In recent years a number of scholars have given attention to the question of ‘monotheism’ in first-century Jewish religion, especially (but not exclusively) scholars interested in the emergence of ‘high Christology’ and the reverence given to Jesus as divine in early Christian groups. In my book, One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism, I urged that first-century Jewish religious commitment to the uniqueness of God is the crucial context in which to approach early Christian devotion to Christ.¹ I emphasized two characteristics of ancient Jewish religiousness: (1) a remarkable ability to combine a genuine concern for God’s uniqueness together with an interest in other figures of transcendent attributes described in the most exalted terms, ‘principal agent’ figures likened to God in some cases; and (2) an exhibition of monotheistic scruples particularly and

most distinctively in public cultic/liturgical behaviour. The readiness of ancient Jews to include exalted figures, especially 'principal agent' figures into their conceptual schemes of God's sovereignty provides us with useful (though limited) analogies and valuable background for the early Christian conceptual accommodation of the risen/exalted Jesus as God's designated plenipotentiary. On the other hand, ancient Jewish reluctance to offer public, corporate worship to principal agent figures makes the early Christian pattern of 'binitarian' worship genuinely innovative and striking.

A number of other scholars as well recently have explicitly made monotheism a crucial contextual feature of the Jewish religious matrix of earliest Christian belief and worship, including Harvey, Dunn, Casey, Bauckham and Wright. There are interesting disagreements among us about the development of devotion to Christ, but we all attribute to Graeco-Roman Jewish religion a monotheistic stance and we all find it a significant aspect of the historical context of earliest Christianity. Moreover, we all agree that the worship of the glorified Jesus as divine marks a major and singular development in the context of Jewish monotheism.


4. I use the word 'worship' here to designate open, formal, public and intentional actions of invocation, adoration, appeal, praise and communion that characterize the corporate cultic gatherings of early Christian groups and were clearly patterned after the sort of cultic devotional actions otherwise reserved for God in scrupulous Jewish monotheistic circles.
On the other hand, a few other scholars have argued that Graeco-Roman Jewish religion was not really monotheistic but was instead very much ready to acknowledge and reverence more than one divine being. Thus, these scholars contend, the early Christian cultic reverence of Christ is to be seen as merely a particular manifestation of what they allege to have been a wider Jewish ditheistic tendency.

That informed scholars can disagree whether Graeco-Roman Jewish religion was in fact monotheistic indicates the need for further improvement in our approach to the question. In this essay, I wish to strengthen and elaborate my own earlier argument that first-century Jewish religion characteristically exhibited a strongly monotheistic scruple, and I also offer some refinements in method and clarifications of key matters that I hope can assist us all in characterizing more accurately the religious setting of the origins of Christ-devotion. I begin with these methodological matters, after which I offer an analysis of the specific nature of first-century Jewish monotheism.

**Methodological Matters**

The first methodological point to emphasize is the importance of proceeding inductively in forming and using analytical categories such as 'monotheism'. On both sides of the issue (to varying degrees among the individual studies) there has been a tendency to proceed deductively from a priori presumptions of what 'monotheism' must mean, instead

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of building up a view inductively from the evidence of how monotheism actually operated in the thought and practice of ancient Jews (and earliest Christians). It is mistaken to assume that we can evaluate ancient Jewish texts and beliefs in terms of whether or how closely they meet our own preconceived idea of 'pure' monotheism.\(^6\)

Unless we proceed inductively, we almost unavoidably import a definition from the sphere of theological polemics in an attempt to do historical analysis. Protestants, for example, might find some forms of Roman Catholic or Orthodox piety involving the saints and the Virgin problematic forms of monotheism, and this might constitute a fully valid *theological* issue to be explored. But scholars interested in historical analysis, I suggest, should take the various Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions as representing varying forms of Christian monotheism. If we are to avoid a priori definitions and the imposition of our own theological judgements, we have no choice but to accept as monotheism the religion of those who profess to be monotheists, however much their religion varies and may seem 'complicated' with other beings in addition to the one God. For historical investigation, our policy should be to take people as monotheistic if that is what they profess to be, in spite of what we might be inclined to regard at first as anomalies in their beliefs and religious practices. Such 'anomalies', I suggest, are extremely valuable data in shaping our understanding of the limits, flexibility and varieties of monotheism out of the actual beliefs of real people and traditions.

To cite one important matter, there seems to be an implicit assumption on both sides that more than one transcendent being of any significance complicates or constitutes a weakening of or threat to monotheism. Those who see first-century Jewish religion as monotheistic tend, therefore, to minimize the significance and attributes given by ancient Jews to any transcendent beings other than God. But it is fairly clear that such figures as principal angels are to be understood as distinct beings that can sometimes be described as exhibiting and bear-

\(^6\) E.g., early in his essay Hayman says, 'I do not intend to proceed here by setting up a model definition of monotheism and then assessing the Jewish tradition against this yardstick'. But unfortunately, he then proceeds to do so, in my judgement, in imposing such things as a doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as a requirement of true monotheism ('Monotheism', pp. 3-4), and in making the question turn on whether ancient Jews were 'truly monistic' (p. 2), i.e., whether they believed in a plurality of heavenly beings.
ing divine attributes and powers. The descriptions of such beings are not simply rhetorical exercises, but indicate in varying ways the participation of these beings in the operation of divine purposes.

