

Answer To mugh3's Post #1

It should be kept in mind for the uninitiated, that Jesus **is** Michael the Archangel in JW thought. They believe he was the first created being, and that it was Michael who came down to earth as Jesus. They also teach that “Jesus” sacrifice on the cross wasn’t remission of all sins, but only that of the original sin, and that we have to earn our “salvation” (the word salvation has a different meaning as compared to orthodox Christianity). When a Jehovah Witness or Mormon missionary come to, say, a Baptists door and state that they are “saved,” we must realize that there is a language barrier between the three “sects.” Understanding this *multiple defining principle* allows for smoother communication between all parties. FYI (for those who didn’t know).

“Neither the word trinity, nor explicit doctrine as such, appears in the New Testament.” ~ Mugh3

It is true that the word *Trinity* is not in the Bible. However, the word *Bible* is not in the Bible, either! Or the word *theocracy*, but we know that Israel (and JW’s would claim the same) was under such a system. This is not just a cute answer with no substance. No verse in the Bible explicitly states that a certain collection of books is the only inspired writing to be recognized as God’s Word. There is no list in the Bible of books that belong there – no inspired “*table of contents*.” Yet the belief that these books, and *only* these books, belongs in the Bible is itself based on the Bible’s teaching, as JW’s themselves recognize.

Trinitarians (that would be me) maintain that this is true of many biblical teachings. For example, the word *self-existent* is not in the Bible, but Christians believe that God is self-existent, that is, His existence depends on nothing outside himself. What matters is whether the ideas expressed by such words are faithful to the teaching of the Bible, not whether the words themselves can be found in its pages.

“... ‘hear, o Israel; the lord our god is one lord’ (duet. 6:4).” ~ Mugh3

You mentioned you knew a little Hebrew, well, I can see that you neither studied this passage in its original language, but simply took the English version to boot. The Hebrew word used for “one” in this passage is most significant, it is not “*yachid*,” which means “*the only one*” (example: God said to Abraham, “*Take your son, your only son, Isaac...*” Genesis 22:2). The Hebrew word here is “*echad*,” it means “*unity*,” or “*united one*” (example: “*A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*” Genesis 2:24). This verse actually conforms better to the Trinitarian viewpoint.

“The doctrine developed gradually over several centuries and through many controversies. By the end of the 4th century, the doctrine of the trinity took substantially the form it has maintained ever since” ~ Mugh3

This is a leading quote. The doctrine of the trinity was codified in the fourth-century to combat *Arianism*, which arose early in the fourth-century. Arius of Alexandria, claiming to follow in the footsteps of the second-century Alexandrian church father, Origen, held that the Son was a second God, inferior to the father (much like the JW’s), and that the Holy Spirit was a third God (JW’s would assert that the Holy Spirit is a force, like electricity), inferior to both the Father and the Son. Unlike Origen, however, Arius denied that the Son and the Holy Spirit were eternal, maintaining that “*there was a time when the Son was not*” and describing both the Son and the Holy Spirit as exalted creatures.

The fourth century codification of this “*doctrine*” is only to lay out officially what was believed by almost all of the previous believers (Church Fathers if you will) prior to this time. This was done only in response to Arianism coming from Alexandria. Much like the codification of what books belong in the Bible because of Gnosticism in the late second-century wanting to add books to what was already accepted as “*kosher*” (no pun intended, the early church were almost all Jews). The books accepted were already generally accepted, but the church needed to clarify so that there wouldn’t be confusion.

The trinity is implicitly taught by the second-century Fathers (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria) and becomes fairly explicit in the third-century fathers (Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen). I will deal with this more in-depth at a later post.

“Among the apostolic fathers, there had been nothing even remotely even approaching such a mentality or perspective” ~ Mugh3

Justin Martyr

The JW booklet, *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, asserts the Justin Martyr “*called the prehuman Jesus a created angel who is ‘other than the God who made all things.’ He said that Jesus was inferior to God and ‘never did anything except what the Creator... willed him to do and say’*” (p.7 of my copy).

The fact is that Justin Martyr taught that the prehuman Jesus was God, not an angel. Justin did say that Christ was called an angel, but explained that this was because Christ, who was actually God, took on the appearance of an

angel (e.g., Genesis 18 – 19:24, what is known as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ). Thus, Justin writes that,

“the Father of the universe has a Son; who also, being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God. And of old he appeared in the shape of fire and in the likeness of an angel to Moses and to the other prophets...” [1]

Elsewhere, Justin calls Christ *“both God and Lord of hosts”* (that is, Jehovah) [2]. Also, *“God the Son of God.”* [3] Justin not only believed that Christ was God; he believed in a rudimentary form of the Trinity. Thus he stated that Christians worshipped God the Father, *“the Son (who came forth from him...), and the prophetic Spirit.”* [4] That this meant that Christ and the Spirit were both God is implied by his repeated statement that *“we ought to worship God alone... to God alone we render worship.”* [5]

In short, although Justin Martyr did not use such terms as *“Trinity,”* and his philosophical explanations of the relation of Christ to God were somewhat confused, he worshipped Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and regarded Christ a Jehovah God.

Irenaeus

One of John’s disciples was Polycarp who discipled Irenaeus. The Watchtower booklet says that Irenaeus, a late second-century theologian, held that Christ was inferior to God, *“not equal to the ‘One true and only God,’ who is ‘supreme over all, and besides whom there is no other’”* (p.7). But in context Irenaeus was contrasting the *“one true and only God”* with the lesser gods of Gnostic speculation, not denying that Christ is God.

In fact, Irenaeus defended a view of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that was implicitly Trinitarian. Thus, he states that the church has its faith *“in one God, the father almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God,”* and in the same context speaks of *“Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King.”* [6] Irenaeus writes of *“Christ Jesus, the Son of God; who, because of his surpassing love towards **His creation**, condescended to be born of the virgin, He Himself uniting man through Himself to God....”* [7] Thus, Jesus Christ was both God and man, the Creator who became a man to save his creation.

Clement of Alexandria

The JW booklet claims that Clement of Alexandria held that Christ was *“a creature”* and inferior to God (p. 7). In fact, Clement held the exact opposite. He taught that Christ is *“truly most manifest Deity, He that is made equal to the Lord of the universe; because He was His Son,”* [8] and one and the same God as the Father. [9] Clement explicitly called Christ the *“eternal Son,”* [10] and denied that the Father had ever been without the Son. [11]

Bibliography

1. Justin Martyr, *First Apology 63*, in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A. D. 325*, 1:184, 1969 reprint of the original 1885 edition. (hereafter cited as ANF)
2. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho 36*, in ANF, 1:212
3. Ibid., 128, in ANF, 1:264

4. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 6, in *ANF*, 1:164
5. *Ibid.*, 16, 17, in *ANF*, 1:168
6. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.10.1, in *ANF*, 1:330
7. *Ibid.*, in *ANF*, 1:417
8. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 10, in *ANF*, 2:202
9. Clement, *The Instructor* 1.8, 1.11, in *ANF*, 2:227, 234
10. Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 12, in *ANF*, 2:206
11. Clement, *Miscellanies [Stromata]* 5.1, in *ANF*, 2:444