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# IS GOD GOOD?

### **Godism — another form of Gnosticism?**

We ended the last chapter with the peculiarly British question as to whether the Prince of Wales, who at the time of writing this book was keen to become *Defender of Faith* rather than the *Defender of the Faith*, may unwittingly have called into question the continuation of the monarchy itself. We should perhaps close off this line of debate with these observations: clearly with the heavily politically-correct and multi-cultural leanings of much of the media-politico intelligensia in the UK in the early 2000s, it remained likely that the Prince would weaken (and be seen to weaken) if not actually abrogate the Crown's commitment to Christianity. This would be a departure of more than a thousand years of history, undertaken on the basis of just a few years of stunted debate engaged-in by a very narrow (post-modern in outlook, and generally anti-Christian in agenda) section of society. It remained likely at the time of writing this book that the Prince would get his way. The then Archbishop of Canterbury had surprised the nation in 2008 by seeming to call for parts of Islamic Sharia Law to be introduced into the UK, and political commentators believed that he and the Prince would take a similar line on multi-faithism in general. There would accordingly be no real *established*

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*church* opposition to the deletion of the definite article in that singularly important royal title of *Defender of the Faith*.

Many would argue, in any case, that the Monarch's job description can evolve and change over time and that, indeed, this is absolutely necessary if the monarchy itself is to survive. Would people march on the streets at the deletion of the definite article 'the' from the monarch's title in relation to faith and its defence? Plainly the answer would be 'no' so the ruling elite would surely achieve what they desired with no real 'capital investment' in terms of reduced popular support. Little if any real harm, they considered, would be done. If however it is considered, as some serious observers do, that the preservation of Protestant Christianity in this country has been a bedrock of its political and social development and that this (irrespective of whether you happen to be a Roman Catholic Christian or not) has been at the behest of Almighty God, then to refuse to defend *that same faith in the personified form of the monarch* means that the sole task that remains unique to the monarch no longer exists. All other aspects of the royal job description could be personified in other people and/or in other institutions. With no willingness to defend *the* faith at the personal risk of the life of the monarch, it was certainly arguable in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that there was no need for a British monarchy. If the defence of reformed Christianity (loosely Protestantism) for the UK had been part of God's plan for that nation for its preceding 450 years — and by this is meant, theologically, the right of access of the individual person to God the Father through the mediation of Jesus His Son without the aid of priests — if all of this had indeed been God's will and purpose — and if in the final analysis the future monarch was no longer willing to discharge this historically God-given duty, then would God ultimately see

no further need for a British monarchy?

In the previous chapter we also noted that Godism generally is a mixture of religious philosophies and in particular of *Theism*, *Monism* and *Deism*. We added for good measure that peculiar philosophy with the improbable title *Holistic Gnoseology* which holds rather vaguely that only a global approach to reality by means of a global knowledge is able to reach the truth of the Eternal. Holistic Gnoseology then is considered to be a general philosophy to achieve a supposedly deeper and more comprehensive reality for the individual. The word ‘gnosis’ is an English translation of the classical Greek word meaning knowledge. Fully developed Gnosticism is a philosophical-religious movement that became prominent in the Greek/Roman world of the second century AD. While Gnosticism drew from many traditional religions its effect was most clearly felt in the very early Christian church, and led that church to form what we now call the agreed and authorised *canon* of Scripture, the *creed*, and the formalizing of *episcopal organisation*. Evidence for the Gnostic threat to the early church is found mainly in the writings of the early Church Fathers who opposed Gnostic teachings — especially Irenaeus, c. 185, Hippolytus, c. 230 and Epiphanius, c. 375. Their writings indicate a diversity in the Gnostic theology, as well as in their ethics and ritual, which makes strict classification quite impossible. Gnosticism, like so many other *isms*, is a very mixed-up thing! Although Gnosticism seems to reach back before the time of Jesus, the first Gnostic of whom we can speak with certainty was one Simon Magus, a first century Jewish teacher of unorthodox views who introduced the basic idea that evil resulted from a break within the Godhead. Simon Magus’ beliefs remained basically Jewish and monotheistic. The dualistic phase

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was reached following the expansion of Gnosticism into the Greek/Roman world of the early church, particularly borrowing from Platonic philosophy the idea that a ‘lower god’ or demiurge, had created the world. As always, readers who want to look further into this will find material widely available, especially on the internet. Care should always be taken with internet resources, however, because they are not rigorously quality-controlled in a scholarly sense, no matter what they may say to the contrary!

