NATHAN MACDONALD

Deuteronomy and the Meaning of "Monotheism"

2nd edition

Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe
1

Mohr Siebeck

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2nd corrected edition

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Preface

The following study is a revised version of a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Durham in September 2001 with the title, *One God or One Lord? Deuteronomy and the Meaning of "Monotheism"*. I am grateful to the editors of the series *Forschungen zum Alten Testament*, Prof. Dr Bernd Janowski and Prof. Dr Hermann Spieckermann, for accepting this work for publication.

The completion of the doctoral thesis was the culmination of many years of academic study during which time I benefited from the innumerable contributions of others. First, I wish to express my thanks to the staff and faculty of the Department of Theology at Durham University. Amongst these, Rev. Dr Walter Moberly, my doctoral supervisor, takes first place. His careful thinking and deep piety have immeasurably contributed to my own reflections on the task of being a student of the Old Testament. Of him, it can truly be said that he is a teacher of the law who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven, bringing out treasures old and new. I am also grateful to Dr Colin Crowder, Prof. Robert Hayward and Dr Stuart Weeks who have helped sharpen my thinking on various matters. I have enjoyed extended discussions with four fellow doctoral students at Durham, and I am grateful to them for their insights: Dr Simon Gathercole, Dr Keith Grüneberg, Sue Nicholson and Michael Widmer.

My study of the Old Testament did not begin at Durham and I am grateful to those who taught me in Cambridge. During my time there I had the privilege of learning from Rev. Dr Andrew McIntosh, Prof. Graham Davies, Prof. William Horbury, Dr Geoffrey Khan and Prof. Robert Gordon. My rudimentary knowledge of Old Testament can be traced back long before then, and it is only right to express my gratitude to those who taught me at an early stage to love Scripture and to try and embody its teaching. It is with much affection that I mention Mrs Davies and Sister Pam, whose names are unknown in the world of scholarship, but are written in the book of life. My earliest teachers, who more than anyone have modelled Christian living and discipleship, and a love for Scripture, are my parents, Malcolm and Ann MacDonald. No son could have wished for better. They and my wife's parents, Stuart and Margaret Wilson, have shown support, interest and love throughout my studies.

There are many friends and colleagues in Cambridge, Durham and St Andrews who have shown an interest in my work, and with whom I have enjoyed many conversations. At Claypath United Reformed Church, Durham, I have been given the opportunity on numerous occasions to discuss my work, and to develop my own understanding of Scripture in sermons and study groups. I have particularly valued conversations with Rev. Dr Robert Fyall, Dr Scott Masson and George and Kirsty Carter. Two friends from Cambridge have been valued partners in the study of the Old Testament: Dr Peter Williams and James Palmer. In St Andrews I have benefited from conversations with many of my colleagues, including Prof. Christopher Seitz, Prof. Richard Bauckham, Prof. Alan Torrance, Prof. Bernhard Lang, Dr Louise Lawrence and Dr Mark Bredin.

Devoting three years to study is something that cannot be done without financial support. I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Board for a grant during the three years of doctoral studies, and during my Masters' year at Cambridge.

Finally, I owe the greatest debt to my wife Claire. It is to her that I dedicate this volume with much affection. I am grateful for her love and support during the past years, and for maintaining an interest in, what often appeared to be, the esoteric concerns of scholarship. Over many months she has, without complaint, looked after many of the practical concerns of living so that more of my time could be dedicated to academic work. It is not possible to adequately express my thanks to her:

אַחַת הִיא יוֹנָתִי תַמָּתִי

Nathan MacDonald
St Mary's College, St Andrews
St Andrews Day 2002

Preface to the Second, Corrected Edition

Dr. Henning Ziebritzki's news that all the copies of the first edition of *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'* had been sold was as welcome as it was unexpected. No less so was his belief that there remained a demand for the book and that he would welcome a new foreword for a second, corrected edition. I am grateful to him and Mohr Siebeck for their concern to see the work remain in print, and for the readers who have found, and continue to find, value in what I have written.

Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism' insists on the importance of locating Deuteronomy's one-God statements in the context of Israel's love towards YHWH and YHWH's election of Israel. Consequently, it was critical of accounts where the practical implications were neglected in order to emphasize Israel's intellectual progress towards monotheism. It warned of the hermeneutical challenges of the term 'monotheism', not in order to prohibit the use of the term – which would have been a rather futile gesture – but to try and encourage a hermeneutical reflectiveness on this important, but challenging, word.

Given the sharp thesis of the book, it was perhaps not surprising that reviewers were mixed in their reception of it. Particularly striking in this respect was a strong division between reviewers from the Anglo-American world and continental Europe. British and American scholars tended to welcome the book and its thesis, even if they sometimes disagreed with parts of its argument, whilst German-speaking scholars were far more critical in their assessment of it. In its own way the book's reception is illustrative of fissures in the world of academic theology that have been widening for many decades. There are many reasons for this different reception. Most obviously, of course, the book was conceived and written in the United Kingdom and naturally reflects the environment of its gestation. Beyond this, it can be observed that English-language scholarship has tended to encourage a critical attitude to intellectual paradigms. German-language scholarship, for its part, tends to show a far greater awareness of the history of the discipline and the location of new works within existing paradigms.

In relation to this, the discussion of Deuteronomy remains an area of considerable academic activity in continental Europe – in almost sharp

contrast to the UK and North America. As a result every new book on Deuteronomy – and there have been very many in recent years – enters into a controversial and contested area. My book was no exception. The book's restriction to the final form, as part of a 'canonical' methodology was a cause for consternation. The redaction-critical development of Deuteronomy is seen as particularly involved and great care has been taken to distinguish different compositional layers. Whilst synchronic readings of Deuteronomy have begun to appear in European scholarship, they are outnumbered by diachronic analyses and often have a rather apologetic tone.

It is almost ten years since I completed the text, and neither my own thinking nor the scholarly discussion has stood still in the intervening time. Perhaps inevitably the book would look quite different were I to begin to write it now. An important stimulus for me in that time was the response of European reviewers such as Eckart Otto and Georg Braulik.[1] They were concerned that the work could be seen as driving a wedge between the text's compositional history and its final form. I appreciate now rather better this worry. Nevertheless, my own decision to utilize a final form reading reflected some concern about the way that diachronic analysis of Deuteronomy draws, at least in part, upon a sense of theological development during the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. The adoption of a final form method was in order to avoid presupposing a particular account of monotheism that could have been entailed by a diachronic account of Deuteronomy's development. What concerned me was the logical circularity that this could have introduced, and the prioritizing of certain kinds of issues.

My own methodological approach would now be slightly different, for a variety of reasons. First, in Pentateuchal research as in other areas it has become clearer how interrelated the questions of the final form of the text and its compositional history are. The later forms of the text are seen as important *datum* in ways that were not the case for many earlier scholars doing diachronic analysis. The work of Otto, Braulik and others has been especially helpful in integrating synchronic and diachronic approaches. Second, I would feel the need to tackle more directly some of the issues relating to specific redaction-critical proposals. For example, the *communis opinio* that Deut 6.4 immediately preceded the instructions about centralization in the *Urdeuteronomium* receives only passing comment in this book, albeit with an implied criticism.[2] This issue strikes me as consider-

[1] OTTO, E., Monotheismus im Deuteronomium oder Wieviel Aufklärung es in der Alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft geben soll: Zu einem Buch von Nathan McDonald [sic], ZAR 9 (2003) 251–257; BRAULIK, G. Monotheismus im Deuteronomium: Zu Syntax, Redeform und Gotteserkenntnis in 4,32–40, ZAR 10 (2004) 169–194.

[2] See below p. 72.

ably more problematic than has been recognized and needing rather more discussion. Thirdly, it became clear to me, especially through conversations with Chris Seitz and the work of my former doctoral student Daniel Driver,[3] that there were various ways in which a 'canonical approach' was being understood, and that my work was situated in a particular tradition. I would now see the approach in this book as 'final form' rather than 'canonical', and my own methodological instincts are now with the latter, rather than the former. What I would now recognize as a 'canonical approach' is far more interested in engaging redaction critical proposals. In particular Driver's work helped me to understand better how continental scholarship was concerning itself with some of the issues to which Brevard Childs had sought to give attention in his 'canonical approach'.

