

I will be dealing with an unusually important question in this week's mailbag: is it right to consider Judaism and Christianity monotheistic?

QUESTION:

Aren't Judaism and Christianity really henotheistic rather than monotheistic? For example, even in the 10 Commandments it merely says YHWH is the only god to be worshiped, not that He is the only god. And in Christianity there is the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Satan, angels and demons, and in some sects, Mary the queen of heaven. And I would think all the pagans coming into the church would bring along their polytheistic thinking - perhaps that is part of the reason Jesus was elevated to the status of God.

RESPONSE:

This is a very good question, and as you might imagine, a lot of it comes down to how one defines one's terms. One set of definitions involves the actual terms themselves. Normally "Monotheism" is understood to be the belief that there is only one God, no other; "Henotheism" is the belief that there are other gods, but only one of them is to be worshiped. The other set of definitions is more a matter of categories: what constitutes a "god"? Are all supernatural and superhuman beings who dwell in heaven to be considered gods? For example, are archangels a kind of god? Some people (ancient and modern) would say yes, others would say no.

And so, is it better to call Judaism and Christianity monotheistic or henotheistic?

My view is ...

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