Those who question whether Graeco-Roman Jewish religion was monotheistic tend to emphasize the honorific ways in which transcendent beings other than God are described and the prominent positions they occupy in the religious conceptions reflected in ancient Jewish texts. It is clear that ancient Jews often envisioned a host of heavenly beings, including powerful figures likened to God and closely associated with God. But does this plurality of heavenly beings indicate that Graeco-Roman Jewish religion was not monotheistic, or does it rather indicate that historical expressions of monotheistic commitment may have been fully compatible with acknowledging important heavenly beings complementary in some way to, but also distinguished from, the ‘one God’? Only an inductive investigation of the religious professions and practices of particular groups and traditions can answer this question properly.

The evidence indicates interesting flexibility and variety in the expressions of monotheistic religiousness chronologically relevant for first-century Jewish and Christian groups. In previous work I have emphasized how early Christians such as Paul were quite able to refer to their beliefs in monotheistic language, while accommodating devotion to Christ in terms and actions characteristically deemed by them otherwise as restricted for God (e.g., 1 Cor. 8.4-6). Though I have not found another fully analogous example of quite such a robust and programmatic binitarian monotheistic devotion in first-century Jewish tradition, with other scholars I have illustrated the sometimes astonishingly exalted ways divine agents can be described in Jewish texts that exhibit a strong monotheistic orientation. In particular, we should note the cases where a principal angel is given God’s name (e.g., Yahoel) and is visually described in theophanic language, sometimes causing the human who encounters the angel to confuse the angel initially with God. These data illustrate the variety and flexibility in ancient Jewish monotheistic tradition, especially the ability to accommodate ‘divine’

7. Hurtado, One God, One Lord, esp. chs. 2-4.
figures in addition to the God of Israel in the belief structure and religious outlook.

My second methodological point is that in addition to variety, we should allow for change and development across time periods. In his proposal that Jewish monotheism may have undergone some significant changes and developments in the late first and early second century, whether or not one finds his proposal persuasive in all specifics, Dunn seems commendably to allow for a more flexible and dynamic Jewish monotheism than is reflected sometimes in other studies. It is possible, for example, that in reaction to Jewish-Christian reverence for Jesus (and the exalted status of other divine agent figures in other Jewish circles, such as the ‘Elect One’ of the Similitudes of Enoch) some rabbinic authorities may have advocated a less tolerant attitude toward the veneration of heavenly figures than may have characterized the earlier decades of the first century. Or it may be that Jewish authorities sought to identify more explicitly acceptable and unacceptable kinds of reverence. In light of these possibilities, a careful and inductive approach sensitive to the dating of evidence and the possibility of change and development within religious traditions is essential.

As a third methodological point, I wish to emphasize the importance of giving attention to religious practices, especially cultic and liturgical practices and related behaviour in forming our understanding of religious groups. In dealing with ancient religious traditions there is an understandable tendency for scholars to focus on questions about concepts and doctrines, and to exegete texts with insufficient attention for the larger context of religious practice of the people who produced and used the texts.

Thus, for example, scholars argue largely about whether ancient Jews conceived of more than one figure as divine, and seek to answer the question almost entirely on the basis of semantic arguments about the meaning of honorific titles or phrases, without always studying adequately how ancient Jews practised their faith. But in the same way that

modern principles of linguistics persuasively teach us that the particular meaning of a word in any given occurrence is shaped crucially by the sentence in which it is used, and just as it is a basic principle of exegesis to understand the meaning of phrases and statements in the larger context of a passage or even a whole document, so it should be recognized as a basic principle in the analysis of religious traditions that the real meaning of words, phrases and statements is always connected with the practice(s) of the religious tradition.

For ancient Jews, Christians and pagans, the primary exhibitions of what we would call their religiousness were in cultic and liturgical behaviour (e.g., sacrifice and equivalent phenomena), and Jewish and Christian monotheistic commitment was exhibited most explicitly and sharply in scruples about such worship behaviour (as I shall argue more extensively later in this paper). Consequently, if we wish to understand ancient Jewish and Christian monotheism, if we wish to measure its intensity, if we wish to know how it operated and what it meant 'on the ground' in the lives of adherents, we should pay considerable attention to the way their commitment to the uniqueness of one God was exhibited in their practice with regard to granting cultic veneration to other beings or figures.

Conscientious Jews (and Christians) not only refused to offer worship to other gods, as I have argued in One God, One Lord, and as I shall reiterate again below, it is precisely with reference to worship that ancient Jewish religious tradition most clearly distinguished the unique one God from those other heavenly beings such as principal angels, which they clothed with god-like attributes and referred to as participating prominently in God’s entourage. This is what makes the early readiness of monotheistic Christians to participate in the public cultic veneration of Jesus the most striking evidence that Christian devotion quickly constituted a significant innovation in Jewish exclusivist monotheism.

Jewish Monotheistic Profession

In light of the methodological points I have urged, let us now consider the question of whether first-century Jewish religion can really be considered meaningfully as monotheistic. The first thing to note is the strongly monotheistic profession characteristic of Jewish religiousness of this period. We are fortunate to have available studies by several
other scholars, and so I shall restrict my discussion here to a few illustrations of ancient Jewish monotheistic rhetoric and point the reader to the studies in question for fuller presentations of the evidence.