Although for a number of the years since the first edition of this book appeared I have been engaged with projects with little to do with monotheism or Deuteronomy,[4] some sense of how I might do things differently and how the perspectives in this book can be developed can be gained from my essay on monotheism in Isaiah.[5] Written for an audience broader than just Old Testament scholars, there is not the analysis of redaction-critical or other technical issues that would be appropriate in other contexts. Nevertheless, I try to engage recent developments in the analysis of the book's compositional history that give far more attention to the book's canonical form. This requires a reassessment of the monotheistic rhetoric in Deutero-Isaiah. I insist that the discussion of monotheism in the book of Isaiah take seriously the fact that Deutero-Isaiah did not remain isolated from the rest of the book (if it ever was in the first place), and that some account must be given for how the monotheism of chapters 40-48 relate to what preceded in Isaiah 1-39 and what follows in Isaiah 56-66. When this is given due attention, it becomes far more difficult to see what sort of 'breakthrough to monotheism' Deutero-Isaiah actually represents.

Though I might write a somewhat different book now, there is still much that I think is valuable. The hermeneutical issues that circle around the term 'monotheism', and the existential and relational significance of biblical affirmations about YHWH's oneness are more appreciated now than when I wrote. Others have contributed to that increased reflectiveness in Old Testament scholarship, but in its own modest way *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'* appears to have played a part. In addition, its

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[3] DRIVER, D.R. Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian: For the Church's One Bible (FAT II/46), Tübingen 2010.

[4] My work on the symbolic uses of food and eating arose from research for this book. See the discussion of food and memory in chapter 4 below.

[5] MACDONALD, N., 'Monotheism and Isaiah', in: WILLIAMSON, H.G.M., FIRTH, D.G. (eds.), Interpreting Isaiah: Issues and Approaches, Leicester 2009, 43–61.

insistence that we think more carefully about what 'monotheism' means, working inductively from the biblical text, has the potential to shift our perspective from determining when the 'breakthrough to monotheism' occurred to consideration of the diversity of biblical expressions of monotheism.

The first edition was dedicated to my wife, Claire, for the love and support she had shown. In the years since its publication she has continued to enrich my life – and since 2006 the lives of our children - in ways that are beyond recounting. When all other words fail, there is only 'thank you'.

תודה רבה יונתי תמתי

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Theologische Fakultät, Göttingen
St Martin's Day 2011

Contents

Introduction

YHWH's Oneness and "Monotheism"

> *Questions of how to understand the Bible in its own right, of how to understand the Bible in terms of contemporary categories, and of how to relate these perspectives are* the *questions of biblical interpretation.*
>
> Walter Moberly

If Moberly is correct and the salient questions of biblical interpretation are indeed the ones he outlines then this work attempts to contribute to this field. The concerns of this thesis are the meaning and significance of YHWH's[1] oneness in Deuteronomy, the contemporary category of "monotheism" and the relation between the two.

The following pages are an exercise in the interpretation of the received form of the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy, and what that text has to say about YHWH's oneness. It attempts to understand Deuteronomy, as far as possible, on its own terms without prior recourse to an understanding of the text's complex compositional history. This concern with the final form of the text places it in broad sympathy with what may be broadly described as "canonical" approaches.[2] That is, this is not a work on archaeology, the religious history of Israel, or even source, form or redaction criticism. However, at various points the works of scholars in those areas are used. This work, therefore, reflects a belief in methodological pluralism. This is not the result of a modern fad, but a theological principle: before the parousia we all see in part. As will become apparent to those acquainted with Old Testament scholarship, the argument that is offered in this work has implications for other areas though there will not be space to explore all of them. This should not be interpreted as a form of methodological imperialism. Rather it reflects the interrelatedness of those disciplines that constitute study of the Old Testament.

