence between the divine attribute singled out in declaration of faith, the Lord is one, and His attribute of love (\textit{ehod} and \textit{ahava}).” But this also implies that Jewish theology connected God’s uniqueness/onesty to love and recognized (however indirectly) a connection between the name YHWH — God’s unique personal name — and love. In this context, it seems natural that this God would be called Immanuel, and Jesus would lay claim to the Shema as we shall see. See Abraham Kaplan, “The Judaic view of God,” 410.
This is indeed a new teaching, a significant departure from the Judeo-Islamic tradition\textsuperscript{138} where the incarnation in Christ and an agape-oriented interpretation of the Shema stand on their own, disagree to some extent with the Old Testament Shema, and are completely absent from the Qur’anic tawhid. The character of God emerging from these verses, concepts (the oneness, prophethood, covenants), and extrapolations in the New Testament, which were filtered through the life, death, and resurrection of the prophet Jesus Christ, reveals that God does not think that becoming human is unfitting to his glory. In fact, this God honors human beings by making them his own temple and establishing a new covenant that stands in continuity with the Old Testament covenant yet also discontinues that covenant. Jesus is God’s incarnation in which the Shema, the word of God, becomes inclusive to all humanity. Now the Gentiles are one with the people of God and (more than that) have the potential to become one with God through theosis. Jesus as God’s incarnation also makes the Shema open-ended, and the Trinitarian dogma is a development of this open-endedness. God’s oneness somehow includes elements of many-ness and relationality (Father-Spirit-Son or lover-love-beloved or God in human and human in God) where humanity is not excluded from this relational Shema.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{138} I use the phrase “Judeo-Islamic tradition” to indicate those elements of the two Abrahamic faiths that agree with one another over Christianity. These are incarnation and the divinity of Jesus Christ.

\textsuperscript{139} In its classical interpretation, the Trinity includes relationality; Father, Son, and Spirit are dynamically within one another; they are co-inherent (\textit{perichoresis}). Love is relation, so love at least is implied in the Trinity.
To put it mildly, this is indeed a different kind of oneness considered to be highly suspicious if not outright blasphemous in the Qur’an\textsuperscript{140} and, coupled with the incarnation and divinity of Christ, untenable to Judaism. The conceptual language of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit as internal to the Shema could be fully understood only in this context where the Spirit dwells in us, making us one with Christ in spirit while not obliteration our humanity or difference from him (and from God) in flesh. The character of God who emerges from the New Testament is a more personal kind of God that dwells in humans and becomes incarnate as a human being. This God is similar yet also different from Allah because Jesus is involved in the identity and being of this God.\textsuperscript{141}

The inclusive oneness of God and the intense personal and humane dimension of God seen in Jesus affects God-human relationships drastically. Humans are still servants of God and are to worship him, but this relationship is transcended or (so to say) upgraded to filial relationships because of Jesus and thus charged with soteriological significance. Humans are not just servants of God who have to worship

\textsuperscript{140} There are a few verses in the Qur’an that were interpreted by Sufis to legitimize or give leeway for an intimate proximity of humans with Allah. However, in such nearness, human agency disappears though this nearness does not result in union; Allah displaces humans in a way that it is Allah who hears or sees through humans without being united with the mystic. Interestingly, the Sufi interpretation of God’s becoming near or one with the mystic is connected to the pre-temporal covenant; As Junayd interprets it, when the mystic is nearest to God, at some phase he/she stands in God’s presence as they were during the pre-temporal covenant: bare soul. See further Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, “The Doctrine of One Actor: Junayd’s View of Tawhid,” \textit{The Muslim World} 73, no. 1 (January 1983): 33-56.

\textsuperscript{141} It is possible to argue that Jesus is involved in defining God’s identity or oneness in the Qur’an, but in the Qur’an the relationship is reversed. In the New Testament, Jesus defines God as the incarnating deity who includes humans into his oneness by granting them the gift of being God’s temple. In the Qur’an, Jesus defines God as not-human, not-incarnate, and not-Messiah. Through Jesus’ words and his description in the Qur’an, we learn that God cannot be worshiped by worshipping a human. In other words, Jesus sets the boundaries in the Qur’an that maintains the separation of Creator-creature and refines the oneness of God as exclusionary.
God who is the merciful creator, provider, life-giver, and omnipotent and omniscient deity; humans are God’s children who are united with God because of God’s son, who ratified the new covenant prophesied in the Old Testament (Jer. 31:31–34). The filial language and God’s participation in the sacrifice of human Jesus brings an intimacy to the servanthood of humans. Such a relationship has reciprocity and symmetry: God loves first so that humans love God back; God surrenders his Son first so that humans surrender; God becomes human so that we could become temples of God.

The Eucharistic Oneness of God

With the implications for the oneness of God and the indispensability of Jesus, God’s character becomes clearer in the Eucharist. The importance of the Eucharist cannot be emphasized enough; it is one of the central sacraments Christ left for the church that all main branches of Christianity recognize. Also, it is unique to the Christian faith despite its continuity with the themes of the Hebrew Bible (sacrifice, meal, Passover, etc.) and allusions to it in the Qur’an.\(^\text{142}\) Naturally, it should be explored in relation to the oneness of God in order to see what kind of continuity and discontinuity it exhibits and what their implications are for the oneness of God.

\(^{142}\) For Qur’anic verses that allude to the Eucharist or (as some commentators claim) feeding the multitude with the fish and the loaf, see vv. 5:112–115. However, the context of the verses is different and are detached from the Eucharist of the miracle of feeding the multitude.
God’s oneness as perceived in the Shema is implied in the Eucharist which, as it will be argued, gives rise to Eucharistic oneness or monotheism. The Scriptural basis for such an interpretation comes from concepts of the Shema, new covenants, incarnation, and prophethood. However, this section will only focus on the new covenant in relation to the Shema, the prophetic office seen in the Eucharist, and Christ’s relation to the Shema (since incarnation and the oneness have already been explored in literature). The new covenant was explicitly connected to the Shema in Jeremiah. Gerald Janzen in his article, “On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4–5),” argues that the word *ehad*, one, in the Shema “is to be construed as referring to Yahweh’s integrity or moral unity.” He affirms that “concern for the ‘oneness’ of Israel’s God [is] squarely within Israel’s religious history and at the heart of the covenant traditions.” To prove his point, he appeals several verses, some of which are Jer. 32:38–41:

> I will give (*natan*) them one (*ehad*) heart and one (*ehad*) way to fear me all their days for their good and that of their children after them. And I will make for them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn back from them doing them good. And the fear of me I will put (*natan*) in their hearts that they may not turn aside from me. And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land in (*be*) faithfulness (*emet*), with (*be*) all my heart and with (*be*) all my soul.

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145 Ibid., 280-281.
146 This is his translation.
Based on linguistic, structural, and poetic features of the text, Janzen argues that the poem stands in the tradition of Deuteronomy, and the word one, *ehad*, in this passage should be taken to refer to Israel’s undividedness that she would gain through God’s new covenant where God will give her one heart and one way. Also, the phrase “with all my heart and with all my soul” refers to the Shema, and the two together demonstrate that as Yahweh claims to be *ehad* in faithfulness (as in the Shema) with all his heart and with all his soul (as in Jeremiah 32), so Israel is expected to love God with all her heart and with all her soul and with all her strength (as in the Shema).147

Now, Jesus Christ, as he establishes the Eucharist in all synoptic Gospels, refers to making a new covenant by his actions of sharing the cup and the bread (Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20). This new covenant is the covenant spoken by Jeremiah, so *ipso facto* the Eucharist implies the Shema or the oneness of God explicated in Jeremiah: if the Shema is referred to by the new covenant in Jeremiah and if the new covenant is referred to by Jesus in the Eucharist, then the Eucharist refers to or implies the Shema, however vague it may be. This has significant implications for the Christian oneness of God, but before exploring the theological implications, it need to be recognized that Shema-laden Eucharistic oneness is recognized elsewhere in the New Testament. In 1 Cor. 10:17, Paul says, “because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.” Here the apostle argues against participating in idol temple rituals, and he uses the Eucharist

147 Ibid., 291.
and his undivided devotion to the Lord to make his argument. Elements of the Eucharist unify us with God through the partaking of the body of Christ so much so that “you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10:21).

This verse supports the Eucharistic oneness at the level of a thematic-conceptual language that reflects the Shema. Since believers are temples of God in whom the Spirit received through Jesus’ blood and flesh resides, believers should not divide their loyalty to one true God. Also, in 2 Cor. 3:3, Paul argues that believers are “a letter from Christ written not with ink but with the Spirit of living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human heart.” This verse hints to the heart mentioned in the new covenant (Jer. 32) by contrasting it with the old covenant in which the law was written on stone tablets. Again, the interiorization of the law harmoniously completes the interiorization of the Word of God enacted through the prophetic action of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

In addition to the aforementioned verses, Christ himself implies his own claim to the Shema as he embodies it in his actions, and this turns out to be consistent with the intention and action of the Eucharist. In Mark 2:1–12, Christ forgives the sins of a paralytic man, causing scribes to object to him based on the Shema; only God

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149 I intentionally use this parable rather than more explicit texts from John or the letters because the Gospel of Mark is considered to be one of the earliest documents and is mostly silent on the divinity of Jesus.

can forgive, not a mere human being. Jesus, however, counters their objections not by refusing the charge of blasphemy at all but instead by defending his right as the Son of Man to forgive their sins. “The point then is that there is some truth to the charge, i.e., Jesus’ action has implication for the understanding of the oneness of God confessed in the Shema.”¹⁵¹ For purposes of this section, what is important in Mark 2:1–12 are two things: 1) Christ’s claim on the Shema is expressed through healing and forgiving, a theme consistent with Jesus’ enactment of his self-sacrifice for the forgiveness of others in the Eucharist; 2) Jesus, who re-interpreted the Shema in his actions in a radically different way from the scribes, is the one who presides over the Eucharist, which links the Eucharist to the Shema via the person of Christ.

