

MONOTHEISM AND THE MEANING OF GOD “THE ONE”: THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS FROM THE SHEMA TO CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Abstract

This study explores the theological significance of the concept of “oneness” in the monotheistic tradition, with a specific focus on the *Shema*, the central declaration of faith in Judaism: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Dt 6:4). By examining the linguistic, historical, and spiritual dimensions of the divine name and its association with unity, this study seeks to elucidate how the proclamation of God’s oneness shapes the monotheistic worldview, informing both doctrinal formulations and communal identity. The analysis delves into how “oneness” serves as a theological anchor, emphasizing the indivisibility and sovereignty of God while fostering a collective identity centered on worship and ethical living.



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Introduction

The number *one* occupies a special place in multiple fields of thought, from theology to mathematics, philosophy, and culture. One is the primordial symbol of unity, the beginning and the indivisible essence, being perceived as the expression of perfection and the foundation of all existence. It represents the starting point in mathematics, symbolizing unity and coherence. It begins with any numerical system around which everything else is organized. In philosophy, one reflects the idea of unity as a universal principle, signifying harmony and wholeness. Still, it transcends the simple numerical dimension, symbolizing unity, indivisibility, and the beginning,

bridging knowledge, faith, and cosmic order. Thus, in the theological message, number one is associated with the absolute uniqueness of God – “The One” – the source and foundation of all created things. God is not only the First, but also the Only One, in the ultimate sense of divine existence, and this uniqueness is a testimony to the fact that everything that exists finds its root in Him.

The revealed text of Scripture categorically proclaims the uniqueness of God. From the first statement of the Bible: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1), God presents himself as the sole Creator of all things. The act of creation is concentrated in *yom echad* (“one day”), an expression that highlights not only the unity but also the identity of creation with the Creator. The exact dimension of unity is reflected in man, the crown of divine creation. Adam is created with a soul and a body, each of which is indivisible and inseparable. Likewise, the unity between man and woman is consecrated in Genesis 2:24 as a reflection of divine unity in the diversity of human relationships: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

The theology of the Old Testament states the character of Israel as a “chosen people”, presenting it as the unique witness of God among the nations. The understanding of this choice is exceptionally expressed in Exodus 19:5 as obedience and fulfillment of the Law: “If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.” The Promised Land, where “milk and honey flow,” is where God’s people must live in obedience to the Torah, reflecting on a social level the harmony and fullness of life in communion with God.

The uniqueness of the place of worship in biblical times is another expression of divine exclusivity. The Tabernacle of Meeting, described in Exodus 25-27, was built according to divine instructions and was the visible form of God’s dwelling among men. Later, the Temple built by Solomon (1Kgs 8:10-11) symbolizes the unique place where the people could meet with God. This uniqueness combines the theological dimension of the sacred place with a call to unity in worship of all peoples, as Isaiah states: “Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people” (Is 56:7). From a liturgical point of view, the sacred text warns of the need for single worship of God. Centralized around a single Holy Tabernacle, a single Temple, this cultic uniqueness means the exclusivity

of worship to God and excludes any form of division or syncretism, polytheism, or idolatry. This cultic model leads to the affirmation of the eschatological importance of Mount Zion, prefigured in Isaiah 2:2-4 as the spiritual centre of the world. Also, the hierarchical structure of the priests and Levites established by divine command (Nm 3:5-10) had as its objective not only the cultic worship in the holy place but also the preservation of holiness in the community of God's people. A particular manifestation of uniqueness is the commandment to dedicate the firstborn to God, fulfilled in recognition of divine sovereignty over all aspects of life: "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine" (Is 13:2).

In theological discourse, the number one affirms the plenitude and infinity of God. God is One and All, complete, indivisible, and represents the source of every other number since all others are composed of a series of unities. This transcendent uniqueness of God is without equal: "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (Is 45:5). The uniqueness of God is the foundation of the life of faith, calling for exclusive reverence and a relationship of obedience and love towards the Creator of all.