The epigraph is from MOBERLY, Bible, 76. Moberly's emphasis.

[1] When using the tetragrammaton I will leave it unvocalized. However, where other scholars are cited their own practice is retained.

[2] What "canonical" might mean has, of course, been answered in a number of different ways. My own use of the term here is a pragmatic one. I wish, with this scholarly shorthand, to identify myself with a diverse set of concerns that has been associated with the term "canonical" in recent scholarship.

The first chapter places the present work in context by considering the meaning of the term "monotheism" and the history of research upon "monotheism" in the Old Testament.[3] My approach to those common introductory questions has a number of distinctive characteristics. The usual approach to the discussion of Israel's "monothesim" is to discuss the possible definitions. Having chosen the "correct one" this is used as a yardstick for both Israel's religious history, and the work of other scholars. My suggestion is that the matter is not so simple, for the word "monotheism" frequently implies a particular understanding of religious and historical description. This has implications for understanding the history of research. The question is not merely what date certain scholars have offered for the origin of "monotheism" in ancient Israel, but what particular understanding of "monotheism" informed their historical reconstruction. The chapter begins with the first use of the word "monotheism" by Henry More in 1660, not because I believe that the first use of the word in some sense determines later usage, but because, as a number of theologians have suggested, this first use shares many features with later uses. After a brief sketch of developments after More, I turn to the discussion of Israelite "monotheism". My sketch of the history of research is representative, rather than exhaustive, and includes Kuenen, Wellhausen, Albright, Kaufmann, von Rad, Gnuse and Dietrich. I argue that most of these scholars share an understanding of "monotheism" that is only conceivable as a result of the Enlightenment. Such an understanding problematizes reading the biblical text. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the attempts by Sawyer, Clements and Sanders to solve the *problem* of biblical monotheism in the canonical text. An analysis of their work helps to situate my own approach to one book in the Bible which has a number of reflections on YHWH's oneness, Deuteronomy.

The following five chapters are concerned with examining the theme of YHWH's oneness in Deuteronomy. This examination is particularly focused on

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[3] As is well known there is considerable controversy about the appropriate name for what is both the Jewish canon, and the first part of the Christian canon. As a member of the Christian tradition I will use the term "Old Testament" in my discussions of these writings, or when interacting with other authors in the Christian tradition. When referring to the work of Jewish writers I will use the term "Jewish Bible", rather than "Miqra" or "Tanakh", the terms preferred by Jewish writers. This reflects the fact that I approach the Jewish canon, with its tradition of interpretation, as an outsider. (The increasingly popular term "Hebrew Bible" is problematic on a number of grounds, see further SEITZ, Testament.)

Even within the Christian tradition the term "Old Testament" is not unproblematic. However, it appears to me that whatever the problems with the term it is better than the alternatives that have been offered, and further, indicates something of the continuities and discontinuities between the two parts of the Christian canon, which are fundamental presuppositions for Christian interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. For discussions of the issue, see BROOK AND COLLINS (eds.), Hebrew.

the framework to the lawcode, especially chapters 1–11. There are two reasons for this focus. First, the theme of YHWH's oneness is prominent in those chapters, and second an examination of the lawcode would entail a considerably larger volume.

The rich interweaving of themes in Deuteronomy makes a starting point for a study of almost any theme in the book far from self-evident. Good grounds can be given for beginning an examination of the "oneness" of YHWH with the *Shema* (Deut. 6.4–9). The *Shema* also provides a useful organizing structure for the whole of my work and, therefore, provides the starting point for each of the exegetical chapters.

The second chapter is concerned with the confession of YHWH's oneness. It begins with the first verse of the *Shema*, the elusive "YHWH our God YHWH one". The different translations of the verse are considered with the implications for its meaning and significance. This verse is then considered in comparison with other related passages in Deuteronomy: the first commandment, Deut. 4.35, 39 and 32.39. These are examined primarily with the question in mind of whether they are concerned to deny the existence of other gods.

