

THE CONCEPT OF MONOTHEISM

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ABSTRACT

'Monotheism' has been defined as the belief in the existence of one 'God' or in the oneness of God. Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church gives a more restricted definition. "Belief in one personal and transcendental God", as opposed to polytheism and Pantheism. The major concern of the western Philosophers and theologians are their commitment either to monotheism or Polytheism 'Monotheism is the belief in a single all powerful God, as opposed to religions that believe in multiple Gods.

Key Word: early history, zoroastrianism, greece christianity, islamic , hinduism, sikhism, violent or benevolent.

INTRODUCTION

Monotheism is perhaps the most discussed and debated category of religious classification. Unlike other religious classification, monotheism has often been associated with an "ideal" for which all religions should strive. Many faiths have put forward great amounts of efforts to champion monotheism, considering it to be the supreme form of religiosity.¹ Monotheism has even been, on occasion, placed on a pedestal in academia-religious scholars and theologians viewed it for decades as the most "rational" way of conceiving of God and often placed or an evolutionary hierarchy above more "primitive" ways of viewing divinity such as polytheism or animism.²

The terms "monotheism" was coined in 1660 by Henry More (1614-1687) a member of the Cambridge Platonists, in order to better organize and categorize religions on a continuum (or progressing in an evolution from "primitive" level such as animism through to polytheism, eventually ending up at monotheism)³. Monotheism was seen as the most "civilized" notion for conceiving of divinity and placed at the top of this hierarchy. Scholars such as Max Muller (1823-1900) believed that monotheistic religions such as Islam and Christianity were reflection of advanced civilization and advanced levels of thought.⁴ Original monotheism was

put forward by Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954) in a series of volumes beginning in 1912 to claim, in direct opposition to this evolutionary viewpoint, that monotheism was the original belief of humankind, and that subsequent beliefs such as Polydaemonism and pantheism, among others, gradually arose out of the degeneration of this primordial monotheism, nevertheless this theory has been largely discredited in academic circles.⁵

MONOTHEISM:

Monotheism has been found in a variety of cultures around the world, and is not exclusive to technologically advanced societies. Some suggest that monotheism first arose in the religion of Zoroastrianism.⁶ Others have argued Egypt was the birthplace of monotheism, while Jews often consider their religion to be the original form of monotheism.

Zarrathustra founded Zoroastrianism sometime during the long time span between eighteenth and sixth centuries B.C.E. by turning against the polytheistic ritualism that was prevalent among Indo-Iranian religions at that time.⁷ In doing so, he unified the various notion of divinity found within these faiths into one all encompassing deity called Ahura Mazda. Zoroastrianism can be considered dualistic monotheism, a subtype of monotheism where a monarchical God representing good stand, opposed to less powerful evil sources.⁸ Such monotheism remained prevalent in Zoroastrian belief as Zoroastrianism taught it however later teachings brought older Indo-Iranian gods back into the Zoroastrian mythology, making it as distinctively polytheist.⁹

The Greeks were also among the first cultures to propound monotheistic ideals, at least in a philosophical sense. Generally, the idea of a unified, divine principle was seen by the Greeks to express a sense of reasonableness or order in the cosmos. For Pre-Socratic philosopher, including Xenophanes, such an idea seemed to be the highest manifestation of religious thought.¹⁰ For example, Xenophanes depicted the spiritual union of the so-called "All=One" as uncreated, unchangeable, and ubiquitous throughout the Universe.

Plato construed the ultimate principle as a unity of the good, and identified God this way. In a world of evil, in constant flux, God represented the single good, which was ultimately unchanging in its embodiment of perfection.¹¹

Like wise Aristotle conceived of a First Mover who derives from physical unity, that is a solitary supreme being who is eternal and immutable.

Christians believe in the one God of their Jewish origins, but nuance their monotheism with the doctrine of the Trinity. The classic Christian "three in one, one in three" formula was first developed by the theologian Tertullian at the beginning of the third century C.E. Christians generally profess that the one God is manifest in three persons; God the father, God the son, and God the Holy spirit.¹²

At the very core of the Islamic tradition is monotheism, like the other Abrahamic faiths, Islam asserts that monotheism is as old as humanity, and is the ultimate from the religious faith degrading into various forms of polytheism and idolatry over time. However, in Islam more so than Judaism or Christianity, monotheism is the linchpin by which the entirety of the belief system is held together. Islam has a simple but pointed philosophy.

Concerning Monotheism there is only one God (called "Allah") and no others, period. There is no Trinity, as in Christianity, and no claims which might suggest numerous creative entities. Rather, Allah alone is the sole entity for worship. There is no existence or supernatural powers to be worshipped other than 'Allah'. Allah is all truth and the source of all creation. Allah created the universe by himself, and is also self-created. This power is not depleted in any way or the basis of what he has created.¹³

The Upanishads developed this concept of a deeper oneness even further. They labeled this deeper reality as Brahman, which they described as unchanging, infinite, immovable and transcendent reality that is the divine Ground of all being. This Supreme Reality is regarded as the source and sum of the cosmos; eternal and genderless, utterly beyond description.

Contemporary Hinduism is divided into four major divisions, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Smartism. These denominations all believe in one deity or deities but differ in their various conceptions of God. Vaishnavites conceive of God as Vishnu and Shaivites conceive of God as Shiva. These denominations then, can be said to follow a singular concept of God which would classify their beliefs as pantheistic monotheism or Pantheistic monism. Smartism, which follows Advaita philosophy, are monists and accept each of the multiple.¹⁴

Sikhism is another monotheistic faith that arose in northern India in the fifteenth century. The opening verse of the Gurbani Sahib known as the Mool Mantra, exemplifies their firm belief in monotheism. In English, this statement reads: "One universal Creator God. The Name is truth. Creative being personified. No fear no Hatred. Images of the Undying. Beyond birth, Self-Existent." Thus, even before discussing the details of faith and practice, the Sikh holy book proclaims the oneness of God, illustrating the importance of this idea to the faith.

CONCLUSION

Numerous people have observed and commented that monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in spite of their fundamental ethical and moral grid lives', on benevolence and love, have actually been for more violent and intolerant causing for more wars and conflicts, than non-monotheistic religions such negative characters have been attributed to its adherence to an absolutist, theological thesis that only my God is God. According to book column nits and author Another Jonathan Kivsch, who wrote 'God Against the Gods in 2005', the monotheistic idea of only one God tends to bring forth a strict demand for intolerance of others holding different creeds and although polytheism may not be entirely free from intolerance, nevertheless monotheism is far more intolerant than polytheism because violent monotheist kills to gain theological as well as political dominance, while violent polytheists do so to gain only political control.¹⁵

It seems that ironically monotheism has been guilty of idolatry which it has been denouncing. Some have argued that "monotheistic idolatry" idolizes the idea of only one God instead of properly worshipping God himself. According to them, however, if monotheism overcomes idolatry, its fundamental teaching on God's benevolence and love will come to the fore, and its problem of violence can evaporate. For example, exile Brunner held that if we go beyond the idolatrous nature of monotheistic "Objectivism" as well as the egoistic nature of 'Subjectivism; the truth will be revealed as "Personal encounter" of love between God and us.¹⁶

In fact, the Hebrew Bible promotes an ethic of charity, generosity, social justice, and peace trying to taking care of the windows, the orphan, the poor, and the foreigner similar teachings on love and peace are found genuinely in other monotheistic religions as well.

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