Using the fundamental literature of the theme [1], commentaries on the texts of the Holy Scripture (see Dohmen 2004; Otto 2012; Veijola 2004), specialized studies (see Oeming, Schmitt 2003; Knierim 1965; Smith 1990; Schmidt 1969) and treatises on the Theology of the Old Testament (Kaiser 2003; Westermann 1985; Brueggemann 1997; von Rad 1962), we propose in this study to highlight the meaning of the divine name "One" and the attribute of divine unity, to understand how they reflect the unique nature of monotheism. How the name of God is associated with absolute unity leads us to understand how this aspect influences collective identity and the ethical principles promoted by monotheism, such as justice, love of neighbor, and individual responsibility, but also strengthens the link between faith and identity.

The God-Man Relationship in the Light of the Oneness of Yahweh

The relationship between the One God and man, His unique creation, "in His image," is affirmed in Old Testament Scripture. Gradually, this God-man relationship deteriorated, and man, basing it on selfish and egotistical interests, inverted it. The new relationship – man-God – led quickly to polytheism, as cultural history has recorded among pagan peoples.

Although part of the same Semitic religious framework, the God of Israel is entirely different from the other gods of the peoples of the Ancient Near East. The Unity and Uniqueness of Yahweh are expressed in the Old Testament Scripture in a clear, specific way, compared to the same attributes granted to pagan divinities by the scriptures of other peoples. The immutable identity of God is revealed positively through His manifestations and confessions but also negatively through the denial of all other deities. Only Yahweh is One and Only, the deities are non-existent (Dt 32:39; Jr 10:10-12), and they are only human creations of wood and stone (Is 37:19; 44:13-20).

“There is no one like the Lord” (יְהוָה כִּמּוֹדֵי אֲחֵרִים), Yahweh often announces through His prophets: Ex 8:10; Dt 33:26; 1Kgs 2:2; 2Kgs 7:22; Jr 10:6-7,10.

The Unity and Uniqueness of God are not a philosophical conclusion, the result of a strictly rational approach, but are, directly, His self-revelation. Monotheism is founded on this direct revelation, so polytheism is rejected. “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me” is the confession recorded in Isaiah 46:9. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is not “a god” in the sense of belonging to a “group of gods”. He is “One God”, He is *sui generis*. The divine aseity is inextricably linked to His uniqueness, to the fact that God encompasses in Himself the “totality of divinity” as a unity.

The affirmations of the Unity and Uniqueness of God are formulated, as simply is His identity, with no ambiguity: “I am God” (אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהִים) (Is 46:9). The rhetorical question of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah: “Who is like Me (Yahweh)?” (מִי כִּמּוֹנִי) (Jr 49:19; 50:44; Is 44:7), is of a simplicity that easily stands out, without being helped by other parts of speech: nouns, adjectives, adverbs. The reason is apparent: Yahweh-God does not need to justify Himself in any way. He is Unique. The reality of God does not need to be argued “by anyone”, it is not human experience that justifies it, God is not a debatable working hypothesis. He is “He who is” (Ex 3:14), he is the foundation of any attempt to discover the mysteries of creation, he is the *sine qua non* of theology. Without God, the one who claims to do theology ends up in polylogy, talking without a message. The text of Scripture, as Good News – the Gospel of man’s salvation – has a katabasic role. Through it, God descends to man and reveals Himself. Theophany as confession is a special way of revealing God in the Old Testament, which anticipates, then only veiled, the manifestation of “the form of God” (Phil 2:6), “in the fullness of time”, the coming of Christ the Lord – the fulfillment of the most awaited messianic promise.

Shema Israel: One God, a Living Faith

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is not a simple exhortation but a command in the fullness of the word. It states (Hebrew text and personal translation after *BHS* [2]):

4 שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:
5 וְאַהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ:
6 וְהָיוּ תְּדַבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-לִבְבְּךָ:
7 וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:
8 וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטַטְפַּת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ:
9 וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ: ם

“4. Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord.

5. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

6. And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart.

7. Fix them (in the mind) of your sons and talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you get up.

8. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

9. You shall write them upon the doorposts of your house, and upon your gates.”

The message, received in critical literature as *Shema Israel* “Hear, O Israel!,” urges not only listening and understanding, but also fulfillment. Therefore, we are not dealing with a piece of purely theoretical knowledge, but with one that “through faith, imposes a plenary commitment to the meaning of what is believed and confessed” (Semen 2007, 265).