One could adduce more scriptural verses or unearth subtler patterns that demonstrate the complexity and ambiguity of the links between the Shema, Jesus, God, covenants, and the Eucharist; however, these are enough to establish a reasonableness and a scriptural soundness of Eucharistic oneness or monotheism. But what does it mean exactly? Unlike God the Father, who could be claimed to be one metaphysically (omnipotent, omnipresent, eternal, etc.) and scripturally (YHWH, Shema, Lord, etc.), in the Eucharist we see a dozen or so people, where each individual is unique, concrete, and separate. Therefore, despite the fact that the Eucharistic oneness of God is based on the Shema — as uniqueness, faithfulness, and

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 202.
The reliability of God to his promises — it cannot be understood to be the oneness of Allah *a la* Islamic *tawhid* or *a la* Sonderegger’s “formless” and “invisible” oneness.152

The oneness of God that was played out and experienced (as becoming one with God) by humans in the Last Supper is the Son’s visible and symbolic action of “ sculpting” his own oneness with the Father according to the Spirit within the limits of the observable human realm. Christ did this so that the oneness promised in the new covenant could be experienced and ratified in his prophetic action; he used bread and wine as tools to visualize or shape the oneness and to invite into that oneness whoever believes. Eucharistic oneness could loosely be defined as the sacramental and symbolic layer of God’s oneness enacted by the prophetic action of Jesus Christ during the Last Supper; this reveals God’s oneness with us in Spirit through Christ without obliterating our human individuality and separateness from God in the flesh. Before the definition is explained in detail, prophetic action153 and “the most significant elements of this prophetic drama”154 need to be introduced.

In the Eucharist, Jesus acts as a prophet by “pointing to a divine activity which otherwise cannot be observed.”155 In addition, as a prophet, Jesus “reveals and

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152 “The Concept of *Tawhid* in Sunni Islam (with special reference to Al-Ash’ari),” *Hamdard Islamicus* 25, no. 2 (2000): 38-39; Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: the Doctrine of God*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 17. For other ways of understanding God’s oneness, see her comments on pages 10-20. Although Sonderegger’s approach to the oneness of God as a philosophical concept is legitimate, her subordination of the Shema and the narrative expression of the oneness to the philosophical articulation is not. Both of them are equally valid in their own ways because the oneness of God is multilayered.

153 For the definition and kinds of prophetic action in general and for Christ’s prophetic action in the Eucharist in particular, see Rhodora E. Beaton, “Realizing Unity: the One Table of the Prophetic Word and Body of Christ,” *Worship* 86, no. 4 (July 2012): 323-338. Most of my reflections on the symbolism of bread and wine are influenced by this article.

154 Ibid., 330.

155 Ibid., 326.
mediates the salvific presence of God in history.”\textsuperscript{156} The most important elements of the Eucharist are the disciples who represent humanity, “actions of sharing of the bread and cup, and the overarching context of the Passover.”\textsuperscript{157} In the Eucharist, Jesus breaks bread, which is different from the “symbol of breaking pottery.”\textsuperscript{158} By breaking the bread, we share that which sustains us, but this breaking does not lose its usefulness or quality as bread. One could say that the oneness of God is like bread; God does not lose his oneness because of incarnation, or God does become many because of the many people gathered in the Eucharist to be one with him. Yet this oneness sustains believers. It points to sharing a new life in Christ: “The cup, which cannot be divided, but is shared by being passed, functions first as a sign of unicity.”\textsuperscript{159}

By doing so, Jesus stands on the same prophetic tradition as Moses where Moses’ sprinkling blood on the people (Ex. 24) indicated the introduction to a covenant with God. By sharing bread and the cup, Jesus’ disciples take on a new “covenantal commitment.”\textsuperscript{160} However, the cup as a metaphor for the blood of Jesus points toward the sacrifice of Christ that continues (because of the lamb in the Seder) and discontinues with the Old Testament because no Jew would drink blood or would easily agree to drink something explicitly likened to blood since it was prohibited.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 330.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 331.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 332.
Moreover, no pious Jew would easily accept a *Seder* meal where a human being seriously took himself to symbolize the Lamb.

That said, the Eucharistic oneness of God could be taken as the sacramental layer of God’s oneness because in the Eucharist, the Father administers grace through and in the prophet Jesus so that our bodies begin to transform into temples for the indwelling and unification with God in Spirit. Since a union with the Son saves all believers, to be one with God through Jesus sustains the process of justification and sanctification. This oneness is enacted by the prophetic action during the Eucharist; the enactment shows that God’s oneness re-captured in the new covenant draws Gentiles in for the sake of God’s kingdom. Also, it enacts God’s faithfulness and reliability because through Jesus, God sacrifices his son to make the new covenant. It needs to be recalled that the new covenant is not made because humans got better or somehow became holy in God’s presence. The new covenant was made because God — out of his faithfulness to his promises — participated in Jesus’ sacrifice for the sake of forgiving humans and giving them new life. As such, the Eucharist foreshadows two acts: one, God’s faithfulness, and two, his willingness to sacrifice his son for the sake of humanity. Although Jesus Christ is not just a prophet but also a priest who self-sacrifices and a king who feeds his subordinates metaphorically with his body, his prophetic office is the most important for the Eucharistic oneness. As a prophet, Jesus heralds God’s new kind of oneness in the Eucharist. Unlike other prophets who preached the oneness of God, Jesus lived it and enacted it in his own life, death, and resurrection to the benefit of human beings because he himself was God Incarnate.
As the perfect temple of God’s Word — the Shema — Jesus Christ also embodies the ideal of Imago Dei in which the Spirit dwells in the flesh-temple so much and so deeply that the boundaries blur between human as a non-God and God as a legitimate object of worship.\textsuperscript{161} So the partaking of Jesus’ blood and flesh unites us with God through him. This means that God’s oneness in Jesus is open-ended; the Eucharistic oneness does not exclude humans. On the contrary, the Eucharist is a ritualized form of prophetic action underlying theosis, which is based on God’s oneness as it is revealed in the Shema. However, none of these obliterate the integrity of the human body, individuality, and the concreteness of individuals. Ordinary humans become one with God in Spirit and not in flesh.

Another aspect of the Eucharistic oneness could be seen as unity of all the offices of Jesus. In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ acts simultaneously as priest, king, and prophet. In his prophetic actions and life, this prophet unites God and humans by making them one so that humans could be saved. As a priest, he sacrifices himself, ending all sacrifices so that humans do not shed the blood of animals anymore. As king, he feeds his disciples with life-giving new manna so that his disciples could confirm to him and become one with his Father in Spirit. Eucharistic oneness is also a symbolic enactment of the whole purpose of incarnation. As Marc Oulett observes, “The mystery of the Incarnation thus comes to completion in the Eucharist, in the

\textsuperscript{161} This is not to say that the difference between ordinary humans and Jesus is the difference of quantity or degree; as if to say that God indwells in Jesus more than any human being so that we could become exactly like Jesus if we yield to the Spirit. Incarnation also means the qualitative difference between Jesus and humans. Christians imitate Christ to become like him, but this likeness is limited; the Spirit intensifies believers’ sanctification, but this does not make them God or the same as Jesus. For further theological ideas on this theme, see Veli-Matti Karkkainen, Christology: A Global Introduction (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).
moment that the communion in Jesus’ paschal sacrifice brings the inner unity of the divine Persons into the heart of believers.”

Now the question is what kind of God emerges from this Eucharistic oneness? There could be various answers to this question, but here only some will be mentioned. First, God who emerges from this Eucharistic oneness is a God whose oneness unifies humans to him as that oneness has been seen in Jesus. The Shema turns out to be open-ended in the prophetic action of Christ so that others may partake in God. Second, God emerging from this Eucharistic oneness is hospitable to humanity; this God does not mind to dwell in human beings because of Jesus. The purpose of incarnation then is best explained with reference to the Eucharist. God dwells in humans or hosts humans in himself through Christ so that God can make (by virtue of God’s indwelling) an everlasting covenant in which whoever accepts Christ begins on the path to theosis. Third, God whose oneness is not exclusive is a sacrificial God. As Joris Geldhof quotes from Edward Kilmartin, the “sacrifice...is, in the first place, the self-offering of the Father in the gift of his Son, and in the second place the unique response of the Son in his humanity to the Father, and in the third place, the self-offering of believers in union with Christ by which they share in his covenant relation with the Father.”

Fourth, this one God is reciprocal and relational just as his oneness is. In fact, only this kind of God would be justified in asking for a self-sacrifice from humans because he first gave himself in his son and participated

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in his son’s self-giving. Only this kind of God would be justified in asking humans to submit because in Jesus Christ he identified with the downtrodden and submitted himself first. Relationality of the oneness of God means that his oneness also includes his relationships with humans, the epitome of which is God’s identification with humans in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, God reveals his hidden mystery that is unearthed by faithful believers’ reflections on the scriptural oneness and unheard of in the Judeo-Islamic tradition — God’s oneness somehow includes a subject-object distinction in himself, and therefore there is a relationality in God’s very being.164

By implication, the Eucharist and the oneness embodied in it have a special place in the covenants and prophetic teachings of the New Testament. To put it succinctly, in the Eucharist, various forms of the oneness of God (the Shema, incarnational oneness, strict oneness, Trinitarian oneness, etc.) converge so covenants and prophethood culminate; in the Last Supper, God and prophet become one. As Sanneh says, “God crowned the efforts of the prophets by offering himself in their place.”165 God becomes one with the prophet Jesus, and by that, God vindicates all prophets who lost their lives heralding the covenants of the one and only Creator. It also means that God honors the institution of prophethood and reasserts it. Second,

164 Subject-object distinction in God or some kind of relationality in God was recognized by theologians for a long time. Traces of it could be seen in Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity. For a modern approach to this question, see Neil B. MacDonald, “YHWH and Jesus in One Self-Same Divine Self: Christological Monotheism as an Experiment in Objective Soteriology,” American Theological Inquiry 6, no. 2 (July 2013): 23-36. Also, see his “Christological Monotheism, Numerically the Same Divine Self, and John’s Gospel,” American Theological Inquiry 6, no. 2 (July 2013): 3-22. However, this is what makes Islam and Judaism question the oneness of God in Christianity. Sonderegger somewhat alludes to a subject-object distinction too though her take on the matter differs. See Katherine Sonderegger, Systematic Theology, xii: “Almighty God, we say, is both Object and Subject; both What and Who.”

in the Eucharist, God becomes one with the sacrifice and the priest; through God, the priest and his sacrifice become one too. The Lamb of God is God in the ritual of offering himself. Third, unlike many previous covenants, it is God himself in his flesh temple ratifying the new covenant and inviting us to internalize it. Believers take bread and wine, and by that action they symbolically enact how God puts the Shema within his believers and writes it on their hearts (Jer. 31:32–34). As Jeremiah says, God does good with all his heart and with all his soul by making an everlasting covenant (Jer. 32:38–41). The old covenant and its Shema is reaffirmed and transcended in the new one through a human who is a prophet — yet more than just a prophet.