In a lengthy article from 1955, Samuel Cohon surveyed references both in ancient Jewish and non-Jewish texts illustrating Jewish self-affirmation and their identification by others in clearly monotheistic rhetoric. Of non-Jewish writers, we may note Tacitus as an example: 'the Jews acknowledge one God only, and conceive of Him by the mind alone', reflecting Jewish monotheism and rejection of cult images. Among non-rabbinic texts of Jewish provenance, Cohon surveys affirmations of God’s uniqueness in Sibylline Oracles (3.11-12, 545-61; cf. 4.27-32; 5.172-76, 493-500), Letter of Aristeas (132-38), Wisdom of Solomon (13-15), and references in Philo (e.g., Quaest. in Gen. 4.8; Vit. Mos. 1.75; Dec. 52-81; Spec. Leg. 1.1-52; Leg. All. 3.97-99, 436-38) and Josephus (e.g., Ant. 2.12.4; Apion 2.33-198).

We may also cite Ralph Marcus's frequently overlooked but very valuable compilation of theological vocabulary from Jewish Hellenistic texts (excluding Josephus and with only illustrative citations from Philo). Marcus’s main point was to indicate the degree to which Greek-speaking Jews maintained traditional expressions for God and the degree to which they adopted religious and philosophical vocabulary of Greek literature. Marcus listed some 470 expressions, attributing about 25 percent as borrowed from Greek literary tradition, the remaining, overwhelming majority coming from the Greek Bible. His summary of the theological themes reflected in these expressions shows the strongly monotheistic nature of the concept of God they reflect.

God is variously represented as one and unique, as creator, ruler and king, residing in heaven, all-powerful, all-seeing, omniscient, as father of Israel, as saviour, as judge, as righteous, terrible, merciful, benevolent and forbearing.

Marcus left Josephus out of his study because Schlatter had earlier devoted two publications to an in-depth analysis of Josephus’s language and conception of God, showing Josephus’s indebtedness and fidelity to the Jewish emphases on the uniqueness and sovereignty of the God of Israel. Schlatter’s studies were supplemented by Shutt in an article investigating whether Josephus’s ways of referring to and describing God ‘show any appreciable influence of Greek language and culture’. Though he concedes that Josephus’s expressions show the influence upon him of non-Jewish terms and ideas (e.g., references to ‘Fate’ and ‘Fortune’), Shutt concludes that ‘fundamental theological principles of Judaism’ remained dominant in Josephus’s writings, including the belief in the sovereignty of the one God of Israel over all.

H.J. Wicks conducted a still valuable study covering Jewish apocryphal and apocalyptic literature of the second-Temple period, analysing the language and doctrine of God reflected therein. He gave persuasive evidence of strong monotheistic beliefs throughout the period and of a lively religious sense of God’s sovereignty and accessibility. Surely the most wide-ranging analysis of second-Temple Jewish monotheistic rhetoric, however, is in the DPhil dissertation of Paul Rainbow. Working from a database of 200 passages where he finds monotheistic expressions (including about 25 passages from the New Testament), Rainbow offers some sophisticated linguistic analysis of the ‘ten forms of explicit monotheistic speech’ characteristic of Graeco-Roman Jewish texts. These are:

22. Rainbow, ‘Monotheism and Christology’, esp. ch. 4. The 200 passages are listed in Appendix 1 (pp. 228-86). They include some from the Old Testament and
1. phrases linking a divine title with adjectives such as ‘one’, ‘only’, ‘sole’, ‘alone’, and the like;
2. God pictured as monarch over all;
3. a divine title linked with ‘living’ and/or ‘true’;
4. positive confessional formula, ‘Yahweh is God’ and the like;
5. explicit denials of other gods;
6. the glory of God is not transferable;
7. God described as without rival;
8. God referred to as incomparable;
9. scriptural passages used as expressions of monotheism, e.g., the Shema;
10. restrictions of worship to the one God.23

As the studies I have summarized here lay out the data in considerable detail and can be consulted, it would be tedious to burden this discussion with a host of additional references to the primary texts. I submit that the religious rhetoric of Graeco-Roman Jewish texts indicates that Jews saw themselves as monotheists. If their willingness to include other heavenly beings in their beliefs may cause problems for some modern expectations that ‘pure’ monotheism should entertain no such beings (as Hayman and Barker complain), the real problem is in imposing such expectations. If we follow the principle I advocate of taking people as monotheists who proclaim such a commitment, then ancient Jews must be seen characteristically as monotheists.

There are two major themes or concerns that seem to come through in this monotheistic rhetoric.24 First, there is a concern to assert God’s

New Testament, but are mainly drawn from extra-canonical Jewish documents, with only token citations of Philo and Josephus.

23. Of course, ‘one/only god’ formulae can be found in ‘pagan’ sources of the Graeco-Roman period as well, as Erik Peterson has shown (Heis Theos: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen [FRLANT, 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926]). Note also Morton Smith, ‘The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East’, JBL 71 (1952), pp. 135-47. But in pagan religious practice, these formulae were fully compatible with the recognition and worship of all the gods, either as all valid manifestations of one common divine essence or as valid second-order gods under a high (often unknowable) god.

universal sovereignty. This is reflected with particular frequency in statements insisting that the one God created everything and rules over all, even nations that do not acknowledge this God. Even where spiritual powers of evil are pictured as opposing God, as is often the case in apocalyptic writings, their opposition is characteristically described as temporary, ultimately futile. Satan/Beliel/Mastema figures are rebellious servants of God, whose attempts to thwart God’s will only serve it by exposing the wicked (who cooperate with evil) and by testing and proving the righteous (who oppose evil and remain true to God).