In the third chapter the meaning and significance of the command to love YHWH is analysed. Deuteronomy uses a number of terms in conjunction with love to describe the nature of an appropriate response to YHWH, and each of these is examined. The nature of Israel's love for YHWH is particularly expressed in the *hērem* command. Deuteronomy 7 is examined in order to understand the manner in which the command is to be executed.

The fourth chapter begins with a consideration of the prescriptions in the *Shema* for remembering YHWH and Israel's obligation to be devoted to him (6.6–9). The instructions in the *Shema* it is argued are to be understood in concrete ways that suggest remembering the oneness of YHWH is far more taxing than is usually allowed. The importance of remembering and the constant threat of forgetfulness are examined in Deuteronomy 8 and the incident with the Golden Calf in Deuteronomy 9. Finally, the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32) is examined as a vehicle of remembering. Whatever the original role of the Song it now functions as an integral part of the book of Deuteronomy, or more strongly, as a memorable summary of its central message. My examination of the Song in chapter four and five is, implicitly, a plea for the Song's reintegration into academic discourse about Deuteronomy.

The fifth chapter considers Israel as the elect people of YHWH. The nature of election is explored beginning with Deuteronomy 7 and Deuteronomy 9–10. The paradoxical logic of election described in those chapters finds dramatic expression in Deuteronomy 4 and the Song of Moses. In each passage the relationship between Israel's election and the confession of YHWH's uniqueness is explored.

The sixth chapter considers the relationship between the prohibition of idolatry and the oneness of YHWH. I argue that Deuteronomy 4 not only explains the relationship between the two, but also provides a rationale for the prohibition of idolatry. The chapter concludes with an examination of Deuteronomy's account of the incident with the Golden Calf.

In the conclusion the results from the exegetical examination of Deuteronomy are applied to modern understandings of "monotheism". It is suggested that many of the descriptions of Israelite monotheism reflect the intellectualization implicit in the term "monotheism" and are strongly informed by Enlightenment ideas of God. Recognition of this allows alternative understandings of God's oneness, such as those from traditional Judaism and Christianity, to help enrich our understanding of what it means to say that YHWH is "one". Themes such as love towards YHWH, the demanding nature of remembering YHWH, the problem of the human propensity to idolatry can again be seen as central to Deuteronomy's affirmation that YHWH is one.

Chapter 1

The Origin and Meaning of "Monotheism"

Among the questions relating to Israel's religious odyssey, that of the origin of monotheism is intellectually and theologically primary.
Baruch Halpern

To claim that any particular task in the area of the study of the Jewish Bible is "intellectually and theologically primary" is surely bold. Though if the flood of books and articles on the subject is anything to go by, Halpern's judgement is less audacious than it might first appear.[1] Tracing Israel's religious odyssey is to venture down a well-trodden path, but one that for the moment I will avoid. Instead, I wish to proceed along a quiet byway and trace the origin of the word "monotheism".

Some justification must be given before taking a diversion, however scenic it may promise to be. This can be found in some recent observations made by certain theologians on the subject of "monotheism". D. Tracy notes that, "'monotheism' is an Enlightenment invention that bears all the marks of Enlightenment rationalism",[2] and N. Lash sees the coinage of "monotheism" as part of a decisive, indeed fateful, shift in the conceptualization of religion, God and the world.[3] There are good grounds, therefore, for thinking that though our journey will take us far from Israel's religious odyssey, it may afford us some unexpected and significant vistas of familiar territory. That is, I hope that the origin of "monotheism" may be seen to have something important to say about "Israel's religious odyssey".

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "monotheism" was coined by the Cambridge Platonist, Henry More (1614–87). We will examine the first use of "monotheism" and set it in its literary context. More's work

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The epigraph is from HALPERN, "Pipes", 77.

[1] As an indication of the interest in this subject, it is necessary only to note the collections of essays that have appeared since 1980: KEEL (ed.), Monotheismus; LANG (ed.), Gott; HAAG (ed.), Gott; DIETRICH AND KLOPFENSTEIN (eds.), Ein Gott; SHANKS AND MEINHARDT (eds.), Aspects; BECKING *et al.*, One God?.