To use a literary conceit, in relation to previous covenants, prophets, and the Shema, the Eucharist is like a road roundabout. Various prophetic teachings on God’s oneness, schools, theologies, and ideas of understanding the covenants of God flow into the Eucharist and converge there. When these ideas and prophetic actions come out of the roundabout, they are not the same anymore because they all share something from every other one due to the convergence of God, humanity, oneness, and discrete individuals in the Eucharist. From this perspective, the Qur’anic understanding of the oneness of God that was insisted on by Qur’anic prophets and

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166 It may look like a tautology to imply that God sacrifices himself to himself, but we have to realize that in the Eucharist, it is not just God who sacrifices; it is also a human Jesus who submits to God and graciously takes it upon himself to act as God’s self-sacrifice by hosting the Son. In other words, human participation in God and God’s participation in humans is the crucial element that saves the Eucharist from being an insulated loop or feed-back mechanism where God acts as a one-man show without any human involved.
covenants could be likened to one road entering the Eucharist and coming out of it as one while contesting the validity of the other roads.

The Eucharistic oneness of God (like that of the Trinitarian one) plays kind of a theologically preventive role; after the Eucharist it seems difficult to capture the elusive oneness of God in absolutizing statements or to believe in God’s oneness in such a way that excludes every trace of many-ness from God. The very fact that the Eucharistic oneness of God operates on two levels — at the level of Spirit, we are one with God while at the level of flesh, we are separate and discernibly not one with God — precludes all theology from absolutizing the oneness of God and making it the ultimate religious teaching or concern of God. Potentially, it protects human faith from idolizing the oneness of God by creating a mental, non-negotiable, and “us/monotheists vs. them/polytheists” structure that would exclude polytheists, idolaters, and atheists from the love of mindful Christians.

Some preliminary conclusions on the oneness of God in the Qur’an and the New Testament are in order. It seems that God as mentioned in the New Testament and in the Qur’an are one and the same God if some philosophical language is imposed upon the scriptural data. In both of these faiths, Scripture gives enough reasons to think that God is one, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, omnitemporal, and sempiternal God. Moreover, the scriptural patterns or concepts demonstrating how God and humans interact also suggest that we essentially talk about one and the same God, who nevertheless does not appear to be one and the same universal Creator due to peculiarities in the Qur’an and peculiarities in the New Testament.
This is because both the Qur’an and the New Testament are historically conditioned sacred texts. In both Scriptures, the deity creates covenants with humans, sends prophets, and these prophets come with a somewhat similar if not essentially the same message, and they are connected to one another by the unity of the message or the underlying belief in one deity. Also, God is characterized in both sacred books as a merciful, just, forgiving, patient, and faithful God, who reminds people of his covenants and calls them back or makes a new one. Philosophical elements and larger scriptural patterns are significant points to be taken into account in understanding God’s oneness (and sameness) in the New Testament and in the Qur’an. These philosophical-theological reflections give us deep, logically sound, and valid human reasons that satisfy the urge for consistent, whole, and systematically worked out ways of understanding God. Scriptural patterns allow us to take the sacred texts into account without becoming lost in minutiae and to see any recurring patterns that stand the test of time and the hustle and bustle of everyday relationships in whose context the Scriptures were born.

Yet in-depth explorations of both Scriptures show that the deity and his oneness have some significant differences that make it difficult to see Allah and YHWH-Jesus

167 As the Qur’an argues in several verses, there can be only one omnipotent creator and not several omnipotent creators. This is not just logically untenable (because of the implicit contradiction in the concept of existence of more than one omnipotent deities) but also theologically unacceptable; neither the Qur’an nor the New Testament recognizes a limited or subordinate one creator God. Nevertheless, the New Testament and ante-Nicene fathers suggest that the Son in Jesus Christ is subordinate to God the Father in some ways. This subordination also implies some significant distinctions between God in the Qur’an and God in the New Testament and the divinity of Jesus. According to the Qur’anic pattern, subordination is proof that Jesus is not God because God cannot be subordinate to anyone in any way or cannot include subordination in himself. At least in Phil. 2, we see a creative interpretation of subordination of Jesus to the Father that contributes to Jesus’ divinity positively.
as one and the same deity if we want to take that deity to be truthful and faithful in his revelations; believers should not underestimate these differences. In the New Testament, God’s oneness is pronouncedly difficult to describe and is thus elusive. This one God is connected to Jesus Christ in such a way that the worship of Christ is legitimate. In some ways, God is one with Christ, yet God does not lose his divinity, and Jesus does not lose his humanity. So, Jesus is God, and God is Jesus. God in the New Testament incarnates in Jesus, Jesus is his temple in whom God’s fullness resides, and Jesus shares the Spirit of God (who is God) with humans in the new covenant. God does not mind to be called father of humans because of Jesus. As if this complication is not enough, traditional interpretation of the Trinity adds its own problems onto the equation. There are none of these fluctuations between oneness and many-ness in the sacred book of Islam, at least not to the degree that it is observed in the New Testament. In the Qur’an, God refuses to be called father, does not have a son either literally, metaphorically, or metaphysically, and repudiates incarnation and the worship of Jesus Christ as God. Allah’s oneness is very clearly differentiated in his relationship with other beings in such a way that it is not shareable for whatever purpose. In addition, God in the Qur’an builds a relationship with humans only as Lord-worshipper/servant while in the New Testament this relationship is built as Father-worshipper/servant/child/temple. The oneness is the ultimate feature of Allah in the Qur’an, and it is refined by explicitly refusing the fatherhood of God in general and the divinity and sonship of Christ in particular. In

\[168\] As Sufism shows, this relationship does not exclude love. Two primary verses that appeal to the concept of love in the Qur’an are 11:90; 85:14.
the New Testament however, the oneness of the Father is always spoken in relation
to Jesus Christ, and it implies the Spirit of God within Jesus so much so that Christ is
considered to be God Incarnate. Also, as this work demonstrates, the oneness of God
in the New Testament is multilayered and open-ended in a way that it includes
humans in some of its layers.

Obviously, depending on our prejudices, unconscious fears, love of God, and
sincerity in our beliefs in Allah or in YHWH manifested in Christ, one can (dis)agree
that the Qur’an and the New Testament speak about one and the same God. Are
Allah and YHWH one and the same deity in one and the same way? Or does one of
these Scriptures teach false things about God? The appeal to the elephant and blind
men allegory or a post-modern condition would not work because some of the claims
that these two faiths make about God and his oneness simply cannot be reconciled.
They move in opposing directions; Jesus is either to be worshipped as God (as in the
New Testament) or cannot be worshipped at all because he is not God (as in the
Qur’an). Devising a theological language or hair-splitting the details to say that
Christians worship Jesus’ divinity and not his humanity would not work for either
the Qur’an or the New Testament because both perceive Jesus Christ to be one
person. So, it seems only two choices are possible, and both of them cannot be correct
at the same time in relation to the same object. Besides, appealing to such secular
interpretations that ignore these apparent disagreements violates the integrity of
both sacred texts. Neither the Qur’an nor the New Testament sees the oneness of God
or the identity of Jesus Christ as an optional element to absorb God’s oneness.
Therefore, there is a perpetual lack of closure in the matter of the oneness of God between the Qur’an and the New Testament. Yet this should not be taken as a basis for rejecting cooperation or withholding love from one another. There are many reasons for that, two of which are paramount: one, both the Qur’an and the New Testament agree that God is a compassionate and merciful creator whose love and forgiveness have priority over his wrath or vengeance. If Muslims and Christians honor their God, they have to prioritize what their God values more. And two, what the Qur’an and the New Testament reveal about the creator of the universe is infinitely less (and necessarily limited) when compared to what God withholds from humanity about the divine mystery. In deference to the mystery of the ineffable one who can be as transcendent as Allah and as humble as Jesus Christ, followers of Abraham owe each other love and cooperation.

Chapter 3: Jesus and Muhammad in Context of the Series of Prophets, Covenants, and the Oneness of God

The main point of the chapter is that Jesus Christ could legitimately be envisioned to be a submitter or a Muslim via the unreified islam (to be discussed later) and that his submission (or his islam) to God is significant in our understanding of monotheism in
the New Testament. To establish the argument, it will be demonstrated that Jesus Christ and Muhammad fit into the prophetic series as this concept is understood in the ancient Near East, and there are legitimate theological reasons to imagine Jesus Christ as Muslim. After that, the chapter will explore unreified islam and how Jesus could be seen as a Muslim though not exactly the way Muhammad imagined. A section will also be devoted to exploring Muhammad’s place in the series of prophets as well. Then the chapter will conclude by comparing Jesus’ and Muhammad’s places in the series of prophets and their implications on the oneness of God.

The Series of Prophets as Evidenced in the Ancient Near East

According to some ancient Near Eastern religious traditions, prophets came in series, one coming after another and being linked to the others based on what they taught. The prophet Muhammad was not the first prophet to the Arab people; there were a couple between him and Jesus Christ though Islamic resources report very little information about the other two. Another ancient faith that taught a series of prophets was Manichaeism. “A Parthian text refers to Manichaean apostles sent with

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170 Ibid., 41.
books to different lands...”\textsuperscript{171} In Manichaeism, prophets were sent to regions of the ancient world, and it had been debated whether they adopted that model from Christianity.\textsuperscript{172} Like Muhammad (and those before him), Mani claimed to be the “‘Seal of the Prophets’ culminating a long line of prophets including Adam, Seth, Noah, the Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus.”\textsuperscript{173} Not unlike Manichaeism and Islam, the Mandaean religion imagined prophethood “as occurring in groups of three: Hibil and Shitil, the ‘keepers of the epoch,’ foretell the coming of Anosh the savior and last of the three great apostles.”\textsuperscript{174} As Wheeler notes, “The concept of prophethood found in Manichaeism and other late antique religions is that the coming of the final prophet initiates a new historical era.”\textsuperscript{175} These ancient faiths together with the three surviving Abrahamic faiths clearly show that the concept of a series of prophets, meaning coming in series and being linked to one another because of their source and teaching, was widespread.

Without regard to the details of who was and who was not a prophet in this series, it is possible to locate Jesus Christ and Muhammad within Abrahamic religions’ prophetic lines. Both Jesus Christ and Muhammad left behind sacred texts with some unique features that identify with yet also distinguish them from other prophets in the series. According to Hebrews, “in these last days” God spoke “to us by his Son whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom also he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1–2).