Second, there is a concern to assert God’s uniqueness, which is characteristically expressed by contrasting God with the other deities familiar to ancient Jews in the larger religious environment. The classic ridicule of other gods and of the practice of worshipping images in Deutero-Isaiah (e.g., 40.18-20; 41.21-24; 45.20-21; 46.5-7) is echoed in texts of the Hellenistic and Roman periods (e.g., Wis. 13–15). We may take Philo’s comment in his discussion of the first commandment as representative of conscientious Jews of his time:

Let us, then, engrave deep in our hearts this as the first and most sacred of commandments: to acknowledge and honour one God who is above all, and let the idea that gods are many never even reach the ears of the man whose rule of life is to seek for truth in purity and guilelessness (Dec. 65).

It is important to note that this concern for God’s uniqueness also comes to expression in a contrast or distinction between God and his loyal heavenly retinue, the angels. For example, angels can be distinguished as created beings from God who is uncreated. In general, God is distinguished from the angels rhetorically by emphasizing that he is superior to them and is their master. Even when we have a principal angel such as Yahweh who bears the divine name within him and in


some sense may be taken thereby as ‘divine’, as a special vehicle of God’s attributes (Apoc. Abr. 10.3-4, 8-17), the angel acts at the pleasure of God, and is finally a minister of God, an extension of the sovereignty of the one God.

Worship Practice

The monotheistic profession evidenced in Graeco-Roman Jewish religion is particularly exhibited in religious practice, especially devotional actions connected with the cultic setting. Before we examine the evidence, it may be helpful to clarify terms and distinctions I shall use.

We may speak of various kinds and levels of veneration or reverence that members of a religious group or tradition may give to various beings and figures. As indicated already, ancient Jews (and Christians) were quite clearly able to accord honoured places to angels and other exalted figures (e.g., Moses, Enoch, Messiah) in their religious thought and life. We may refer to the sum of the overtly religious practices and actions of a person or group as a ‘pattern of devotion’ or ‘devotional pattern’. Within the spectrum of the devotional actions of a person or group, we may identify ‘cultic’ actions or behaviour, that is, prescribed and characteristic actions set within the sacred place or liturgical occasion, explicitly functioning as components of a person’s or group’s religious identity, and intended to effect, represent, maintain and enhance the relationship between the devotee(s) and the deity/deities affirmed by the person or group. For example, ritual sacrifices are formal cultic actions for ancient Jews, as is formal and corporate or liturgical prayer. These specifically cultic devotional actions we may refer to as the ‘worship’ practice(s) of a person or group. Not necessarily every venerative action or gesture may be intended or seen by the

26. This point is made persuasively by Amir, ‘Die Begegnung’: ‘In diesem Sinne möchte ich die Monolatrie nicht nur, wie üblich, als eine Vorstufe, sondern geradezu als den eigentlichen religiösen Kern des biblischen Monotheismus bezeichnen’ (p. 4). On Jewish devotional practice in general, see now Sanders, Judaism, esp. pp. 195-209. Older studies include Adolf Büchler, Types of Jewish-Palestinian Piety from 70 BCE to 70 CE: The Ancient Pious Men (Jews College Publications, 8; London: Jews College, 1922), whose rather uncritical handling of rabbinic traditions will now be questioned, but whose study is still worth noting, especially for his discussion of the piety of the psalms of Solomon (Jewish-Palestinian Piety, pp. 128-95). Schlatter, Die Theologie des Judentums, includes a lengthy chapter on ‘Die Frommigkeit’ reflected in Josephus (pp. 96-158).
devotee(s) as 'worship' in this specific sense of the term. We will see that Graeco-Roman Jewish religion exhibits strong scruples about the legitimate objects of formal cultic or liturgical devotion, and can be described as reserving 'worship' for the one God, although the wider devotional activities may include other forms of reverence expressed for other figures.

We may begin by pointing to an obvious datum about which I assume there will be no controversy: at least in the Greek and Roman eras, Jerusalem Temple sacrifice was offered exclusively to the one God of Israel. In other words, this central Jewish religious institution by its cultic practice reflects a strongly monotheistic orientation. For all the lofty ways patriarchs and angels were described in contemporary Jewish texts, there was no cultus to them, no evidence of them receiving liturgical honours in the Temple services.

The Qumran texts show an apparent dissent from the administration of the Jerusalem Temple, but reflect no different orientation of religious devotion. The hymns (1QH) are sung to the one God. The prayers are offered to the one God. The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice show an interest in the worship offered by the heavenly court with the angels' worship as a pattern and inspiration for the earthly elect, but the angels are not objects of worship.