In the Gnostic view, the unconscious self of man — his soul, if you prefer — is consubstantial with the godhead, but because of a tragic fall (ideas borrowed indirectly from the biblical account of Adam and Eve) his soul is thrown into a world that is completely alien to its real being. Through revelation from above, man becomes conscious of his origin and of his transcendent destiny. Gnosticism is different from philosophical enlightenment, because it cannot be acquired by the forces of reason, and different from Christian revelation, because Gnosticism unlike Christianity, is *not* rooted in history — it is rather a sort of sophisticated *religious intuition*. Using our definition of Godism from the previous chapter, we can easily see that there are aspects of Gnosticism within broad Godist thought. As most Godists believe that the various religious scriptures have been contaminated by humans, like Gnostics they rely instead on their own *attained knowledge* which (a) transcends the higher religions as and when those religions clash with the philosophy of Godism and (b) enables them to ‘see’ things that are hidden from singular adherents of those religions. A Godist therefore looks with some disdain upon the singular adherents of *the religions* (although many would deny it most emphatically!) as being a religious class of ‘also rans’ in *mankind’s great religious quest*.

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Godists concede that these singular religious types may indeed be ‘saved’ by their slavish acceptance of their own religion (which ‘god’ will find acceptable) but the Godist himself has seen beyond what has been revealed and has achieved a higher esoteric knowledge of ‘god’ wherein these various religions can be harmonized in spite of their glaring differences. The most direct and popular articulation of this quest for religious harmonisation in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was perhaps the so-called ‘Golden Rule’ which we encountered in Chapter 1.

We need to look at Gnosticism as a Christian heresy: it appears that in the first and second centuries AD a number of Gnostics remained as members of local churches and some even served in high offices within those churches. Indeed there is speculation that Valentinus<sup>1</sup> may have been considered as a possible Bishop at Rome. Marcion,<sup>2</sup> perhaps the greatest heretic of the early church period, although probably not fully Gnostic, did certainly assist in the development of Gnostic ideas. He reinterpreted the apostle Paul in such a way that the Old Testament God became the ‘god of evil’ and Christ became the messenger of the good ‘god of grace’. Marcion developed his own

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<sup>1</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD Egyptian religious philosopher and founder of the Roman and Alexandrian schools of Gnosticism. Baptised as a Christian, during the time of Pope St Hyginus he taught a synthesis of Christian and oriental Gnosticism. Aspiring to become a Christian bishop, he left the faith after being passed over for a bishopric in Rome. Even in later years, Valentinus’ teaching continued to argue for the need for Christ’s death and resurrection as effecting Christian deliverance, alongside other esoteric teachings.

<sup>2</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> century theologian who was excommunicated by the church at Rome as a heretic. His teachings were influential during the 2nd century and a few centuries after, rivalling that of the Church of Rome. As he offered an alternative theology to the Canonical, Proto-orthodox, Trinitarian and Christological views of the Roman Church, the early Church Fathers denounced him. Their views continue to dominate authentic Christianity today. One of the greatest heretics in church history, Marcion is condemned by all branches of the Christian Church.

censored canon of New Testament Scripture and in so doing, compelled Christians to counter by clarifying their own canon. Interestingly in the author's personal experience, this idea of a 'god' who has both good and evil facets is propounded by at least some who are involved in modern Christian churches, so it appears that in the shape of Godism generally we *do* see views being expressed that it is impossible to describe as being anything other than a Christian heresy. Classical Gnostic teachings are so involved and so bizarre that we will waste no further time on them in this book,<sup>3</sup> except to observe that Godism, in its insistence on the polluted nature of the various scriptures of the 'higher religions' and with the inability of their 'god' to have secured for 'himself' or 'itself' fully dependable scriptures, do show clear Gnostic leanings. This is combined, as we have already noted, with the Godists' own esoteric ability to 'see' the truth that unites all the so-called higher religions. It seems then that Godists consider themselves to have a *gnosis*, a knowledge, which is simply not attained by those people with less sophisticated theological understanding. The word 'arrogant' springs to mind in this regard! There really is a breathtaking arrogance in those Godists who hold so unswervingly to this idea that they 'see' things in *the religions* and in the sacred writings of those religions that are hidden from others, but without the slightest blush will admit they cannot read those scriptures in their original native language! Finally we observe that Godists often hold views about *the religions* which are generally not shared or recognised by the adherents of those same religions. The adherents of *the religions*, it might be added, ought to

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<sup>3</sup> There are some useful books and some useful material on the internet freely available. As always with the internet, however, be sceptical of scholarly quality control!