[2] TRACY, Paradox, 30.

[3] LASH, "Beginning".

will then be placed in the wider context of the thought and controversies of the Cambridge Platonists. It would clearly be desirable to trace the history of "monotheism" from More to the present day. Since this task would require a detailed examination of Western intellectual history and many volumes, I hope merely to make a *prima facie* case for my argument that the conceptualization of "monotheism" reflects its Enlightenment origins. To this end a summary of J. Assmann's work on the European perception of Egypt suffices in showing the way in which "monotheism" has been understood. An examination of the work of six Old Testament scholars will not only confirm the influence of this conceptualization in biblical scholarship, but also highlight some of the difficulties that are encountered when "monotheism" is used as a measure of Israel's religion. My approach to this problem will be a close reading of key texts on "oneness" in the final form of Deuteronomy. This task will be the concern of subsequent chapters, but in order to situate my approach I will conclude this chapter with three different approaches to the problem of "monotheism" in the biblical text.

I. The Origin of "Monotheism"

Unlike other related "-isms", such as "atheism", "deism" and "polytheism", "monotheism" appears to be the product of English soil, rather than a French or Latin import.[4] The first use of the word is found in the context of a discussion of "pantheism"[5] in Henry More's systematic presentation of the Christian

[4] "Atheism" appeared in English in 1587 and "atheist" in 1571. Both words had already entered the scholarly vocabulary in Sir John Cheke's Latin translation of Plutarch's *On Superstition* (BUCKLEY, Origins, 9). *Déisme* and *déiste* were coined in 1660 and 1563 respectively. *Polythéisme* has its origins with Philo's πολυθεία but was taken out of long hibernation by Jean Bodin in 1580 (SCHMIDT, Naissance, 77).

The closely related "theism" and "theist" were also coined by Cambridge men: "theism" by More's friend and fellow Cambridge Platonist, Ralph Cudworth; "theist" by E. Martin, the Dean of Ely. For a long period of time, "theism" could not only be used as a synonym of "deism", but also as a synonym of "monotheism" (see, for example, HUME, Religion). It could also bear the meaning it now bears, as the genus to which monotheism, polytheism, pantheism and so on belong. All three senses are found in Ralph Cudworth's *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678). He can speak of "*Pagan Theists* [who] were both *Polytheists* and *Monotheists*" (233), and of "meer theists, or natural religionists only" (3 of Preface), whilst his only definition of a theist, as someone who asserts "One Intellectual Principle Self-Existent from Eternity, the *Framer* and *Governor* of the Whole World", sounds like a definition of a monotheist (199).

The credit for the first use of "monotheist" is incorrectly attributed to More in 1680 by *OED*. In fact, it can be found before that in CUDWORTH, System, 233.

[5] "Pantheism" and "pantheist" were not coined until 1732 and 1705 respectively.

gospel, *The Grand Mystery of Godliness*, published in 1660.[6] More, who spent most of his time at Christ's College, Cambridge, was "an active member of the seventeenth century intellectual community".[7] In his early years he corresponded with Descartes and was one of the first to promote Cartesianism in England.[8] He was also the leading light of the "Cambridge Platonists".[9] This small, diverse group, mostly from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, shared many concerns and convictions, expressed primarily in their apologetic writings. They argued for the importance of reason against the puritans, "enthusiasts" and the empiricists; for the spiritual world against Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza and Cartesianism; for free will against the Calvinists and Hobbes; and for toleration in the fractured English society of the Civil War and Restoration.[10] Their debt to neo-Platonism is seen particularly in their psychological dualism and their belief in innate ideas, the immortality of the soul and the ascent of the soul to a higher realm.

In its introduction More presents the *Grand Mystery* as the culmination of his scholarly work.[11] The ground had been prepared for it by More's earlier works, *An Antidote Against Atheisme* (1653), in which he had proved the existence of God, and *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659), in which he had shown that the soul was immortal.[12] Building upon these earlier foundations More sought to show in the *Grand Mystery*,

> that there is no Article of the Christian Faith, nor any particular miracle happening to or done by our Saviour or to be done by him, mentioned in the Gospels or any where else in the New Testament, but I have given so solid and rational account thereof, that I am confident that no man that has the use of his Understanding

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[6] MORE, Grand Mystery.