As to the nature of synagogue services, though recent studies caution us about reading too much of later material into the pre-70 CE period and suggest greater variety and flexibility than was later the case, nevertheless all available evidence points to synagogue religious devotion focused on the one God and his Torah. The Nash Papyrus (second century BCE) gives evidence of the Decalogue and Shema, key traditional expressions of God's uniqueness, being used for instructional and/or liturgical purposes. Other texts suggest daily recitations

27. As I have pointed out elsewhere, whatever the pattern of cultic devotion at Elephantine, the material is hardly characteristic of the Jewish population of the Graeco-Roman period and is, in any case, too early to be of direct relevance. See my One God, One Lord, p. 144 n. 83.
30. See W.F. Albright, 'A Biblical Fragment of the Maccabaean Age: The Nash
of the *Shema* by at least some pious Jews of the Graeco-Roman period, and there are wider indications of the impact of this classic monotheistic text on the devotional practices of Jews as shown in the use of *tefillin* and *mezuza* and the custom of daily prayers (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 4.212).31

We have a good deal of material with which to form impressions of the patterns of Jewish prayer in the second-Temple period, as Charlesworth and Flusser have shown in helpful inventories of the evidence.32 Though the prayers recorded in the surviving texts may well be more rhetorically sophisticated than most spontaneous prayers of ordinary Jews of the time, it is likely that the basic pattern and themes are representative.

In his study of the doctrine of God in non-canonical second-Temple texts cited earlier, Wicks included special attention to the prayers of these writings. Somewhat later, N.B. Johnson devoted a monograph to the prayers in these texts. Both demonstrated that all the prayers in these writings are offered to the God of Israel alone. Though angels may serve as bearers of prayers and as intercessors for humans (e.g., *Tob.* 12.11-15), God is the object of prayers by humans and angels alike.33 As I have pointed out elsewhere, in those texts where angels


figure prominently in the operation of God's sovereignty, God is the recipient of worship and the object of the prayers. 14 We may also note Bauckham's study of apocalyptic passages in which a human recipient of a revelation initially mistakes for God the angel who delivers it and starts to offer the being worship, but is forbidden by the angel to proceed. 35

In the 1992 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Clinton Arnold presented a study of epigraphical evidence in an effort to determine the pattern of Jewish piety reflected in it, especially concerned with the role of angels. 36 He grants that angels 'figure prominently in the belief system' of the Jewish individuals or circles from which the inscriptions derive, and that angels are invoked for protection in an apotropaic manner. But he emphasizes that the evidence does not indicate any organized devotional pattern in which Jews 'gather regularly to adore, pray to, and worship angels'. 37 More recently, Arnold has reaffirmed these points more extensively. 38 In another study Loren Stuckenbruck likewise concludes that Jewish venerative language and practices involving angels (including invocations for assistance) were not intended as infringing on traditional Jewish monotheistic commitment and did not in fact amount to cultic worship of angels. 39 The inclusion of angels in rabbinic lists of prohibited objects of worship may be directed in part against such apotropaic invocations and against

34. One God, One Lord, esp. pp. 24-27.
35. Bauckham, 'The Worship of Jesus'. The key texts are Apoc. Zeph. 6.15; Asc. Isa. 7.21-22; Rev. 19.10; 22.8-9.
37. Arnold, 'Mediator Figures', p. 21; see also his conclusions, pp. 26-27. Cf. also L.H. Kant, 'Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin', ANRW, II.20/2, pp. 671-713, for further evidence of variation in the practices of Graeco-Roman Jews. But this data has to be analysed carefully. For example, the appearance of 'DM' (Dis Manibus) on a gravestone does not necessarily indicate the religious beliefs of the deceased or those who buried him/her. Gravestones were often pre-inscribed with such conventional expressions, the names and particulars of the individual deceased being added later, so anyone purchasing a gravestone from a shop might well have no choice but to use one with 'DM' inscribed.
39. Stuckenbruck, Angel Veneration and Christology, esp. the summary pp. 200-203.
Jewish syncretistic dabbling in magical practices, as Mach suggests. These prohibitions, however, hardly reflect an actual Jewish angel cultus in operation. The syncretistic behaviour of some Jews is, of course, important to note as indication that monotheistic scruples were not always shared or not always observed among all. Moreover, other devout and scrupulous Jews may well have seen such things as wearing and using amulets invoking angels as compatible with affirming the uniqueness of God, distinguishing between this and what we may call formal 'worship'.

In references to One God, One Lord, several scholars have demurred from my position that there is no evidence of organized devotion to angels or other figures among groups of devout Jews. Andrew Chester has recently alluded to the Life of Adam and Eve (13–16) and Joseph and Aseneth (15.11-12) as possible references to such practices. But I find neither text persuasive. The scene in Adam and Eve is surely laden with theological meaning, specifically the idea that humans are God’s most favoured creature, superior to the angels (cf. 1 Cor. 6.3), and that Satan’s hostility to humans is rebellion against God. But this aetiological story of God’s demand that the angels acknowledge the superior honour of the human creature as God’s ‘image’ hardly constitutes evidence that Jews actually met to offer worship to Adam. Chester’s allusion to Joseph and Aseneth, seems to ignore my observation that the mysterious angel who appears to Aseneth in fact refuses to cooperate with her desire to offer him worship, which suggests that her request is to be taken as a misguided pagan response corrected by the angel.