\textsuperscript{171} Brannon M. Wheeler, “Arab Prophets,” 28. In citation 26, Wheeler provides the text’s name as M216c in reference to other sources.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
Muhammad, on the other hand, is said to be “ummi” (61:3) or “unlettered,” someone who did not have formal education, “the Seal of Prophets” (33:40), and “mercy unto worlds” (21:107). From the Qur’anic point of view, those people who were recognized as prophets in the Qur’an are all aligned or belong to the same line of prophets because they all taught the oneness of God and the submission to that one God. In addition to this, from the New Testament point of view, certain prophets belong together or form a series within the prophetic series because they prophesied the coming of the Messiah. The New Testament prophets such as John the Baptist, Anna, and Zechariah belong in this line of prophets too (Matt. 11:9; Luke 2:36; Luke 1:67).

If one takes the Qur’anic point of view with all its implications, then it has to be agreed that Jesus Christ is not just a prophet but also a Muslim or a submitter. Like other prophets, he taught his people to believe in and worship one God, which agrees with the Jesus depicted in the New Testament. Moreover, he submitted himself to one God, and therefore he was a “Muslim” as the Qur’an imagines him to be despite significant differences between the New Testament’s description of Jesus’ submission to the Father and the Qur’an’s description of his submission. Below it will be argued that Jesus Christ could be imagined to be a Muslim in a carefully delimited way. But before doing so, the chapter will turn to the theological or scriptural reasons for imagining Jesus Christ to be a Muslim.


177 I will use the words “Muslim” and “submitter” alternately or sometimes together to remind us that it is not just any kind of submitter but specifically the one that the Qur’an describes.
Scriptural or Theological Reasons for Envisioning Jesus Christ as a Muslim

There are three main reasons that Jesus Christ could be imagined to be a Muslim. The first is historical: both scriptures depict him as a prophet who submitted to God. The second is Christological: imagining him as a Muslim would enrich our understanding of Christ. The third is missional: seeing Christ as a Muslim would perhaps increase the chance of Muslims’ better appreciating the Christian point of view in regards to his divinity.

The New Testament suggests that Jesus Christ obeyed his Father or submitted to his will.\textsuperscript{178} Verses such as Matt. 12:50, 26:42, Mark 14:36, John 5:30, 6:38, and others demonstrate that Jesus was subordinate to God the Father in one way or another.\textsuperscript{179} However, in Christian theology, the subordination of Jesus to the Father is mostly explored without the contributions of Islamic teachings. Here the Qur’anic teachings on islam or submission will be taken into account in order to understand in what ways


\textsuperscript{179} Our exploration of Jesus’ submission to the Father and the use of the word “subordination” should not be taken as our support for subordinationism, a Christian theological view rejected by the Council of Constantinople (381). For an in depth exploration of subordination, see John V. Dams, “The Subordination of the Son,” \textit{JETS} 37, no. 3 (September 1994): 351–364.
Jesus Christ is not just subordinate to the Father but also to some extent submissive to him specifically as the Qur’an teaches.¹⁸⁰

However, it needs to be acknowledged that the Qur’anic way of understanding Jesus as a Muslim or a submitter cannot be fully accommodated into the Christian understanding because certain elements of it exclude the divinity of Christ.¹⁸¹ In the Qur’an, Jesus Christ is Muslim not because he just submitted to God but because his submission to God shows that he is not God and cannot be God. Yet in the New Testament, Christ’s surrender to God is incorporated into his divinity. In other words, in the Qur’anic context and in the context of the New Testament, Jesus’ submitting to God is understood in opposing ways. Nevertheless, the Qur’anic picture of submission is not that clear-cut, and there are ways of imagining Jesus Christ as a Muslim or a submitter without hollowing out Christ’s divinity. Admittedly, this way of imagining

¹⁸⁰ Certain elements of Jesus’ submission to God in the Qur’anic description are agreeable to Christians and are sound from a theological point of view. As a human being, Jesus is a prophet of God the Father and speaks on behalf of him. Even those Qur’anic verses that explicitly point out Jesus’ humanity and createdness by God as an argument against his being God are open to interpretation, which indicates Jesus’ exalted status in God’s presence unlike that of other human beings. See Mahmoud M. Ayoub, “Towards an Islamic Christology II: the Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion (a Study of the Death of Jesus in Tafsir Literature),” The Muslim World 70, no. 2 (April 1980): 93. “In the long drama of human prophets and a humanity challenged to seek prophetic fulfillment, Jesus plays a unique role. In him as in Adam, the divine power over and within creation is manifested. He represents a special creation; he is the Word of God injected into the human plane of existence. Yet like other prophets, Jesus remains a human being created by God, his servant and messenger.”

¹⁸¹ See verse 5:17 in Nasr, ed., The Study Qur’an. “They indeed have disbelieved who say, ‘God is the Messiah, son of Mary.’ Say, ‘Who would have any power over God if He desired to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother, and those on earth all together?’ Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them. He creates whatsoever He will, and God is Powerful over all things.”
Christ as a Muslim is limited because it requires a break from the traditional interpretation of both of the faiths.\textsuperscript{182}

Moreover, imagining Christ as a Muslim would enrich our understanding of Christ, especially if we imagine him to be a Muslim via unreified islam (as it will be explained later). In most Christian theology, Jesus’ relation to God the Father is conceptualized either through the Trinitarian frame of reference or through his offices or through his saving work. But the submission of Christ to God and its role in the oneness of God are not central to a Christian theological understanding of either Jesus or God. Exploring how Jesus submits to the Father or how he is Muslim would help Christians better understand Christ’s role in their salvation and the relations between God and humans.

In addition, seeing Jesus Christ as Muslim or highlighting his submission to God from the Christian point of view with contributions from the Qur’an may increase a Muslim’s chance to appreciate in depth the Christian understanding of his divinity. Muslims already believe that Jesus Christ is Muslim, but this understanding is often polemical and in popular Islamic consciousness lacks the ambiguity that the Qur’an demonstrates. Imagining Jesus Christ to be a submitter yet also divine may help some Muslims to see that the Christian picture of Jesus is not really built on an “either-or”\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{182} For traditional Christianity, to claim that Jesus is Muslim implies that he was a follower of Muhammad, which is obviously incorrect. The way I interpret submission may not be fully agreeable to traditional Muslims.

\textsuperscript{183} Put simply, in the Qur’an Jesus Christ can be either God or non-God but not both while in the New Testament Jesus Christ is both God and non-God. This is so because in the Qur’an the underlying reasoning is that only God can be God, and nothing else can be mixed, blended, put together, incorporated, or somehow joined with God to such a degree and in such a way that the other becomes God, part of God, or worthy of worship. Admittedly, this way of thinking tends to be more intuitive and easily graspable compared to traditional theological thinking in Christianity.
kind of thinking but on a “both-and” kind of reasoning. Obviously, the attempt here would not solve all disagreements between the Qur’an and the New Testament, but it would help to show that the complexity of the matter requires a much more nuanced approach.

Imagining Jesus Christ to be a Muslim is also legitimate from a missional-theological point of view. As God appropriated humanity in Jesus Christ for the salvation of humans, so do Christians have the chance to appropriate certain elements of Jesus’ submission to God through the Qur’anic Muslim Jesus so that those who thirst for a more intimate and humble God may find Christ without necessarily fully disowning their identity as a Muslim. This approach to sharing the message has been used by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 9:22.

Jesus Christ as a Divine Submitter and Prophet: Jesus’ Submission to God and its Role in Defining Christ’s Place in the Prophetic Series

Before exploring how Jesus Christ could be seen to be a Muslim yet not in a sense that fully fits into the Qur’anic understanding of him, the concept of reified Islam and unreifed islam needs to be explored. In his book, Understanding Islam: Selected Studies, Wilfred C. Smith argues that in the Qur’an the word “islam” is used not only as a name for the specific practice that Muhammad established but also as a broader term to mean a submission to God or a personal obedience to God in general without the specific
details amassed when it was developed by Muhammad in the later stages of his career or later still by the interpretation of Muslim theologians. The islam as a general submission or universal attitude is unreified islam while Islam as it was systematized and crystallized in the later period of Muhammad’s career and the subsequent tradition of its interpretation is the reified Islam. The opinion of Muslim scholars on this issue is divided although even those who disagree with Smith’s interpretation of the usage of the word “islam” in the Qur’an agrees that in the Qur’an the word “islam” (submission) used to mean both — the name of the concrete tradition Muhammad established and the universal attitude of surrender (to God) without regard to specifics. However, this divide between reified Islam and unreified islam persists in the scholarly literature: the most recent translation/commentary of the Qur’an recognizes the ambiguity in the use of the word “islam” as well.

One verse ascribes submission or islam as the religion of all prophets and mentions it as the religion that Jacob left for his sons. On his death bed, Jacob took their word to not abandon the religion of submission. From this perspective, Jews are still Muslims

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184 Wilfred J. Smith, *Understanding Islam: Selected Writings* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 46–48. Subsequent statements on reified and unreified Islam are influenced by this book. He comes to this conclusion by analyzing the usage of the words of “islam” (submission) and “iman” (faith) in the Qur’an. His conclusion corresponds to my own sense of reading the Qur’an. See page 45: “My conclusion was that the Islamic religion, for various reasons which are susceptible of study, has been in some ways from the beginning the most reified of all the world’s religions…”


187 Ibid., 59, vv. 132–133. “And Abraham enjoined the same upon his children, as did Jacob, ‘O my children, God has chosen for you the religion, so die not except in submission. Or were you witnesses when the death came to Jacob, when he said to his children, ‘What will you worship after I am gone?’ They said, ‘We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac: one God, and unto Him we submit.’” Interestingly, Yusuf Ali leaves the word submission in v. 132 as “islam,”
because they still believe in one God and submit to one God whom their fathers worshipped. Similarly, Abraham, Moses, and other prophets taught submission or islam. Like other prophets, Jesus is a Muslim or a submitter to one God and believed and preached the submission to one God just as the others did. In addition, Jesus is a submitter because all human beings are born with the innate capacity to submit to one God. Simply put, God created human nature in such a way that the submission to God is part of this very nature. But if so, then reified Islam seems to be the best expression or form of the unreified islam because it emphasizes submission and proscribes very specific bodily movements, rituals, and habits to express submission in prayer and in daily life. The commandments that God enjoined to other prophets and to Muhammad (i.e., to establish regular prayers, pay alms-due, worship only one God, treat others kindly, etc.) support this interpretation too. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Jesus Christ is potentially a “Muslim” because as any human being he was born with the innate capacity to believe in one God and to submit to him. Moreover, as the prophet, he also taught the submission to one God.