After the call to the people to listen, two main sentences follow:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד with the following possible translations:

1. Yahweh, our God, Yahweh is the only one.
2. Yahweh, our God, is one Yahweh.
3. Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one.
4. Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is the only one.

The proper name of God – יְהוָה – is the subject of both sentences and, consequently, remains the subject in all translation variants. In variants 1 and 2,

אלהינו would be an apposition of this name, and אֶחָד would be a predicative noun. In variants 3 and 4 we would have two coordinated main sentences, with two predicative nouns: אֶחָד and אֱלֹהֵינוּ. From a grammatical point of view, the last translation seems more possible.

The name אֱלֹהִים appears very often in the Hebrew text: over two hundred times in Genesis and 2,570 times in the Old Testament (Henry 1994, 236). Although the plural אֱלֹהִים is used in the Old Testament Scripture as a singular, not from a desire to generalize the divine, nor from any henotheistic tendency, but as a confession of His unity and uniqueness. The Book of Jubilees, an apocryphal work from the second century BC, deletes any reference to the plural when we encounter אֱלֹהִים, in the Hebrew text, imposing a rigid monotheism. Likewise, any plural dimension of the Godhead is canceled in the targums or in the Aramaic translation, where the plural pronoun referring to God is not used, “betraying a tendency to reconstruct these passages in the interests of a pure monotheism” (Henry 2000, 222).

The difficulties of translation and interpretation appear mainly in the translation of אֶחָד. It appears as an adjective about 960 times (Koehler 1953, 27). The multitude of references also relates to a diversity of meanings. Thus, אֶחָד can be translated by:

- “one” – as a cardinal numeral, the most common use and understanding of the word (attested over 600 times in the Hebrew Scriptures) (Gn 1:9; 2:21; 3:22; 42:11 etc.);
- “first”, as an ordinal numeral (Gn 1:5; 2:11; 8:5 etc.);
- “the same” or “one and the same” (Gn 11:6; 40:5; 41:25 etc.);
- expressing singularity (Ex 12:46; 37:22; Nm 13:23; 1Kgs 8:56; Is 51:2; Zech 3:9 etc.);
- expressing indivisible unity (Gn 2:24, Ex 24:3; Zeph 3:9; 2Chr 30:12 etc.);
- expressing uniqueness (2Sam 7:23; Zech 14:7.9; Song 6:9 etc.).

Most interpreters of this verse oscillate between translating אֶחָד as “one” or “unique”/“the only one”. But beyond the efforts of philologists to agree on the translation of אֶחָד, it is evident that the Deuteronomist wants to convey a precise message, that of the unity and uniqueness of Yahweh. An ultimate decision from a grammatical point of view is difficult to make, since the numeral אֶחָד can be both “one” and “unique,” to the exclusion of alternatives (see Gn 11:1.6). But, making a synthetic analysis of the text,

putting it in dialogue with the other revealed texts (2Kgs 22-23; 2Chr 34-35), as well as placing it concretely in the life of the people, we ask: Is it not about the proclamation of Yahweh – The One, the desideratum of the centralization of the cult in the context of the Josianic reform, a public confession, full of authority, of the “only” Yahweh among the multitude of gods? Let us not overlook that the discovery of the Law, of the text of Deuteronomy, was made after “he had purged the land, and the house (the temple of God)” (2Chr 34:8). The answer can only be clarified from the religious context. Is it possible that the different forms of the appearance of the name Yahweh in the numerous places of worship were a major problem for the centralization of the cult? If so, then we believe that the desire was to reach from this multitude of forms to a single one. However, in the texts about the centralization of the cult, there is no indication of such a reform of the divine name.

Even the first commandment of the Decalogue, “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” does not deny the existence of “other gods,” but forbids cultic proximity to them (Ex 20:2-5; Dt 5:6-7). Yahweh is the only true God, he is “our God” אֱלֹהֵינוּ. Therefore, there is a close connection between the Shema Israel (Dt 6) and the first commandment of the Decalogue (Dt 5).

The commandment to love in v. 5 is possibly the result of a later redaction, since the verb *bha* appears only in the margins of the Deuteronomic paragraphs (5:10; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1,13,22; 30,6,16,20) or in later texts, such as 13:4 and 19:9. The commandment to love Yahweh (see also Mk 12:29-32) does not imply sentimental love, but, in the legal sense of the relationship between master and disciple in the ancient Oriental world, means a special respect given to the one in authority.