Rainbow has pointed to Ps.-Philo 13.6 (where God says, ‘The feast

41. See my discussion of these prohibitions in One God, One Lord, pp. 31-32. Whatever one makes of the rabbinic passages, their late date makes them questionable evidence for first-century Jewish religion. Cf. now the carefully nuanced analysis by Stuckenbruck, pp. 51-75.
42. Andrew Chester, ‘Jewish Messianic Expectations and Mediatorial Figures and Pauline Christology’, in M. Hengel and U. Heckel (eds.), Paulus und das antike Judentum (WUNT, 58; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), pp. 17-89, esp. 64. Chester does not give the exact passages but I presume these are the ones which he intended.
44. See One God, One Lord, pp. 81, 84.
of Trumpets will be an offering for your watchers’) as a possible hint of
angel worship, but this is not the more plausible way to take the pas-
sage, as the translator in the Charlesworth edition indicates. Moreover, 34.2 makes it clear that the author regards sacrificing to (disobedient) angels as a forbidden practice of Gentile magicians. Nor is there in fact any cogent evidence from Philo of prayer or worship being offered to figures other than God. More recently, Rainbow has proposed that the LXX reading in Dan. 7.13-14 (ὡς παλαιός ἡμερῶν ['as ancient of days']; cf. ἔως τοῦ παλαιοῦ τῶν ἡμερῶν ['unto the ancient of days', Theod.]) produces a passage in which the ‘Son of Man’ figure is identified with/as God and receives worship. But it is not clear that the LXX of Dan. 7.13-14 is to be preferred over the Theodotian text as reflecting pre-Christian Jewish Greek translation of the passage, nor is it clear that Rainbow’s proposed translation and exegesis is to be preferred. The reverence offered in LXX of Dan. 7.14 may be offered to the ‘Son of Man’ figure, but seems to be scarcely


46. The Midianite magician works miracles by the aid of fallen angels ‘for he had been sacrificing to them for a long time’ (Ps.-Philo 34.2). This tells us how the author explained the feats of Gentile magicians but is hardly evidence of a Jewish devotion to angels!

47. Cf. F.G. Downing’s curious claim that in Somn. 1.163-64 ‘Philo clearly takes [Abraham’s appeal in Gen. 28.21] as “prayer”, addressed to the Word...’ has no basis in this passage (cf. ‘Ontological Asymmetry in Philo and Christological Realism in Paul, Hebrews and John’, JTS 41 [1990], pp. 423-40 [440 n. 28]). The Logos is not even mentioned here. Philo takes Abraham as requesting God to be to him ‘bestower of kindness’ and not merely ‘ruler’. Philo’s deliberately rhetorical invocation of the ‘Sacred Guide’ (ἱεροφήντα) in Somn. 164 is not addressed to the Logos, but may allude to Moses in his role as great teacher of true religion who works through his sacred writings. Downing’s citations of Abr. 127 and Gig. 54 are likewise puzzling. Neither in fact offers any historical evidence for worship directed to any being but God. Philo merely makes distinctions between inferior and superior understandings of the nature of God, and, in somewhat elitist-sounding language, claims that few of humankind achieve a higher perception of God.

48. Paul Rainbow, ‘One God and his Anointed in Early Judaism’ (seminar presentation notes sent to me by Rainbow in private correspondence). Rainbow reads the LXX of Dan. 7.14 as showing all the nations of the earth giving glory (καὶ πᾶσα δῶξα αὐτῷ λατρεύουσα) to this ‘Son of Man’ figure who is likened to ‘the ancient of days’. 
more than the sort of gestures of submission to and acknowledgement of a victor that characterizes ancient cultures. Even if the LXX reading be taken as describing a heavenly or eschatological ‘worship’ (in the cultic sense) of the Son of Man, there is certainly no indication that historical Jewish groups met to address such cultic devotion to some heavenly ‘Son of Man’ figure! For historical analysis, we must always ask about actual religious practices.

In short, the data largely represent faithful Jews expressing their scruples about worship and prayer to figures other than God. We may have hints here and there of a concern that some Jews were not sufficiently faithful in maintaining a sharp distinction between the unique God of Israel and other figures, whether pagan gods or servants of the true God (a concern explicitly expressed in rabbinic criticism of ‘two powers’ heretics). We certainly have evidence of faithful Jews


50. On the rabbinic ‘two powers’ theme and its background, see Alan F. Segal, Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism (SJLA, 25; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977). J.H. Tigay, ‘A Second Temple Parallel to the Blessings from Kuntillet Ajrud’, IEJ 40 (1990), p. 218, cites m. Suk. 4.5 and t. Suk. 3.1, in which there are invocations addressed to ‘Yah and to you, O Altar’, concluding that ‘the address itself shows that people who were unquestionably monotheistic did not hesitate to address YHWH and a personified cult object in a way which seems to give comparable status to each’. Clearly, however, homage is given to the Jerusalem Temple altar solely because it is the sole revered place where sacrifice can be offered to the one God! Roy Kotansky, ‘Two Inscribed Jewish Aramaic
attempting to maintain and strengthen a distinction between their monotheistic devotional pattern and the polytheistic pattern of the larger Graeco-Roman world. But we hardly have evidence of Jewish religious groups in which cultic or liturgical devotion to angels or patriarchs formed part of their corporate religious practice and was intended as offering to them the sort of cultic devotion otherwise reserved for God.

