

The OT's majestic plural shows us God is a plurality



Big picture: The “let us” of Genesis 1:26 is not a speech device denoting glory or authority, or a reference to angels (God created all things alone), but on the contrary another sign that God, while one, is a plurality of persons.

1. Muslims claim that the royal “we” in Genesis 1:26 is an expression of his glory or authority, or references his communication with others

As Christians we claim that the “let us” in [Genesis 1:26](#) shows us that God is plural in nature; one God but more than one person in relationship. Muslims however claim that God is indivisibly one and so any expression of pluralism is either an example of the ‘royal we’, or that God is communicating with someone else. (See [Genesis 3:22](#), [Genesis 11:7](#), and [Isaiah 6:8](#) for the other places where God uses first-person plural pronouns.)



2. This is how they understand Allah’s use of the first-person plural in the Quran

Plural pronouns for God are not just found in the Bible. In the Quran when Allah speaks, he uses the first-person plural pronoun, saying for example in [Quran 21:107](#), “And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.” Or in [Quran 15:9](#), “Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur’an and indeed, We will be its guardian.” This use of “we” in the Quran is explained as simply a style of speech, similar to how Queen Victoria might have said “We are not amused.” In this sense, the first-person plural pronoun is intended to convey a sense of glory, majesty or authority and is referred to as the “Majestic plural”.

When it comes [Genesis 1:26](#), two explanations are given by Muslims wanting to avoid the conclusion that God is plural in nature. The first is simply that it is the use of the majestic plural as in the Quran. The other one given is that God is talking with the angels, whom he has already created.

3. The Bible claims however that he alone is the creator

This issue with the second argument is that neither the Bible or the Quran gives any indication that anyone was responsible for any act of creation other than God himself. God alone is declared to be the creator, as [Revelation 4:11](#) declares; “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” This is true of the Quran too (for example [Quran 19:67](#) and [Quran 54:49](#)).

4. None of the kings of the Old Testament use the first-person plural for themselves; only God uses it for himself

The issue with saying that God is using the majestic plural in [Genesis 1:26](#) is that nowhere else in the Scripture does anyone else other than God use the majestic plural for themselves, not even the Kings of Israel, or kings of any other nation. The majestic plural just is not found in Scripture other than for God himself. The only conclusion is that the “let us” of [Genesis 1:26](#) denotes the fact that God is plural in nature.

5. Psalm 110:1, “the Lord said to my Lord”, and Genesis 19:24 with its two “Yahweh’s”, are further examples in the Old Testament of plurality for God

It is interesting to note that there are other instances where God is seen in a plurality in the Old Testament. One example that is often quoted in the New Testament is [Psalms 110:1](#), where David says, “The Lord says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Here we have the LORD (Yahweh) speaking of someone who is David’s Lord, someone who can only be God himself. It is interesting that Jesus picks up on this example in Matt. 22:43, when he challenges the Pharisees regarding the identity of the Messiah.

A further example is [Genesis 19:24](#). The English translation of this verse is, “Then the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah – from the Lord out of the heavens.” However, in the Hebrew, the word “Yahweh” appears twice and literally says, “The Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah burning sulphur from Yahweh”. In the context of the passage, we read of Abraham welcoming three visitors, two of whom turned out to be angels ([Genesis 19:1](#)) and the other is said to be “the Lord [who] appeared to Abraham”. ([Genesis 18:1](#)). This context shows that the two “Yahwehs” of [Genesis 19:24](#) should be naturally understood as two persons of a pluralistic God.

6. It doesn’t make sense for Allah to appeal to plurality if there is no one more glorious than he is as an indivisible unity

Maybe the strongest argument against the “let us” in [Genesis 1:26](#) being intended solely to convey a sense of glory, is to ask the question, ‘If Allah’s nature is an indivisible oneness, and if there is no one more glorious than him, why would Allah appeal to plurality to convey to us his sense of his majesty?’ The logical conclusion would be that someone else of a different nature is more glorious than he is.

In reality there is no good answer for this, and it is worth stressing the inconsistency here. At muslimmatters.com Muslim convert, Musa Maguire states “Translating the Arabic ‘nahnu’ to ‘we’ (when Allah is referring to himself) is therefore highly problematic, not simply because the awkward use of English alienates and confuses the listener, but more importantly, because it obscures the core message of Islam – tawheed.”¹

In reality, the reason Allah uses the plural pronoun is probably because Muhammad overheard and mimicked the way he overheard God referred to when Jews and Christians would recite their scriptures (see for example [Bukhari 6944](#)).

7. God’s use of “we” in the Bible shows that he is knowable and explains the reason why Jesus prayed to God as his Father

At first glance, this argument may seem to be just a technical conversation about grammar. However, if God is not a community of persons, it means that God is not relational. A failure to understand the plural nature of God can be one reason why Muslims raise objections to the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Gospels. There can be value in spending time laying a foundation from Genesis and the Old Testament showing how God is plural in nature before looking at the Gospels.

At the same time, the Islamic view of Allah's use of 'we' as a reference to his majesty is a welcome truth which we can agree on. However, the view that it is just a literary device disregards the fact that God is a relational God who is knowable and who created us to know him. Take time to explore this with your friend and the implications of why God being relational is so important. Take the conversation to Christ's words in John's Gospel where we see the dynamic of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit and Jesus using 'us' and 'we' when referring to himself and the Father (For example, [John 10:30](#), [John 14:23-31](#), [John 17:11](#)).

References

1. ¹ <https://muslimmatters.org/2008/02/27/the-royal-we/>