“These words which I command you today” in v. 6 refers to those expressed in v. 4. Therefore, we are dealing with a practical recommendation: the commandment should be worn as an amulet on the chest [3], for a constant reminder, as we see in Exodus 28:29-30: “And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually. And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment

the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually." and Song of Songs 8:6: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm".

A spiritualization of the idea appears only in *Dt* 11:18, where the hagiographer asks that these words be placed not only in the heart, but also in the soul: "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes". This spiritualization must be understood concerning the commandment to love God in v. 5.

Verse 7 refers to the transmission of the message. The verb שָׁנַן [4] is usually used in practical situations of sharpening something, for example sharpening a sword (*Dt* 32:41) or arrows (*Is* 5:28; *Ps* 45:6; 120:4; *Prov* 25:18) and, along the same lines, in metaphorical form, "sharpening the tongue" of the wicked, to attack the righteous (*Ps* 64:4; 140:4). The idea is that the *Shema* be engrafted [5] on the descendants, as emphasized in *Dt* 6:20-25. The times and spaces mentioned: when you are at home, when you are on the road, when you go to bed, when you get up, characterize, overall, the entire life of man: at home and outside (private and public space), evening and morning.

Verses 8 and 9 resume the exhortation from v. 6, that the confession of faith in the One God should not only be affirmed in words and physically worn on the chest but should become a visible work throughout life through deeds of virtue. Visible signs should not have a metaphorical role (as in *Ex* 13:9; *Prov* 3:3; 6:21; 7:3) but should be, concretely, an obstacle to forgetting [6].

The three texts of the Shema, Exodus 13:1-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and 11:13-21, are preserved in *tefillin* and *mezuzot* [7]. The "doorposts" and "gates" are signs of public openness. This practice has proven that the confession of faith is short enough to be written anywhere and uttered as often as possible.

The Echo of Divine Unity in Ancient Scripture and in Jewish Tradition

Shema Israel, *Dt* 6:4-9, is not any text. It belongs to the basic redaction of Deuteronomy and the book that concludes the Torah and, therefore, must be understood in this theological context. Therefore, the divine command to honor the One and Only God is not only enunciated in *Shema Israel*, but constitutes the centre of gravity of Deuteronomistic theology. It emphasizes the reality that God is One and

Only: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Dt 6:4). The affirmation is a divine sentence, sealed with the holy name of Yahweh, which no human authority can surpass.

When אֶחָד modifies a plural noun into a singular form, then it is compound. In Dt 6, 4, אֶחָד modifies the relationship between אֱלֹהֵינוּ (God, plural) and יְהוָה (God, singular), which shows that אֶחָד, one, has an absolute meaning, is the only Almighty One. Yahweh is the God of Israel, he is “the God of our fathers” (Ex 3:13). He is greater than all the gods of other peoples; He is Lord of lords, אֵל אֱלֹהִים (Ps 50:1). The other gods do not exist, they are only the work of man’s hands: מְעִשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם (Ps 135:15). Job recognizes God as the Only Creator: “Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?” (Job 31:15). In the context of the same theology of divine paternity over creation, אֶחָד appears as an attribute of אֵל in Mal 2:10: “Is there not one father (אָב אֶחָד) for us all? Did not one God (אֵל אֶחָד) create us?”

The *Shema* texts biblically substantiate the monotheistic essence of Judaism. The Talmudic tract *Berachot* comments in detail on the *Shema*, emphasizing the Hebrew *echad* as an attribute of God’s Being: “All who prolong the word *echad* will have their days and years prolonged” (Berakhot 13b). Rationalist medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Maimonides, describe biblical monotheism in the sense that there is only one God, whose essence is unique, simple, and an infinite unity. Jewish mysticism gives a much deeper explanation, distinguishing between God’s essence and His emanation. God is present everywhere, including in the most mundane aspects of life. This mystical principle, based on the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, reflects the belief that every human action can become holy when it is done in the name of God. In his book, Norman Lamm refers to the Kabbalistic concept of *tzimtzum*, the idea that God partially “withdrew” to allow creation to exist. Thus, Isaac Luria speaks of God’s “withdrawal,” which refers only to *or ein sof* “endless light” and not to the *ein sof* “the Endless One,” the divine essence. God’s infinity is revealed complementary in both, in the deity (infinite light) and creation (finite light). This doctrine is reinterpreted in Hasidism to explain divine omnipresence: although God appears hidden, He remains essentially present in all creation (Lamm 1999, 7) [8].