Jews were quite willing to imagine beings who bear the divine name within them and can be referred to by one or more of God’s titles (e.g., Yahoel or Melchizedek as elohim or, later, Metatron as yahweh hakaton), beings so endowed with divine attributes as to make it difficult to distinguish them descriptively from God, beings who are very direct personal extensions of God’s powers and sovereignty. About this, there is clear evidence. This clothing of servants of God with God’s attributes and even his name will perhaps seem to us ‘theologically very confusing’ if we go looking for a ‘strict monotheism’ of relatively modern distinctions of ‘ontological status’ between God and these figures, and expect such distinctions to be expressed in terms of ‘attributes and functions’. By such definitions of the term, Graeco-Roman Jews seem to have been quite ready to accommodate various divine beings. The evidence we have surveyed here shows that it is in fact in the area of worship that we find ‘the decisive criterion’ by which

Amulets from Syria’, IEJ 41 (1991), pp. 267-81, discusses protective amulets cataloguing angels in incantations, which illustrate the sort of practices an unknown number of ancient Jews may have combined with a profession of monotheism. I offer two comments: (1) Such incantations/invocations of angels addressed beings that were seen as servants of the one God, and so the practice may not have been intended in any way as diminishing God’s uniqueness; (2) such invocations seem not to have been made a part of corporate, public Jewish worship, and this suggests that a scruple about God’s uniqueness operated to keep such practices within certain limits, as far as more formal Jewish worship was concerned.

51. In this paragraph, I lift phrasing from Chester, ‘Jewish Messianic Expectations’, pp. 64-65, whose otherwise very helpful essay shows here a failure to appreciate these points adequately. Part of the problem in estimating what Jews made of heavenly beings other than God ‘ontologically’ is that scholars tend to employ distinctions and assumptions formed by Christian theological/philosophical tradition. For a helpful critique of such anachronism and an illustration of the much wider and more complex semantic field represented by ‘divine’ and ‘god’ in ancient Greek, see S.R.F. Price, ‘ Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult’, JHS 104 (1984), pp. 79-95.
Jews maintained the uniqueness of God over against both idols and God’s own deputies. I may also add that the characteristic willingness of Graeco-Roman Jews to endure the opprobrium of non-Jews over their refusal to worship the other deities, even to the point of martyrdom, seems to me to reflect a fairly ‘strict monotheism’ expressed in fairly powerful measures.

The Religious Outlook

We may understand this ancient Jewish religious outlook as constituting a distinctive version of the commonly attested belief structure described by Nilsson as involving a ‘high god’ who presides over other deities. The God of Israel presides over a court of heavenly beings who are in some measure likened to him (as is reflected in, e.g., the Old Testament term for them, ‘sons of God’). In pagan versions, too, the high god can be described as father and source of the other divine beings, and as utterly superior to them. In this sense, Jewish (and Christian) monotheism, whatever its distinctives, shows its historical links with the larger religious environment of the ancient world.

There are distinctives of the Jewish version (inherited and adapted by early Christians), however, both in beliefs and, even more emphatically in religious practice. As Nilsson has shown, in pagan versions often the high god is posited but not really known. Indeed, in some cases (particularly in Greek philosophical traditions) it is emphasized that the high god cannot be known. Accordingly, often one does not expect to relate directly to the high god or address this deity directly in worship or petition. In Graeco-Roman Jewish belief, however, the high god is known as the God of Israel, whose ways and nature are revealed in the Scriptures of Israel. Also, as the evidence of Jewish prayer and cultic practice surveyed above shows, Jews characteristically expected, indeed felt obliged, to address their high God directly in prayer and worship.

Moreover, in pagan versions, beliefs about a high god were not characteristically taken as demanding or justifying a cultic neglect of the other divine/heavenly beings. In Jewish religious practice, cultic rever-

ence (‘worship’, e.g., sacrifice) characteristically is restricted to the high God alone. This is not simply a religious preference; it is taken as an obligation, and failure to observe this obligation is idolatry. Philo, for example, urges his readers to avoid confusing the ‘satraps’ with ‘the Great King’ (Dec. 61–65), when it comes to worship.

These constitute chief distinctives of the ancient Jewish understanding of the nature of the divine. In basic structure, their view of the divine involved a principal deity distinguished from all other divine/heavenly beings, but characteristically accompanied by them, a ‘high-god’ or ‘monarchical’ theology not completely unlike other high-god beliefs of the ancient world. But in the identification of the high god specifically as the God revealed in the Bible, and, even more emphatically, in their characteristic reservation of worship to this one God, their religion demonstrates what we can call ‘exclusivist monotheism’. Both in theology and in practice, Graeco-Roman Jews demonstrate concerns for God’s supremacy and uniqueness to an intensity and with a solidarity that seem to go far beyond anything else previously known in the Graeco-Roman world.

Quite a lot could be accommodated in Jewish speculations about God’s retinue of heavenly beings, provided that God’s sovereignty and uniqueness were maintained, especially in cultic actions. I think that we may take it as likely that the glorious beings such as principal angels who attend God in ancient Jewish apocalyptic and mystical texts were intended by the authors very much as indicating God’s splendour and majesty, and not as threatening or diminishing God in any way. The greater and more glorious the high king, the greater and more glorious his ministers, particularly those charged with administering his kingdom.

God’s sovereignty was expressed and protected by portraying all spheres of creation and all the heavenly beings, even those temporarily ‘disobedient’ (Satan/Beliel, demons, fallen angels) as inferior and subservient to God, ultimately within God’s power. God’s uniqueness was characteristically manifested and protected in religious practice, by directing prayer (especially in the cultic/liturgical setting) and worship to God alone, withholding such devotion from any other heavenly being, including God’s closest ministers and agents.