It is also possible to argue that Jesus Christ was a submitter in a way that was close to Muhammad’s way of submission. As Muhammad, who commanded his followers to pray regularly, the New Testament testifies that Jesus often prayed (Mark 1:35, Matt. 14:23, etc.). Like all Muslims, Jesus Christ fasted (Matt. 4:2) and gave zakat or money for the sake of the poor (Matt. 6:3). All these verses demonstrate that at least to some extent which is what it says literally in the original Arabic. See Yusuf Ali, trans., The Holy Qur’an: Translation and Commentary (Brentwood: Amana Corp., 1983), 54.

188 See Nasr, ed., The Study Qur’an, commentary on v. 30:30.
Jesus Christ could be seen as a Muslim according to the unreified islam. However, he was not a submitter or a Muslim according to reified Islam for obvious reasons: Jesus did not recite verses from the Qur’an in Arabic as Muslims do in salaat, he did not go to Mecca for pilgrimage, and he did not kill sheep in order to honor Abraham’s attempt to sacrifice his son. If anything, he sacrificed himself so that no animal had to be sacrificed and that human sins could be forgiven (Heb. 10:4–5). Also, it is impossible to fully agree with the Qur’anic understanding of Jesus the Muslim precisely because the Qur’an means by it that Jesus Christ should not be worshipped and that he never taught others to worship himself. In fact, according to the Qur’an, Jesus Christ himself submitted to and worshipped God, and from the logic of the Qur’an, it is absurd to worship someone who worships someone else as God. In other words, this universal concept of submission shared by all the Abrahamic faiths is used in the Qur’an to discredit the very heart of Christian teachings, the worship of Jesus Christ as God Incarnate. Moreover, submission is used as a theological argument against Christians; God cannot submit, for there is nothing that he could submit to or be submitted. But Jesus did submit to God; therefore, he cannot be God. Hence, it is reasonable for Christians to agree that Jesus Christ was a Muslim or a submitter only according to unreified islam.

What does all this have to do with Jesus Christ’s covenant or his place in the series of prophets? In short, Jesus Christ as a Muslim actualized his innate capacity of submission for the sake of humans’ salvation. Through his surrender to God, Jesus Christ became one with God and made the new covenant. He selflessly and voluntarily
laid down his life for the sake of all who believe. Like John 15:13 teaches, there is no greater love than “to lay down one’s life” for one’s friends; Jesus’ submission or islam is his attitude and faith mingled with his love for God and for humans. Other prophets, including Muhammad, taught submission, but their submission was not specifically seen in these soteriological terms. Also, in the series of prophets, Jesus Christ is the one in whom the submission to God and God’s fatherly love for humans (John 3:16) unite and culminate with the benefit to all humans.

Christ’s self-understanding as a submitter to God the Father also has implications for his oneness with God and God’s oneness in general. Phil. 2:6–11 teaches that Jesus’ humbleness and submission to God caused him to be exalted to the highest place. This interpretation lends itself to Christological monotheism because it implies that due to his submission Jesus Christ became one with God, and so the disciples worshipped him. The narrative thrust of the Gospels here (i.e., Jesus submitted, God exalted, and the disciples worshipped Jesus) is captured in a few key verses. The disciples included Jesus Christ in the identity of God only after understanding that through his surrender, he was exalted to the right hand of God. But to agree to that kind of interpretation without acknowledging ontologically the earlier divinity of Christ prior to his descent as the Nicene Creed or the Shema-oriented monotheism is to open up to the Islamic charge that Jesus was not God, only later came to be taken as God, and therefore should not be worshipped. Nevertheless, Phil. 2:6–7 suggests that Christ’s divinity preceded his

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189 This does not mean that Jesus did not suffer or that there is no tension in his submission. See Matt. 26:36–56.
humanity; John 1:1 would also serve as a counterpoint to this accusation. Jesus Christ was not divinized as an afterthought; in fact, God’s prior eternal presence in this prophet was recognized after his exaltation as the basis for the worship of him.

So, one could say that from the human perspective, Jesus came to be seen as divine because in his submission to God the Father, he became one with God. But from the perspective of the Spirit, it is also true theologically and scripturally that Jesus Christ submitted because he was already divine or God Incarnate; he came from God the Father and lived as a human being to embody the true submission that saves as his resurrection testifies. Put simply, Jesus did not submit because he was only a human being. But he succeeded to submit unto death and go through such excruciating pain precisely because he already was God Incarnate. Jesus’ lengthy discourse in John 17 also suggests that the submission of Christ to God contributes to believers’ theosis by way of becoming one with God. It also shows that Jesus’ surrender to God does not exclude his divinity as the Qur’an claims.

In addition, Jesus’ submission was not only to God but also to human beings. Through the Eucharist, which was his way of ratifying and sanctifying the new covenant, he metaphorically submitted his body and blood for the sake of the salvation of others. In Golgotha, Jesus Christ literally submitted to human beings unto death. In a way, Christ’s being a Muslim or a submitter implies some kind of circular movement between God and humanity that through Jesus in the Holy Spirit incorporates humans

190 1 Cor. 12:3.
191 Christ’s resurrection shows that human surrender to God leads to the gift of eternal life by God’s indwelling and becoming one with humans. Even death cannot overcome that gift.
into the perichoresis of the Trinitarian persons. Since God the Son actualized his submission to the Father by dwelling in Jesus through the Spirit, humans gain their salvation by replicating that pattern in their relation to God and in their relation with one another. When humans submit to God, they become one with God within the limits of finite human capacity.

The New Testament lays down such a vision of God-human relationships that poses a certain kind of relationality within God himself, then projects that outwardly to be replicated in the relationships both with humans and among humans through the prophet and the covenant. Thus, in terms of unreified Islam, Christ’s role in the prophetic series and his covenant could be seen as the actualization of an inclusive (God in humans and humans in God) and soteriological submission to God. Obviously, this Islam is different from the reified Qur’anic Islam. Jesus’ submission as outlined here cannot be fully integrated into the Qur’anic submission without violating it to some extent.

Also, the submission to God differentiates Jesus Christ as God’s Word in the prophetic series and contributes to his being the image of God as Christ’s quality of being Imago Dei contributes to his submission. If trust to the Creator, a whole-hearted

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192 The image of God is a multifaceted topic, and some scholars propose that God created humans in the image of Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, and God himself became visible in Jesus. For this interpretation, see Burnell F. Eckardt, “Another Look at the Imago Dei: Fulfilled in the Incarnate One,” Concordia Theological Quarterly 79, no. 1-2 (January 2015): 67–78. Based on this interpretation, one can say that God reveals his high esteem for the submission of humans to God because he himself revealed his own submission through Jesus Christ. Eckardt’s argument is based on the exegesis of the Hebrew phrase “tselem elohim” (image of God) and suggests that God’s image has shape and form. If so, it has implications for Christians’ surrender to Jesus because Jesus’ concrete habits and actions of surrender gain additional validity for Christians.
devotion to the Lord, and a love of God is what all prophets taught, then none of them lived their lives as a full embodiment of what they taught more than Jesus. Even Muhammad disobeyed God, as the Qur’an and ahadith testify, and was invited by Allah to pray for the forgiveness of his sins. Various prophets of the Old Testament (Jonah) and apostles in the New Testament occasionally re-interpreted and compromised the message they received to fit into their environment. Jesus however taught and lived what he believed unto death. His interpretation of God’s word, the Shema, took him to the cross because he lived it as God intended — with God’s word embodied in human lives. Because of Christ’s submission to God, he could say, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” It implies that the submission of Christ to God was so complete that nothing interfered, and to see Christ was to behold God the Father.

Muhammad as a Prophet and Submitter: His Place in the Prophetic Series

Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, has always been considered by Muslims to be a prophet who stands in the same line of prophets as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. It is largely so due to the Qur’an, but what the Qur’an teaches has some continuity with what the Old Testament teaches. Like the Old Testament prophets, Muhammad taught a belief in one God the Creator and a submission to that God. Although the emphasis in

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Muhammad’s teachings may differ, the observable continuity between the Old Testament prophets and the conceptual language of Muhammad in the Qur’an is undeniable.195

According to the Qur’an, Muhammad is the last prophet, seen in his title of khatam-ul-anbiya, “Seal of the Prophets.” In addition, he has been considered ummi or the unlettered prophet. Traditional Islamic theology disagrees about the details of how to understand his title ummi, but all agree that this has to do with either Muhammad’s own lack of formal training in religious matters or his being an outsider to the people of the book, namely, Christians and Jews.196 If the title is understood in the latter way, it means that the Qur’an identifies or defines Muhammad as a prophet in opposition to the two other Abrahamic communities. Umni resembles the New Testament concept of goyim, and the prophet Muhammad is like a Gentile sent to the Gentiles who did not have revelation. Another feature of Muhammad that is emphasized in the Qur’an is his humanity. Verses 17:94, 18:110, and 41:6 either explicitly focus on Muhammad’s being a human or mention it as part of a larger issue dealt in the text. Muhammad is fully human with all its implications; like humans, he sins too. Despite the fact that the Qur’an implies that Muhammad sinned (45:55; 47:19; 48:2), later Islam developed a

doctrine named *isma* or the protection of Muhammad and other prophets from sinning by God.\(^{197}\)

Although Muhammad has the title of the Seal of the Prophets, which suggests in terms of sequence that he is the last prophet, this is not necessarily so in terms of his character as the prophet and the features of his teachings. In traditional Islamic thought, Muhammad is imagined to be a prophet between Moses and Jesus Christ because of his balancing of both justice and mercy.\(^ {198}\) According to traditional Islam, Moses represents the justice and sternness of God while Jesus Christ represents God’s mercy. Muhammad on the other hand brings both features together. This idea could arise from the various verses in the Qur’an that explicitly name Muhammad to be a witness, warner, and giver of good news as well as from the verses that emphasize Jesus Christ as the mercy of God (48:8). This kind of middle ground position of Muhammad is also used in Islamic apologetics against the perceived passivity and other-worldliness of Christianity.\(^ {199}\) But for the purposes of this chapter, what is more important is Muhammad’s place in the series of prophets and the role of submission that he taught. We now turn to examine this topic.