“Hear, O Israel”: The Shema Reflected in New Testament Theology

The *Shema* is one of the many Old Testament texts quoted in the Gospel of Mark, as in 12:28-30: “And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”

Luke and Matthew quote Deuteronomy 6:5 according to the LXX, where it is written: καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου. Matthew 22:37 is close to the *Shema* text: Ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου. But in Lk 10:27, numerous differences are visible: Ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης [τῆς] καρδίας σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ἰσχυί σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου, καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. Significant is the use in the Septuagint of the preposition ἐξ, “from,” while in the New Testament writings ἐν, “in” is preferred (Melniciuc-Puica 2005, 107). The *Shema* biblical texts converge towards the use of the verb ἀγαπήσεις, through the *gezerah shawah* technique (the union of two texts based on a keyword) (Melniciuc-Puica 2005, 107).

In Matthew 22:34-46, Jesus refers for the first part of the answer, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” to Dt 6:5, and for the second part to Lv 19:18: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”. But the discussion between Him and the Pharisees continues: “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies thy footstool?” (quoting Ps 110:1). If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions”. Christ means that He is the Lord and the son of David, being the Son of God.

In addition, the Holy Apostle Paul elaborates the *Shema* in 1Cor 8:6 with reference to the risen Christ: “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him”.

The prohibition of the representation of God in the Old Testament is explained by the fact that God revealed Himself through His Word, His manifestation was made through the Word. This is His uniqueness: the rejection of material representations of God, in favour of the audible revelation of His name. The specific work of God the Father becomes known through the revelation of the Son of God Incarnate, co-existent with the Father, from eternity in the unity of existence: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:1-5).

Many biblical hymns begin with the praise of God (1Chr 29:10; Dan 2:20; Lk 1:68; Eph 1:3; 1Pt. 1:3) or end with it (1Chr 16:36; Ps 41:14; 72:18; 89:53; 106:48). We encounter the same doxological language in the New Testament regarding Christ (2Pt 3:18; Rm 11:36), and in Rev 5:12 God (the Father) glorifies Christ the Lamb. The text Rm 9:5 is the most apparent scriptural confession of the divinity of Christ, together with the texts Jn 20:28, Tit 2:13, Rm 9:5, and Jn1:1: "Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever." Studying the sacred text, it is evident that Rm 9:5 follows a specific doxological tradition, well known to contemporaries. Rm 1:25 glorifies God the Creator, "Who is blessed forever, Amen!" In 2Cor 11:31 we encounter the expression: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore". The fact that the pastoral epistles abound in such solemn doxological expressions, sometimes addressed to "God", sometimes to "Christ", leads us to believe that such a doxological formula was transferred from the Jewish cult of God-Yahweh to the Son of God, in the early Church, under the Apostles' conviction that "God has raised this Jesus" (Acts 2:32) and that "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:9). The only difference is topical: in the Old Testament, the doxology is "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel" (1Kgs 8:15, 56 and then Eph 1:3; 2Co 1:3).

Revealed Monotheism: The First Commandments through the Lens of Patristic Thought

The first commandment, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me!" (Ex 20:2-3), is constantly reaffirmed in the Pentateuch, especially in legal texts such as Ex 6:6; 13:3; 15:13.16.26; 29:46; Lv 11:45; 26:1; 26:13.