In his study of rabbinic criticisms of ‘two powers’ heresies, Alan Segal has identified two types of heresies attacked, and has suggested that one type was Jewish-Christian reverence of Jesus and the other
(which Segal dates a bit later) was gnostic speculation about a demi-urge creator-god. I think that Segal is correct, and that the two developments in question were considered heretical because they were seen to challenge the two fundamental concerns of Jewish monotheism. Gnostic speculations attributing the creation to a divine being other than the high god were likely taken as constituting a severe diminishing of the universal sovereignty of God, removing from God's purposes and control the sensory world and human history. Jewish-Christian cultic reverence of the exalted Jesus in terms and actions characteristically reserved for God, as described in One God, One Lord, though it was initially a development ('mutation') within Jewish monotheistic tradition, was a sufficiently distinctive variant form to have been seen by many non-Christian Jews as compromising the uniqueness of God in the important sphere of cultic action. Whether there were other variant forms that constituted equally innovative forms of monotheism that developed within the Jewish monotheistic tradition of the late first or early second century remains an intriguing but thus far debatable possibility.

The reactions against the known 'heresies' the rabbis had in mind—Jewish Christianity and Gnostic groups—may well have produced a hardening of rabbinic monotheism in the direction away from a more flexible and monarchical monotheism and towards a more stringently 'monistic' stance, as Dunn and Wright have suggested. But, as already noted above, the flexibility in speculations about figures associated with God, such as angels, Messiah, patriarchs, divine attributes, even in the pre-70 CE period seems not to have involved cultic devotion (worship) given to these figures in their own name, openly as a feature of liturgical practice. It is in the explicit and programmatic inclusion of Christ with God in the prayer and worship practices of early Christianity that we see an apparent innovation in previous Jewish monotheistic religious practice.

55. Segal, Two Powers in Heaven.
56. One God, One Lord, esp. ch. 5, 'The Early Christian Mutation'.
57. E.g., Wright, The New Testament and the People of God, p. 259. E.E. Ellis has claimed also that rabbinic leaders of the second century and later 'brought into final definition the unitarian monotheism of talmudic Judaism' (The Old Testament in Early Christianity [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], pp. 115-16).
58. Rainbow ('Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix', p. 88 n. 22) seems to me to overestimate the ease with which cultic devotion to a divine agent figure could be
Moreover, as Mach has recently argued, we should probably also allow for other (e.g., political) factors, in accounting for rabbinic unease with angel speculations. We should also recognize that interest in angels, including principal angels likened to God and closely associated with God, may have declined in some circles and in some periods, but was active in some devout Jewish circles after the first century, as evidenced in 3 Enoch and other texts.

There were reactions against Christian and Gnostic developments, but it is not clear that these reactions produced a significantly and widely embraced modification of the fundamental shape of Jewish monotheistic belief and practice. It does seem a very cogent possibility, however, that reaction against the Jewish-Christian form of binitarian monotheism, involving devotion to God and to the exalted Christ, may have had the effect of making any other such programmatic binitarian development unacceptable thereafter.

**Conclusion**

In addressing the question of whether or how Graeco-Roman Jewish religion can be regarded as ‘monotheistic’ it is advisable to take an inductive approach. Such an approach must (1) take seriously the religious professions and self-understanding of the people/groups studied, (2) allow for variety and development in the kinds and expressions of monotheistic religiousness, and (3) recognize the crucial importance of religious practice(s), particularly cultic (worship) practice(s) in understanding a religious group or tradition.

When we follow this inductive approach, we gather clear evidence that devout Jews proclaimed their faith in monotheistic professions which emphasize the universal sovereignty and uniqueness of the one God of Israel, and manifested a devotional pattern involving the reservation of cultic devotion (formal/liturgical ‘worship’) for this one God and a refusal to offer these cultic honours to other gods or even to the divine agents of God that often figure so prominently in ancient Jewish conceptions of the heavenly world and the exercise and outworking of God’s will. The plurality of heavenly beings in first-century Jewish tradition is not in itself reason to question the appropriateness of calling these traditions monotheistic, particularly if we give due weight to the seen as logical and acceptable in the Graeco-Roman Jewish tradition.

distinctions devout Jews made between the levels of reverence appropriate for divine agent figures and the full cultic reverence (worship) due the one God. This more precise and inductively formed view of Graeco-Roman Jewish religion also gives us a firmer basis for understanding the historical significance of cultic devotion or worship offered to the exalted Jesus in early Christian circles that professed a monotheistic stance.

ABSTRACT

In recent scholarship there has been considerable discussion over whether first-century Jewish religion can be described meaningfully as 'monotheistic', and, if so, how this affects our understanding of the rise of early 'high' Christology. This essay offers refinements in our approach to the question and concludes that we can attribute 'monotheism' to first-century Judaism, provided that we build our understanding of the term inductively. Ancient Jewish monotheism was a distinctive version of the ancient 'high god' pattern. The distinctives were in beliefs and practice. The key distinctive beliefs were (1) the high god is known and is the God of Israel, (2) this God presides over a heavenly host of other heavenly beings but is distinguished from them as creator of all and as ruler of all. In addition, and most importantly, there was a distinction in religious practice: This God is to be worshipped exclusively. First-century Jewish monotheism was, thus, an exclusivist, monarchical view of God, manifested particularly in 'orthopraxy' in cultic/ liturgical matters.