Although Muhammad insists that he does not teach anything new and only reminds people of the true religion of Abraham, it is a fact that not only do his teachings emphasize the oneness of God and the submission to one God more explicitly than any

other prophet recorded in the canonical texts of the Bible, but his teachings also define
the oneness by excluding certain elements (like incarnation) from another Abrahamic
faith. On one hand, this emphasis on the exclusive worship of one God and on the
submission to him mostly agrees with the Old Testament and to some extent with the
New Testament if the oneness of God and his exclusive worship could be taken to be an
implied background of the Christian sacred text. On the other hand, the extremeness of
this emphasis on the oneness of God and on the insistence of surrender to only one God
in such a way that worship is not mediated at all sets Muhammad’s teachings and
prophetic role apart from other prophets.200

If all prophets (including Jesus) agree with the prophet Muhammad in general that
worship, submission, and belief in only one God is true insight revealed throughout the
ages and if Muhammad himself teaches that what he brought is not really a new
religion, then the unique contribution of Muhammad’s teachings on submission and the
oneness of God could be seen as that part of his doctrines not found in previous
prophetic teachings. These are the unmediated worship of God, the universality of the
covenant built into human nature itself, and the refusal of the divinity and worship of

200 For an understanding of the mediator function of Muhammad that has some implications for worship,
see Lamin O. Sanneh, “Muhammad, Prophet of Islam, and Jesus Christ, Image of God: a Personal
worship, I mean worshipping God via worshipping God’s manifestations. Worshipping Christ or the
worship service in which priests’ participation is necessary could be considered mediated worship.
Broadly speaking, the worship directed to God through the use of statues or other objects that are
traditionally considered to be idols is mediated worship too. From the perspective of the Qur’an, any
kind of mediated worship is idolatry and unacceptable to God.
Jesus. The majority of the other important teachings of the Qur’an (i.e., prayer, tithing, the belief in heaven and hell, resurrection, judgment, prophethood, covenants, revelations, predestination, afterlife, justice, etc.) are principally agreeable to the two other Abrahamic faiths, especially to that of Judaism. Even the unmediated worship and the submission only to God somewhat agree with Judaism more than they do with Christianity due to the divinity of Jesus.

Understood in this way, in the series of prophets Muhammad could mostly be seen as a prophet whose uniqueness was defined primarily in relation to Jesus’ divinity since even the universality of the covenant could somehow be incorporated into the Jewish and Christian teachings. Now, because the submission of the Son in Jesus implies a reciprocity of God in his surrender to humans and because Muhammad as a prophet refused the divinity and worship of Christ, it could be said that submission in Islam is external to God and also unilateral; humans submit, but God does not. However, the submission taught by Muhammad could be internalized by humans to some degree. Muslims strive to submit to God their attitudes, feelings, and intentions. Coupled with

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201 I don’t mention the doctrine of the Trinity because it seems a consensus is forming that the Qur’an does not refuse the mainstream Christian doctrine of the Trinity but instead its various heretical offshoots. See Mun’im Sirry, Scriptural Polemics: The Qur’an and Other Religions (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 133–165; John C. Block, “Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English Translation of ‘Thalatha’ in Qur’an 4.171 and 5.73,” Journal of Islamic Studies 23, no. 1 (January 2012): 50–75; The Study Qur’an, see comments on vv. 4:171; 5:73. Although this does not mean that the mainstream doctrine of the Trinity is agreeable to the Qur’an, I think the more difficult challenge for future theological dialogue between Muslims and Christians will be the worship of Jesus Christ as God.

202 I say “somewhat” because the Old Testament establishes the institution of priesthood unlike the Qur’an.

203 Mediaeval Sufism developed something similar to theosis called ta’ālīlah. See Tim J. Winter, “Jesus and Muhammad,” 29. However, Winter recognizes distinctions between the two as well. For these distinctions, see page 31.
the surrender expressed in bodily rituals and repeated regularly, this leads to internalizing the submission.

However, if one sees submission to one God as the innate disposition recognized by prophets and reinterpreted many times by them, then one may argue that what Muhammad did as a prophet was to insist upon the intuitive nature of God’s oneness and the surrender to God. The New Testament’s focus on Jesus and his relation with the Father somewhat weakens humans’ recognition that the oneness of God is intuitively simple and does not easily admit a highly complex understanding of the oneness seen in the Trinity. So Muhammad’s teachings could also be seen as revelation that refuses the specific Trinitarian heresies and Christological controversies. Be that as it may, such an interpretation still does not address the deeper challenge posed by Muhammad’s teachings as a prophet. Essentially, if there is any attribute of God that is not shareable, such as the oneness of divinity, then Muhammad as a prophet teaches that the oneness is that particular attribute, and anything else that claims so, including the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, is an encroachment upon God’s oneness.

Also, Muhammad as a prophet introduces major tension into the prophetic series by refusing to legitimize the divinity of Christ. Although the Old Testament prophets did not explicitly teach about the divinity of the promised Messiah, their revelations are hospitable to such a Christian interpretation of Jesus Christ as the divine being. But in the Qur’an, the prophet Muhammad refuses Christ’s divinity and worship of him. Does it mean that one of the records of the revelation — in this case the New Testament — is somewhat tampered with or misinterpreted to later read into it these theological
developments? Or does it mean that one of these prophets, Jesus or Muhammad, is mistaken in such important matters as incarnation, God’s oneness, and the worship of God? There is no way of answering these questions that is both faithful to the teachings of the Qur’an and the New Testament and yet does not violate the integrity of either one.

As to the submission seen in Muhammad’s life and teachings, it is a submission embodied in detail and followed by his believers. Coupled with the Qur’anic teaching on unreified Islam, the reified submission that Muhammad taught in specific ritual actions and in the rule of prayer, alms-giving, and daily behavior could be perceived to be a specific enactment that on the one hand includes general principles but on the other hand regulates behavior to the degree of minute details. Muhammad’s teaching on encompassing the submission to God in everything necessitates establishing detailed forms of submission through which human surrender to the divine will is materialized. Of course, Muhammad would not deny that self-sacrifice for the sake of others is also part of his teachings, but as the prophet taught, the emphasis on the submission is on external action.

Yet this should not be taken to deny any internal dimension of submission in the Qur’an as Sufism demonstrates. If anything, external submission leads to or facilitates

204 Nancy Roberts, “Imitatio Christi, Imitatio Muhammadi,” 231. “One thinker suggests that ‘the imitatio Muhammadi is…an imitation of the prophet’s actions and activity, whereas the imitatio Christi is rather the imitation of Christ’s suffering.’” For this quotation she credits Armand Abel, who was cited in Annemarie Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1985), 32.

inner submission; through detailed ways of following Muhammad’s particular version of Islam, men come to integrate their external submission with their inner submission to God. In terms of the specifics of Islam, these elements — the external and the inner submission unified through Muhammad’s teaching — could be taken as Muhammad’s contribution to the prophetic series in which none of the other prophets’ detailed particular path is as preserved as Muhammad’s. The well-documented life of Muhammad makes it possible, and submission in Islam is very much connected to the personality of the prophet.  


As demonstrated in previous chapters and sections, the sacred texts of Christianity and Islam have complex understandings of the oneness of God that overlap yet also differ. In the New Testament, the oneness of God is not contested as a false teaching or something to disagree with. On the contrary, it is recognized as a background teaching

206 However, there is also the other side of the coin. Because Muhammad’s life was documented relatively well in comparison to other prophets, some of his not-so-praiseworthy actions are documented too. In rare cases, this causes some Muslims influenced by Christianity to follow him only to the degree that his life conforms to the model left by Christ. See Nancy Roberts, “Imitatio Christi, Imitatio Muhammad,” 245. However, on page 227, Roberts, a Christian who converted to Islam, claims to retain “a sense of mixed belonging where Christianity and Islam are concerned.” So her opinion may not necessarily represent the attitude of traditional Muslims.
of Jesus’ environment and something that he took for granted. It is not as central as it is in the Qur’an, but it is important enough for Jesus to mention that God is one.

Nevertheless, in the New Testament the oneness of God invites a new interpretation exactly because of Jesus Christ. So it is possible to call the oneness of God in the New Testament a teaching that continues the Old Testament Shema yet also expands and qualifies it because of Jesus Christ. Here Jesus Christ is included into the oneness of God, and this adds one more layer to the concept of monotheism. One way to think about the oneness of God in the New Testament is to see how it crystallizes the elements of a possible multiplicity in the Old Testament’s language of “gods” (elohim) (Ex. 12:12; Ps. 86:8), “us” (Gen. 1:26; Isa. 6:8), and the concept of divine counsel (Ps. 82:1) in the doctrine of the Trinity that recognizes the oneness of God and the relationality within God.

The Qur’an also does not contest the oneness of God as a false teaching, but unlike the New Testament, it not only zeroes in on the oneness of God as the most important, defining character of all revelations but insists upon it. In the Qur’an, the oneness of God as a background has an apologetic element to it. On one hand, the oneness of God is not the widely assumed part of the background into which the Qur’an was revealed. Muhammad argues with pagan Arabs for God’s oneness (43:87; 46:28). On the other hand, the Qur’an recognizes that the oneness of God had always been part of the prophetic teachings and had been taught from generation to generation, making it the background of the long-lost revelations with which the Qur’an identifies. This makes the Qur’anic oneness a much more pronounced and sharp teaching than it is in the New
Testament; often the oneness of God is defined against something or someone. It comes across as a reactionary teaching.

The reactionary elements of the Qur’anic oneness partly stem from the anti-Christian polemic in the sacred text of Islam and serve as a tool to define the oneness of God. For example, by explicitly denying that the Messiah is God (5:72), the Qur’an defines the oneness of Allah as un-incarnational and external to humans. By rejecting Jesus as the Son of God (9:30) in particular, the Qur’an implies that the oneness of God is compromised whenever a filial relationship is posited between God and his creatures. By using Jesus’ submission to God to refuse Jesus’ own divinity (5:17; 5:75; 19:30), the Qur’an implies that the oneness of God cannot accommodate the elements of relationality (the superior — the submitter) within itself. In addition, when the Qur’an refuses the worship of Jesus (5:116), it implies that God’s oneness means the oneness of the object of worship.