Its reception in the Church's catechetical and homiletic discourse is more than obvious, most often bringing to the fore the words of the Savior from the Sermon on the Mount: "You cannot serve God and Mammon" and "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt 6:24.33). For Philo of Alexandria, this first commandment is the chief commandment of the entire Old Testament. Therefore, "let us establish in the depths of our being this initial commandment, as the holiest of all commandments, let us think that there is only one true God and let us honour Him alone" (*The Decalogue* XIV, 65, 69). St Gregory Palamas emphasizes that this commandment refers to the dogma of the Unity of the Godhead, which we must understand as the Trinity of Hypostases: "The Lord your God is One Lord, known in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit: in the Father- unbegotten, in the Son- begotten, without beginning, without time and without passion, the Word made flesh, Who by His own body anointed what He took from us, hence the name Christ – that is, the Anointed One; and in the Holy Spirit – the Same One Who proceeds from the Father, not by birth, but by procession. Only and only This God is true – The One in the Trinity of hypostases, One Lord being also undivided: by being, will, glory, power and work and by all that by which we know the Godhead. You will love Him alone and worship Him alone with all your mind, with all your heart, and with all your strength, and His words and His statutes will be in your heart, so that you may do them" [9].

Origen invites us to reread the first commandment in a contemporary context: "These words are not addressed only to those who once came out of Egypt; they are also addressed to you, the one who hears them now" (Origen 1982, 80). Making the transition from faith (dogma) to action, the great church writer urges us to leave the Egypt of our existence, the life enslaved by passions, to live free from sin, keeping the commandments of the Lord.

The second commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex 20:4-5), is closely linked to the first, stopping idolatry, which can mean egotism through the service of passions. That is why the Savior urges us not to attach our souls to worldly things but to lay up treasures in heaven (Mt 6:19-21).

Origen and Philo take the commandment's text literally and make a brief list of possible idols made of silver, gold, wood, or stone. They insist that those who glorify creation instead of the Creator, "filling the world with idols," invoke demons (Origen 1982, 84-85; Philo of Alexandria, *The Decalogue* XIV, 66).

Moving on from the temptation of worshipping matter, Saint Gregory Palamas urges us to avoid understanding the spiritual world as divine in itself and that the glorification is only of the One God: "You shall not make any likeness of anything that is in heaven above and anything that is in the earth below and in the water to worship them and honour them as God. All are the creation of the One God, the One at the end of the ages Who took flesh from the virgin womb, Who was seen on earth, living among men and suffering for their salvation, dying and rising again, Who ascended into heaven with the body and sits at the right hand of the Majesty and with whose body He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Therefore, you will make an icon of Him Who, for us became human out of love for Him, and through it you will remember Him, and through it (the icon), you will worship Him, raising your mind to the worship of that Body of the Saviour Who sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven" (Sf. Grigorie Palama 2003, 262-4).

Conclusions

"In the beginning Elohim..." (Gn 1:1) are the first words of the Hebrew Scriptures. Saint John begins his Gospel with the same message: "In the beginning the Word..." (Jn 1:1). The two Testaments testify to the same absolute reality: God appears at the beginning of our creation and for our salvation. The dogma that God is One is fundamental to both Testaments. Holy Scripture is monotheistic from the first words to the last. If the Old Testament emphasizes the idea of God One, Christianity does not add anything new. "For I am the Lord, I change not" is the divine message through Malachi 3:6. The New Testament is not "less monotheistic" than the Old, but, on the contrary, emphasizes the confession of One God. The confession of God One is the only revelation, and this testimony denies any form of polytheism. The one God reveals Himself in Scripture, first to the forefathers, then to the patriarchs, then to the prophets, then to the entire Church throughout the ages.

Christianity proclaims the Trinity of Divine Persons in unity, but the Church has never glorified three gods. God is triune. "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1Jn 5:7). Speaking

of the specificity of the Israelite religion, W.F. Albright concludes: "This is the conception of the entire Old Testament: only one God, Who reigns over all that exists. (...) He is the unique God, Who is above all, a God of morality and human relations, a God of all nations, a God over all nature. There is only one God, Who has supreme control over destiny, a God Who creates man with free will" (Albright 1964, 99).

In the Old Testament liturgical experience, God's uniqueness had to be confessed through prayer amid the chosen people (Ex 15:11; 2Chr 14:11; 20:6; Ps 35:10; 71:19; 89:9; 113:5; Mi 7:18). In the Church, confessions of faith played a fundamental apologetic role, delimiting what was false from what was true.