[7] LICHTENSTEIN, Henry More, 11.

[8] More particularly admired the ability of Descartes' mechanistic ideas to describe the physical world. He firmly believed, however, in the limits of Descartes' materialism, particularly its failure to incorporate the spiritual world, which More believed had some substantial existence. He also believed, unlike Descartes, that animals had souls. It was Descartes' failure to incorporate More's suggestions that led to More's growing hostility to Cartesianism. For the relationship between More and Descartes, see HALL, Henry More, 146–167.

[9] There are two useful anthologies of the Platonists' work: CRAGG (ed.), Cambridge Platonists; PATRIDES (ed.), Cambridge Platonists.

[10] For an introduction to the Platonists, see PATRIDES, "Aiery Hills"; CASSIRER, Platonic Renaissance. For the location of the Platonists in their age, and the importance of this task, see CASSIRER, Platonic Renaissance, 42–85.

[11] This most prolific of the Platonists was, in fact, to write far more, despite his claim to be "not onely free from, but incapable of the common disease of this Scripturient Age" (MORE, Grand Mystery, 12).

[12] MORE, Grand Mystery, viii.

> shall be able ever to pretend any Reason against Christian Religion.[13]

More's work is arranged in four parts, in which he demonstrates the obscurity, the intelligibility, the truthfulness and the usefulness of the mystery of the gospel. In his section on the gospel's intelligibility More begins by summarizing the propositions that he had already shown to be reasonable in *An Antidote Against Atheisme* and *The Immortality of the Soul*. First among these is the existence of God, whom More had shown to be an "omnipotent, omniscient and infinitely Benign Spirit".[14] Other matters that can be perceived by a reasonable person are the existence of good and evil spirits, that good will eventually triumph and that the time of man will come to an end, in which men will be delivered and drawn up into the "divine life".[15]

The "divine life", the life regulated by faith, is not, however, the present reality. This is a consequence of the Fall. When Adam and Eve transgressed, humankind fell into the world of sensuality, the "animal life".[16] Humanity became dominated by animal instincts and the senses. This obsession with the material, to the detriment of the spiritual, expressed itself in idolatry. Prior to the coming of Christ, this was the lot of humanity.

The religions of the time before Christ, and outside of the Christian world, were divided by More into five categories. First, there are those who are polytheists. Since the worship of many gods is incompatible with his definition of God as the supreme Spirit, More regarded them as equivalent to atheists. Second, there are those who claim to worship the sun alone. As the worship of something material, it betrayed its affinities with the "animal life". Further, Descartes had convinced More that there was more than one Sun in the universe, and thus sun-worshippers were no more than polytheists. Third, there are "pantheists". It is at this point that the first known use of "monotheism" is found. More argues that,

> to make the *World* God, is to make no God at all; and therefore this kind of *Monotheisme* of the Heathen is as rank *Atheism* as their *Polytheisme* was proved to be before.[17]

The attribution of deity to the world clearly collided with More's definition of God as a Spirit. Fourth, there are those who worship an eternal, spiritual be-

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[13] MORE, Grand Mystery, ix.

[14] MORE, Grand Mystery, 34.

[15] These are almost identical to the notions Lord Herbert of Cherbury claimed to be reasonable and to command universal assent, see HUTTON, Lord Herbert, 20–23.

[16] HARRISON, "Religion", 44, argues that the "animal life" is an important concept for the Cambridge Platonists which is often ignored.