The Qur’an also lays claim to the Old Testament prophets and their teachings about the oneness of God. Here, however, the Qur’an sides with those elements of the Old Testament that emphasize the oneness of God (Deut. 32:39; Neh. 9:6; Isa. 44:6) to the detriment of the multiplicity of divine beings named “gods” (elohim) observed in the Hebrew Bible. Because of this, the oneness of God looms largely in the theology of Islam and is magnified in the consciousness of Muslims. Unlike Christians, the majority of Muslims who practice their faith have a very clear-cut understanding of this oneness. However, even those Christians who practice their faith do not necessarily have as
precise an understanding of the oneness of God as Muslims have.\textsuperscript{207} The Trinitarian teaching often overshadows the oneness of God in theology and in liturgy; the hymns and elements of the worship service focus mostly on Jesus, mention the Father, and invite the Holy Spirit but do not focus on the oneness of God as a whole. Nevertheless, Christians are obliged to believe that God is one because the New Testament gives the impression that a person who believes in more than one God cannot be considered a follower of Christ. This also means that the oneness of God is a necessary article of belief in both religions.

Another feature that sets apart the oneness of God in the New Testament is its hospitality to initially non-divine elements such as human nature. This feature is visible first and foremost in Jesus Christ, who is said to be both human and God. According to the New Testament, Jesus’ humanity does not exclude him from being God nor does it breach upon God’s oneness. Moreover, this feature has a soteriological significance in the New Testament’s economy of salvation. Jesus Christ himself explicitly prays for his disciples to be one with the Father as Jesus is (John 17:21–23).

In the Qur’an, however, the oneness of God does not have any non-divine elements neither from the beginning nor through some event in history of God’s self-revelation. As such, it could be said to be inhospitable to humanity or to elements of humanity. Although humans can host God in their being, as Sufism demonstrates, the Qur’an itself

\textsuperscript{207} Although the precision in Islamic understanding of the oneness of God and its centrality are positive features, it also has a negative by-product that keeps people who come from non-monotheistic backgrounds and embrace Islam from identifying with their cultural religious heritage. See Kieko Obuse, “The Muslim Doctrine of Prophethood in the Context of Buddhist-Muslim Relations in Japan: is the Buddha a Prophet?” \textit{The Muslim World} 100, no. 2–3 (April 2010): 219–221, 224–226.
gives the impression that any human quality somehow connected to God’s oneness is a breach or compromise in that oneness and ought to be rejected. The more positive formulation of this inhospitality perhaps would be to say that in the Qur’an God’s oneness is self-consistent; if God has one attribute that cannot be shared with human beings, it is God’s oneness. If the term “soteriology” is understood to mean the positive end for a believer who believes or follows a certain path, then it is possible to say that in the Qur’an the oneness of God has a soteriological significance but is expressed in negative terms. A person who believes that God is one in such a way that his oneness cannot be shared in any way is going to be saved because he is not a mushrik, a person who joins a partner to God, worships God along with another being, or recognizes that there is more than one God.

The self-consistency and hospitality of the oneness of God often cause a misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims. Muslims often find it confusing that God is one, yet Jesus is God too, and somehow he shares this divine essence. It is perceived to be inconsistent for humans to think of God as both one and three but also unfitting to God to be humanized. To Christians, the Qur’anic oneness of God seems like a monolithic and monadic way of being one.

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208 For a correspondence between a Christian scholar and a Muslim scholar that includes discussion of this topic, see Abd al-Karim Al-Khatib, “Christ in the Qur’ān, the Taurât, and the Injil,” The Muslim World 61, no. 2 (April 1971): 90–101. In this article, Abd al-Karim responds to Kenneth E. Nolin’s review of Karim’s book. On page 99, Abd al-Karim writes, “But then why do you insist on saying that the Christ participates with God in the essential nature of Deity, at the same time as you call for an emphasis upon one God? And could God be one if any other being participates with Him in His essence? And would the essence remain the essence if divided?” Also, see Nolin’s comments in citations 22 and 28.
The features mentioned above lead to the most important difference between the oneness of God in the New Testament and the oneness of God in the Qur’an. That is the element of multiplicity within God. If one agrees that the word “multiplicity” could be taken technically to mean that one can differentiate somehow within God some other elements that do not impeach upon God’s oneness, then it is possible to say that the oneness of God in the New Testament at least implies some multiplicity within the Godhead. So there is the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit; every one of them is fully God, yet there is only one God. Although it could be said that the terms of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit indicate relations within the Godhead and that all three are within one another, all such conceptualizations seem cumbersome and unnecessary compared to the Qur’anic understanding of God’s oneness.

In the Qur’an, the oneness of God is much more intuitive, simple, elegant, and forceful and does not come across as challenging as it does in the New Testament. This simplicity is enforced in the Qur’an by clarifying statements that deny God’s having a child in any way and sharing the worship with any other being, be it god or

209 For the theological developments in scholasticism that wrestled to make sense of three persons in the Trinity without compromising the oneness of God, see Lawrence Moonan, “Aquinas, and the Number of Divine Persons,” Ephemeredes Theologicae Lovanienses 78, no. 4 (December 2002): 490–496. As I showed in the first chapter, the language posing differentiation within the Godhead or in God was explored in Islam, but the winners of the theological debate, the Asharite school of theology, refused to draw conclusions from the implications of the Qur’anic language to its logical end. However, even if we grant that there is some hint of differentiation in Allah (such as Allah’s hand, throne, face, will, etc.), that could be conceptualized as attributes of God that would be conceptually different from the persons within the Trinity. Ontologically, the persons within the Trinity are not attributes nor are they modalities of one God.

210 As a minister, I have seen this confusion first hand in life with ordinary people whose interest in the oneness of God and the Trinity is limited to its practical applications. Usually, it takes less time to explain to people the oneness of God than it does the Trinity. Often, explaining the Trinity requires answering more questions, but in terms of God’s oneness, people tend to be satisfied with minimal explanation.
creature. This difference has practical consequences for Christians and Muslims. Often the Christian attempt to express God and his relation to Jesus within the Trinity sounds to Muslim ears as an attempt to reconcile irreconcilable things. Christians themselves are not very clear about it as the ages-long discussions on God, Jesus, the divinity of Jesus, and the intra-Trinitarian relations suggest.

But this is also where the New Testament’s oneness of God gains a flexibility and openness that the oneness of God in the Qur’an lacks. At the expense of losing simplicity and straightforwardness in presenting God’s oneness, the New Testament gains a set of relations between God and humans, expressed as the Creator’s indwelling in humans and as humans’ capacity to be God’s children and temple. Also, the oneness of God seen through the lens of the Trinity deepens the relationships between God and humans when it is properly applied to discipleship and spiritual growth. These dimensions (God’s indwelling in humans and humans’ participation in God) are lacking or quite marginalized in the Qur’an. In the Qur’an, God’s transcendence, coupled with his oneness, governs everything else and marginalizes to some extent the potential intimacy between Allah and humans.

Because of the element of multiplicity, the New Testament implies a relationality within the Godhead that yields to conceptualizing God through the language of identity; Father-Son-Spirit also implies identities that are fully materialized in the earthly life of Jesus and his humanity. In the Qur’an, however, God’s refusal to be identified with humans limits an exploration of God through the concept of identity. The relations between humans, whether it is love or forgiveness, could be seen as
earthly and imperfect relations between members of the Trinity. This view grounds human relations and their complexity within God’s very being while in the Qur’an human relations cannot be grounded within God. As the Qur’an frames the matter, to pose a relation within God is to open the path to the many-ness of deities or to the complication in human understanding of God’s oneness.

Moreover, the oneness of God in the New Testament has taken shape, visibility, and elusive particularity in its incarnation. Since Jesus is God Incarnate, it is impossible to think about God’s oneness without taking into account the implications of Jesus Christ, his being, and his life. Jesus Christ embodies God’s oneness and links it to God’s love in his life. The Shema becomes flesh in Jesus and lives among humans, which makes the oneness of God have shape, flesh, and visibility. But this also implies that God’s oneness is like the individuality of Jesus the human: it is unique, dynamic, perhaps with internal contradictions, and unrepeatable in time or from one relation to another that God and any given human enter. This obviously creates tension when put together with the oneness of God as it is understood within a philosophical framework, but the tension contributes to the creative exploration of the oneness and should not be excluded from the mystery of God.

In the Qur’an, the oneness of God cannot be seen or embodied\textsuperscript{211} in a human being because God chooses not to incarnate. God’s abandonment of incarnation in the Qur’an

\textsuperscript{211} However, if we take the second school of the oneness of God in Islam (embodied oneness) as the starting point to conceptualize God-human relations in the Qur’an, then it is possible to articulate a concept similar to incarnation. It could be said that since Allah has a body (glorious, invisible, not hollow with physicality and with shape), humans in their bodily-ness (in being physical and having shape) represent to some extent Imago Dei as it is understood in the Qur’an.
may avoid some tensions, but other kinds of tensions still manifest themselves in the Qur’an (as discussed in the first chapter). Moreover, God’s choice to rebuke incarnation in the instance of Jesus’ divinity also closes an important artery in the intimacy between God and humans.

This too has significant implications for Christians’ understanding of God versus Muslims’ understanding of God. In the popular Islamic consciousness, God often comes across as a somewhat detached and stern being who needs to be loved by humans but whose love towards humans is not emphasized beyond Sufi circles. In the Christian popular consciousness, God’s love is emphasized and has a theological significance for pastoral work. Nevertheless, here the talk of “God’s love for me” often runs the risk of being a license for taking God’s justice lightly or sentimentalizing the Creator’s self-sacrificial love.

The Oneness of God and its Implications for Worship in the Qur’an and Worship in the New Testament

The oneness of God in the Qur’an and in the New Testament also affects the worship or servanthood due to God. In the Qur’an, as it was later developed by Islamic theology, the worship of God is as exclusive as God’s oneness. Nothing and no one can be worshipped but God with which the New Testament agrees. Nowhere can it be seen better than in theological developments about the Qur’an. The Qur’an is God’s eternal
word, and the eternity is considered to be God’s attribute. Nevertheless, Muslims do not worship God’s word, the Qur’an. Only God himself as God can be worshipped.212

In the New Testament, worship is as inclusive as God’s oneness. Not only God but also God’s incarnate Word is worshipped. God’s Word who takes flesh is just as eternal as God and deserving of worship. However, this feature could be formulated in negative terms too. As it was stated in the first chapter, the duplicity of worship makes Christians worship both God and Jesus Christ, who was considered to be God’s Word. Although theologically Jesus is God’s Word, this could be seen as a simple theological justification to avoid the cognitive dissonance with the inherited Old Testament belief that only God and nothing but God should be worshipped.

