**monotheism/一神论(Yī Shén Lùn)**

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The term "monotheism" first appeared in 1663 in Lord Herbert of Cherbury's book *De religione gentilium* (On the Religion of the Heathens). It refers to the concept of a primitive religion that was common to all humankind and worshipped nature as the only deity. According to Lord Herbert, the opposite, "polytheism”, the worship of many different gods, developed only later among the peoples until, as a third stage, a new monotheistic religion was introduced in Israel, that was not based on nature but on revelation.

In the 20th century, the concept ‘monotheism’ developed in two different directions. On the one hand, it was now understood as the exclusive specificity of the "Abrahamic religions", i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. On the other hand, a distinction was now made between an "exclusive" and an "inclusive" monotheism. One is based on the motto "No other gods!", the other on the motto "All gods are one". Forms of "inclusive monotheism" can be found all over the world, e.g. in the Egyptian, Neo-Babylonian, Hindu and Hellenistic (Stoic) religions. Only the "Abrahamic" religions know exclusive monotheism. In both traditions, God is praised as the "One and Only" - because other gods are forbidden, because there are no other gods, or because all gods merge into the One. Therefore, the concept of monotheism, which is based on the opposition of unity and multiplicity, is inadequate.

The decisive factor for exclusive monotheism is the connection between monotheimus and covenant. This connection seems to exist only in the Hebrew Bible and the religions dependent on it. It appears there in two founding narratives. One refers to Abraham and the covenant between God and man, the other to Moses and the covenant between God and the people. Both are torn out of their accustomed living conditions, Abraham from Mesopotamia, Moses and the children of Israel from Egypt, and called into the covenant.

The central concept of this new religion is "faithfulness" or "faith", *emunah* in Hebrew, *pistis* in Greek, *fides* in Latin: faithfulness to the covenant and to the One with whom it was made, faith in the promise associated with this covenant: the "Promised Land", the "Paradise", the "Redemption". The covenant between God and humanity founds the new religion of faith and the new history that God and the people of faith have in common, the "history of salvation" that runs towards the goal of redemption and in which all deeds have consequences. monotheism in the Jewish, Christian or Islamic contexts thus means more than the conviction that there is only one and not many gods. It means that this One God has revealed Himself to us in order to make a covenant with us that demands from us faithfulness and trust.

The concept of faithfulness includes the existence of other gods with whom man or the people could be unfaithful to God. So, this is not a strict monotheism that denies the existence of other gods. However, this is also found in the Bible, namely where it is not about God as the liberator from Egyptian bondage, but about the creator of heaven and earth, e.g. in the book of Genesis and chapters 40ff. of the book of Isaiah. Here it is faith and faithfulness, that matter, but insight, knowledge and wisdom. In the biblical monotheism both directions combine, faithfulness to the One who saved us and shows the way to salvation, and knowledge of the One who created heaven and earth and holds everything in his hands.

The covenant religion creates a counter-world in which God is king in opposition to the normal world in which the princes of this world rule. Christianity has enormously sharpened this difference between the "kingdom of God" and the "world" (*civitas divina* vs. *civitas terrena* in Augustine). Between the invisible, extra-worldly God, who in an act of revelation establishes in this world his covenant with a chosen group, and this world in which this group lives and which is familiar to them, an abyss opens up which can only be bridged by faith. Therefore, the new religion based on covenant and revelation combines with a system of rules that govern life in the new world of the covenant.

This form of monotheism draws a line between before and after. People have lived before in a world from which they must now move out in order to enter the new world of God's covenant. Therefore, this religion is always "secondary" in the sense that it presupposes an older religion which it must persecute and eradicate. The new takes the place of the old.

From the very beginning, the idea of revelation is connected with the medium of Scripture in order to record forever God's revealed commandments and rules of life. In the course of time, the most sacred texts are gathered into a canon and set apart as inviolable from the rest of Scripture. In a changing world, however, commentary is needed in order to ensure the timeless validity of the canonical texts. Thus, commentary works such as Mishnah and Talmud in Judaism, the works of the Church Fathers in Christianity and the Hadith in Islam come into being. Simultaneously with the canonisation of tradition, an orthodoxy develops in the monotheistic religions that excludes deviating interpretations and teachings as heresy. This led to persecutions of heretics, especially in Christianity and Islam. Within these religions, which are based on Scripture and revelation, different directions and sects emerge, which at times, like Catholicism and Protestantism in Christianity or Shia and Sunna in Islam, can lead to serious, violent conflicts.

At the same time, the encounter with Greek, especially (Neo)Platonic philosophy resulted in a proximity of monotheism and metaphysics. This proximity blurred the boundary to inclusive monotheism, the distinction between the One Creator of heaven and earth and the One from whom everything arose, the One who is everything, who does not confront the world as a creator from outside, as subject and object, but incorporates it as an origin within himself. Examples of this closeness are, for example, Lactanz, who relates the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus to the God of Christian monotheism, Nikolaus von Kues, who more than 1000 years later reinforces and extends the same lines, and Spinoza, who systematically dissolves the boundary between God and the world and thus between monotheism and pantheism. This also includes the doctrine of "prisca theologia", widespread in the 15th and 16th centuries, according to which the true religion was already represented by Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus, who lived long before Moses.

The three "Abrahamic" religions have rarely coexisted peacefully despite the commonality of their origin. Christianity is not recognised as a pure monotheism by the other religions because of its doctrine of the Sonship of Jesus Christ and its renunciation of the prohibition of images. Islam criticises Judaism for the overly human emotionality of God in the biblical writings. Christianity criticises Judaism for not recognising the Messiahship of Jesus Christ and Islam for its fundamentalist understanding of the Scriptures. The problem of the three coexisting monotheisms, which all refer to a revelation of their God given only to them, led to the literary and factual institution of religious debates since the late 8th century, at which sometimes a representative of "paganism" was invited in addition to those of the three monotheistic religions. From this tradition also stem the ring parable known from Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, in which the three religions are compared to three rings that nobody can tell apart, and the pearl parable, which compares the true religion to a pearl that someone throws into a house at night and which only proves to be such, i.e. the true religion, at daybreak.

The term ‘monotheism’, thus, refers to religions that, apart from worshiping only one god, distinguish strictly between God and world, creator and creation, and imply the idea of a covenant of God and those who believe in him.