[17] MORE, Grand Mystery, 62.

ing. They worship the one God through various names and attributes, and by means of idols. In *The Divine Dialogues*, More makes Cuphophron argue similarly:

> This cannot be deny'd, Euistor, but that the barbarous Nations did religious Worship to innumerable Objects of the kind, but not as to the supreme Power of all, (which was the primary or ultimate Object of all their Adoration) but rather as to Images and Symbols of that Ultimate Object.[18]

This refined form of paganism with its worship of a spiritual God is much more acceptable, in More's eyes, than polytheism, sun worship or "pantheism". However, whatever its qualities it was not without its failings. It characterized very few pagans, was tainted with idolatry and was probably derived from the more enlightened Judaism. Finally, there are the Jews, whose sensual religious festivals show that they too were obsessed with the "animal life". Their religion had no idolatry however, and was given by God. It also had the types of Christ which were understood in a spiritual sense by Moses, although most of Israel did not understand their meaning.

"Monotheism" and the Materialism of Thomas Hobbes

The first impression made by More's work is the ambitious nature of his scholarship. He attempts to create a universal typology of religions. The limits of the scholarship of his day is clearly demonstrated, though, by an interaction with the beliefs of only the ancient Greeks and Egyptians. Despite this More is aware that there were many other religions in the world, which in his time were in the process of being discovered by Europe. Thus, he assures his reader that he could have selected examples of his types of religion from the recently accumulated evidence about religions in "Arabia, Persia, India, China, Tartary, Germany, Scythia, Guinea, Aethiopia...Virginia, Mexico, Peru and Brasilia".[19] As P. Harrison has shown in his *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* the first steps towards a science of religion occurred in the seventeenth century, rather than the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century though was to put the science of religion upon a much sounder footing for "while much comparison of 'religions' took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most of it was motivated not by any deep interest in the religious faith of other peoples, but by the desire to score points from theological adversaries".[20]

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[18] MORE, Divine Dialogues, 401.
[19] MORE, Grand Mystery, 73.
[20] HARRISON, "Religion", 146.

The use of other religions as a polemical foil is particularly evident in More's typology. More's classification of non-Christian religion can be reduced to just two categories. First, there are two deficient forms of "monotheism", Judaism and enlightened paganism. This qualified acceptance provided More with a theodicy against those who regarded the divine providence, which had restricted knowledge of the Christian faith to only a small part of the human race, as arbitrary and unjust. Second, there are those who are atheists. More's argument that both polytheism and pantheism are variant forms of atheism is both interesting and unexpected. Two reasons explain this rather curious movement. First, More had already shown the fallacy of atheism in his *An Antidote Against Atheisme*. Reducing polytheism and pantheism to atheism was an effective strategy for speedy dismissal. Secondly, as More's curt disposal of them shows, his real opponent was neither polytheism nor pantheism, but atheism.

Amongst More and his contemporaries, "there was a widespread conviction that the atheists were at the gates",[21] and that this was the greatest danger facing the Church.[22] In England, More and the other Cambridge Platonists were the chief apologists for the Christian religion and against atheism. What the Platonists and their contemporaries meant by "atheism" was the doctrine of materialism. Thus, More's friend and fellow Platonist, Ralph Cudworth, wrote that those,

> who derive all things from *Senseless Matter*, as the First Original, and deny that there is any *Conscious Understanding* Being *Self-existent* or *Unmade*, are those that are properly called *Atheists*.[23]

In contrast the Platonists believed in the existence of a spiritual world alongside the physical. More believed in the existence of God, angels, demons, ghosts, other spiritual beings and the souls of human beings. In his world even animals had souls. Where the "atheists" saw a purely material universe, More saw a universe overflowing with souls.[24]

The danger of materialism is clearly spelled out by More. In the *Grand Mystery* he writes that,

> the first and most fundamental mistake of *lapsed Mankind* [is] that they make *Body* or *Matter* the only true *Jehovah*, the only true Es-

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[21] BUCKLEY, Origins, 68.

[22] PATRIDES, "Aiery Hills", 25.

[23] CUDWORTH, System, 195.

[24] Perhaps unsurprisingly, More was greatly interested in the supernatural. Demonstrating the existence of evil spirits, angels or ghosts would, in More's eyes, have provided evidence for a spiritual world, and thus God. More became increasingly interested in these matters in his latter years, see HALL, Henry More, 128–145.

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