Another way that God’s oneness affects the worship prescribed in the Qur’an and in the New Testament is what here would be called the level of intimacy and progression towards God. In the Qur’an, because of the precision and the exclusionary nature of God’s oneness, the relationships between God and humans are almost always defined as Lord-servant relationships: God is always external to humans and demands worship; humans are always inferior to God and must submit. Nothing (at least in the Qur’an itself) can encroach this division between Creator-creature because flexing worship in such a way that God becomes father to humans, somehow takes humans as his temple, or somehow allows humans to participate in Godself means a compromise in God’s oneness.

212 Abd al-Karim Al-Khatib, “Christ in the Qur’an, the Taurát, and the Injil,” 98. “Though the Qur’an is the speech of God it is not God. We Muslims do not worship the Qur’an, nor do we take it as a god in place of God.”
In the New Testament, the worship of God as a servant is recognized, but it is transcended because of the incarnation of God through Jesus Christ. Humans are not simply God’s servants; they are also God’s children in whom God dwells in as his temple. Such an approach somewhat tends to blur the boundaries between God as the one who is worshipped and the creature who is worshipping. Theological conflicts about reverence for Mary between Catholics and Protestants and early church debates on Mary as Theotokos are ample evidence to this blurring that requires laser sharp theological definitions to avoid. Often these highly calibrated distinctions are not reflected in the popular consciousness. Yet this blurring is an almost unavoidable by-product that stems from being God’s adopted child and temple.

Worship, a form of submission in the Qur’an and in the New Testament, differs to the extent of its incorporation of human love as a response to God’s love in the context of the oneness of God. In the New Testament, God’s oneness or the Shema reinterpreted itself in Jesus Christ so that its element of love became intensified. If the Shema is about God’s uniqueness and his unyielding devotion to humans, then through Jesus Christ that unique devotion turns into God’s self-giving participation in the sacrificial self-surrender of the human Jesus. But because Jesus is also human, in him the human devotion to God that God yearns for is captured as well. Through Jesus’ submission to God, the New Testament transcends the fear-based submission emphasized in the Old Testament. A proper fear of God is part of the New Testament’s submission too, but in Christ, humans are freed to respond to God’s love through filial love to reciprocate what they received. Put simply, in the New Testament, love overcomes fear as a basis
for the submission to God, and that is because of the New Testament’s description of Jesus Christ, who is one with God and who could legitimately give humans a new knowledge and perspective on God.

This is not the case with the worship of one God in the Qur’an. The worship or submission to one God as a loving response to the Creator is not alien to the Qur’an, but it is not narrativized: there is no explicitly developed plot in the Qur’an that shows God somehow act in self-sacrifice to elicit the proper sacrificial response from humans. Most often than not, humans are called to worship God because a submission to the Creator who provides them with life and everything is the proper response to his giving. But God in the Qur’an does not submit to or does not sacrifice anything as in incarnation for the sake of his love to humans. But the lack of narrativization and the marginalization of love should not be taken as a deficit because the Qur’an compensates that lack with the universalized and one submission to one true God.

According to the Qur’an, everything — the whole universe — submits to God (4:125; 22:18; 59:5). Humans, who have relatively free213 will, may or may not submit to God although submission is in their nature. From this perspective, when humans worship God or submit, they recognize and actualize the natural religion (submission) and become aligned with the whole universe’s proper response to the creator God. This submission is tied into God’s oneness; only when humans submit to the creator God

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213 I say “relatively free” because the Qur’an gives a strong indication that Allah controls everything, but it also very clearly implies that humans have free will. The issue of predestination (qadar) and free will are so important to Islamic kalam (dogmatic theology) that in fact the traditional discipline of theology sprang from the discussion of predestination and free will rather than from the discussion of God’s attributes. See Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 42.
does their submission become a true, fulfilling submission (because there is only one true God) and free from the multitude of mistaken and deluded ways of worshipping idols. Moreover, there is one submission just as there is one God, and this oneness of submission is recognized in reified Islam. Unlike Christianity, Islam developed a very regulated and uniform way of liturgical or public worship (salāt) that is almost exactly the same across all Islamic sects and theological schools despite their differences. In this way, the unreified submission of the Qur’ān becomes one with the reified submission of Muhammad.

The worship of one God in the Qur’ān fits quite well with the Old Testament’s prophetic series and covenants. Like those prophets, Muhammad demands a monolatry and strict monotheism seen at least in some of the Old Testament prophets. In addition, it aligns well with the Old Testament’s silence or ambiguity on incarnation. The Old Testament is not clear-cut enough to refuse the possibility of never incarnating God categorically; Judaism, another faith community that lays claim to the canonical texts, refuses an incarnate God. From the beginning, it was Christians who had to prove and defend the incarnation rather than the Jews’ defending that God would incarnate, but Jesus is not that incarnate God. So with respect to the incarnation, the Old Testament’s prophets and covenants leave room for ambiguity that gives rise to the Qur’ānic refusal of the doctrine of incarnation as being not clear-cut enough to be accepted.

But in the New Testament, God incarnates, and this belief does not fit very well with the Old Testament’s covenants and prophets as far as the worship of only one God is considered. Or rather, one would say that the scriptural basis for incarnation and
worship of an incarnated God, as the Old Testament covenants and prophets were interpreted by Christians, is flimsy according to the standards of the two other Abrahamic communities. Although the concept of multiple covenants is used by modern theologians to recognize the validity of various covenants spoken in these faiths, this still does not help to alleviate the traditional confrontation between the worship of one and only God seen in Judaism and Islam on one hand and the worship of God and/or God’s incarnation in Jesus seen in Christianity on the other hand.

All these similarities and differences show that the oneness of God in the Qur’an and the oneness of God in the New Testament have some tension between them despite their shared fact of God as the one and only creator deity. This tension includes their understanding of the prophetic series, covenants, and the place of Jesus Christ in relation to God and in relation to other prophets.

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214 For the literature on this topic, see the discussion on covenants in the first chapter.
Conclusion

A) Summary

In this thesis, the Christian and Islamic understanding of the oneness of God, one of the central concerns to both faiths, is explored by analyzing what the New Testament and the Qur’an teach about this concept. In the introduction and in the section on methodological concerns, the literature is reviewed, and two concepts — prophethood and covenants — are singled out as the lenses in which to analyze the oneness of God.

In the first chapter, the theological conceptualizations that arise from the complexity of Scriptural texts are established and classified. Broadly speaking, the theological schools on the oneness of God register the tension observed in the texts and wrestle with them, taking various verses as their starting points. This chapter was concluded with the affirmation that in the Qur’anic understanding of prophets and covenants, the central teaching passed down from generation to generation is the unitarian oneness of
God while in the New Testament the central concern is the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s promises in the incarnated God.

The second chapter focuses on God as the character seen in covenants and prophets. Prophets of the just and merciful Allah of the Qur’an focus mostly on the affirmation of his strict oneness and remind people of particular past covenants based on the one primordial covenant. Also, Allah demands the undivided worship that excludes certain elements of the New Testament such as the worship of Jesus Christ. Prophets of the merciful and just Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnation of YHWH, focus mostly on the coming of the Messiah, finding salvation through the Lord, and making the new covenant that represents the new covenant promised in the Old Testament. In addition, the chapter establishes a unique kind of oneness specific to the New Testament. The Eucharistic oneness is a sacramental layer of God’s oneness in which God’s love, salvation to partakers, and the new covenant all converge in Jesus Christ. The overall conclusion of this chapter is that there is a perpetual lack of closure in identifying Allah and YHWH (seen in Jesus) as one and the same God.

The third chapter analyzes the place of Jesus Christ and Muhammad in context to the prophetic series, covenants, and the oneness of God. Here Jesus Christ is conceptualized as Muslim whose submission to God implies that he is one with God and that God’s oneness is open to humans through Jesus. Muhammad is also a prophet in the series of the Old Testament prophets. His teachings insist on the intuitive and simple nature of God’s oneness. However, the Qur’anic oneness is defined by refusing the divinity of Christ, which introduces tension into the prophetic series. The main
conclusion here is that due to Christ, the oneness of God in the New Testament invites humans into a participation in God, and their submission to God is based on God’s prior love for them. In the Qur’an, the oneness of God is self-consistent and universalizes the submission to God, which leads humans’ alignment with creation and their actualization of the natural religion (submission) through Islam (reified submission).

B) Findings and Implications for Ministry and Further Research

The main findings of this thesis are that the oneness of God in the New Testament exhibits an openness toward humans and emphasizes God’s love. In the Qur’an, the oneness of God exhibits precision and self-consistency. It has a strong intuitive component. Also, the oneness of God in the New Testament is embedded in the Eucharist, and because of that, it is sacramental. In the Qur’an, however, the oneness of God is firmly connected to the universalized sense of submission, and this affects how Christians understand Jesus Christ. He is a Muslim and the only prophet who identified with God through his submission to such a degree that the worship of him is sanctified by the Father. But this is so because God is in him and with him from the beginning. By worshipping him, Christians recognize what was there already: Jesus is Lord God whose love compelled him to incarnate.

These findings have implications on how Christians try to live like Christ, interact with Muslims, and what should be explored more in the oneness of God. When the love
of God is discussed in churches, ministers should frame the discussion through the oneness of God in Christ because the love of God ultimately culminates in God’s incarnation so that humans can be one with God too. God becomes one with humans out of his love. Every believer should be encouraged to strive for unity with God in the Spirit as Jesus Christ calls us to do and to hope for theosis as they carry their cross.

In Christian—Muslim dialogue groups, Christians need to be more sympathetic to Muslims’ insistence on the unitarian oneness of God for three main reasons. One, God is sympathetic to human bodily-ness and physicality as his incarnation shows. Christians ought to be sympathetic to Muslims because of this principle. Two, the simplicity of the oneness of God is more emphasized in the Qur’an. From the Qur’an, Christians can learn the blind spots in their own understanding by practicing the humility of the Lord God manifested in Jesus. Three, Christians are called to avoid idolizing the oneness of God because his incarnation and the Trinity preclude such mental ossifications. The Qur’an comes dangerously close to such an ossification as it lacks an internal conceptual frame to destabilize the mental idolization of the oneness of God.

Also, the oneness of God seen in the New Testament suggests some patterned links between Imago Dei, humans as God’s temple, Jesus Christ, and God’s love. Theological analysis of how all these concepts connect to one another through the oneness of God would perhaps yield insights into the human condition and a life worth living. Such research would also shed light on a paradox that I’m sensing: to be one with God in spirit requires transcending the mental concept of God’s oneness that separates those
who believe in one God from those who don’t believe at all. Only in that way can we become God’s temple through which the Father of all gives hope and blessings abundantly to those around us according to the pattern he established in Christ.

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