Christ is the Son of God. He does not replace God, because He is God of essence with the Father and the Spirit. The Word became flesh (Jn 1:14), but He "was God" (Jn 1:1), He did not become God through the Incarnation. Biblical revelation does not use only the names Yahweh and Elohim for God, but reveals to us His hypostases of חֵכֶמָה / σοφία / Wisdom, דְּבַר / λόγος / Word and רִיחַ / πνεῦμα / Spirit. Divine revelation – the testimony of the Church is unequivocal: personal distinctions in God do not threaten the unity of the divine essence.

Just as in the *Shema Israel*, we encounter the testimony of God Elohim, which determines a verb in singular form, so in the mandate entrusted to the Church through the Apostles to baptize, we find the Trinity: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19-20). The "name" of God-Elohim must be known, preserved, and confessed in the Church of Glory as "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," of the "consubstantial and indivisible Trinity." This is the Good News, the Gospel of the New Testament, before which the holy servant of God no longer cries out imperatively *Shema!* "Listen!," but "Wisdom! Arise! Let us hear the Holy Gospel! Peace be with all!"

Notes

[1] Where necessary, to highlight the theological significance of the Hebrew text, I translated from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart, 1997.

[2] Here, my translation in Romanian: "Ascultă Israel! Domnul, Dumnezeu nostru, este singurul Domn. 5. Să iubești pe Domnul, Dumnezeu tău, cu toată inima ta, cu tot sufletul tău și cu toată puterea ta. 6. Și să fie cuvintele acestea, pe care Eu le poruncesc ție astăzi, în inima ta. 7. Să le fixezi (în mintea) fiilor tăi și să vorbești despre ele atunci când șezi în casa ta și când mergi pe drum, când te culci și când te scoli. 8. Să le legi ca semn

la mâna ta și să fie ca o bandă între ochii tăi. 9. Să le scrii pe ușorii casei tale și pe porțile tale”.

[3] The imperative expression “write them on the tablet of your heart” (כְּתֹבֵם עַל־לִבְךָ לְבָבָךְ) (Prov 3:3; 7:3; Jer 31:33; Dt 6:6) can also have a concrete meaning, namely, it can be understood as an allusion to the tablets for schoolchildren’s exercises, which were hung around their necks.

[4] This verb is used mainly in the Qal, Piel and Hitpoel forms, but we are particularly interested only in the Piel form, where it has an intensive meaning: to give education from an early age, with perseverance and repeatedly.

[5] In this text, the meaning of the verb is “to stimulate,” “to sharpen,” “to impress,” “to inculcate.” The Jerusalem Bible translates it as “to repeat.” (Jamieson, Fausset and 1863, 117).

[6] Also, in Exodus 13:16, reference is made to the deliverance from Egypt: “And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt”. This quotation from Dt 6:8 suggests that the “sacrifice” would be left tied to the hands or between the eyes. Such an act has no physical meaning, and if it were to be understood metaphorically, it is difficult to understand the author’s intention.

[7] This tradition may be based on foreign ideas: it is known that Egyptian officials wore a band on their wrist, on which the name of the master or pharaoh was inscribed.

[8] Norman Lamm highlights that Hasidism, as a religious movement, emphasizes man’s direct approach to God. This approach is not just an intellectual or dogmatic experience but one lived and felt through prayer, love, and devotion.

[9] In Romanian translation: “Domnul Dumnezeuul tău Unul Domn este, cunoscut în Tatăl și în Fiul și în Duhul Sfânt: în Tatăl-nenăscut, în Fiul-născut, fără de început, fără de timp și fără patimă, Cuvântul cel întrupat, Care prin însuși trupul Lui a uns ceea ce a luat de la noi, de unde și numele de Hristos – adică Cel Uns; și în Duhul Sfânt – Același Care de la Tatăl purcede, nu prin naștere, ci prin purcedere. Numai și numai Acest Dumnezeu este adevărat – Cel în Treimea ipostasurilor, Unul Domn fiind și némpărțit: prin ființă, voință, slavă, putere și lucrare și prin toate cele prin care cunoaștem dumnezeirea. Pe Acesta singur îl vei iubi și Acestuia Unuia I te vei închina din tot cugetul tău, din toată inima ta și cu toată puterea ta, și vor fi cuvintele Lui și așezămintele Lui întru inima ta, pentru ca să le faci pe ele.” (Sf. Grigorie Palama 2003, 263).

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