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be presumed to be far better versed in their own religious theology than the average Godist! Later in this book, as we begin to look again at the nature of the unswervingly good God that the Holy Bible reveals, and at Jesus Christ His Son, we will begin to see the clear dividing lines between orthodox Christian belief as revealed from the pages of Scripture and the heterodox beliefs of the various ideas that comprise 21<sup>st</sup> century Godism.

### **What exactly is ‘good’?**

It is at this point in our study that we challenge the Godists’ first great weakness when viewed from an orthodox Christian position. They do not believe in a God who is unswervingly or totally good. In our straightforward day to day understanding of what should be considered to be good, we can readily see based upon our own faulty and worldly morality that a ‘god’ who ‘revealed’ himself in umpteen different guises (religions), and in guises that are diametrically opposed to each other, and in the knowledge that by so doing he would cause spiritual and temporal conflict between the adherents of those ‘faith systems’ — such a ‘god’ would have no claim to be good. We need to consider then, what does the Bible say about God’s goodness, and what does experience teach us?

The Holy Bible simply oozes the goodness of God. Anyone with access to a quality Bible Concordance<sup>4</sup> and who looks up the word ‘good’ will find hundreds of references. Leaping back to the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis chapter 1, we see that as God creates the world He declares it to be good. Some may object that in creation we find too much that is bad (earthquakes,

<sup>4</sup> A sort of Bible dictionary showing where in the Bible words and phrases may be found.

tsunamis, disease, failed harvests) and that it is God's 'fault' for having made this sort of a world. But they perhaps too easily forget what appears to be a historical reality alongside a spiritual reality, that, at some point in our time-space world, mankind decided to rebel against God and with that rebellion brought sin and evil into this world in which we must continue to live. This rebellion has huge implications for the happiness and security of the planet as a whole. Mankind, having been unfaithful in actively disobeying God (in order, as they hoped, to become like God), brought into this world a deadly disease that runs throughout all of mankind — the Bible calls it sin. What was created good was rendered 'fallen' from that state of goodness. From now on, men and women would continually try to be 'like God', but without His goodness and holiness, and in the attempt would immerse themselves ever more deeply into the mire of sin and corruption.<sup>5</sup> But in spite of this God's goodness continues to shine through into this, His world.

What is meant by the phrase 'the goodness of God'? At its most basic theologians tend to focus on the bounty of God. When we say that a person is good, we think of his dependability and moral uprightness, or else of his charitable and liberal disposition in the management of his goods and his time. Goodness in humans is generally thought of as the way they 'do good' to other humans. The goodness of God can be described as His permanent and unwavering inclination to deal well and bountifully with His creatures. In considering His creatures, God delights in them and is beneficial to them. God is the highest goodness, because He

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<sup>5</sup> For someone to want to be more like Christ is not in itself a sin — see Matthew 5:48 and Ephesians 5:1. Becoming more like Christ is one consequence of becoming a disciple of Jesus (note His obedience to His Father; and see Philipppians 2:5–11 and 2 Peter 1:2–11; also John 17:20–21. The Satanic deception is to make humans think that God is not telling us the truth. (See Genesis 3:1–7.)

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does not act for His own benefit, but acts for His creatures' welfare, and to demonstrate His own goodness.

The original Saxon meaning of our English word 'God' is '*The Good*'. God is not only the greatest of all beings, but the best. Christians assert that all the goodness found in any creature has been imparted from the Creator, but God's goodness is un-derived, because it is the essence of His eternal nature. As God is infinite in power and has been from all eternity, even before there was any display of that power, so He was eternally good before there was any communication of His bounty, or indeed any creature to whom it might be imparted or exercised. So, the first manifestation of this Divine perfection was in giving existence to all things. **You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees** we read in Psalm 119:68. God has in Himself an infinite and inexhaustible supply of all blessedness and it is sufficient to fill all things. Of course, sadly, not all things want to be filled with His goodness.

The goodness of God underpins all His attributes, some of which we explored in Chapter 2. All the activities of God are nothing more and nothing less than the radiance of His goodness: **And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"** (Exodus 33:19). God's goodness is His crowning glory and is delightfully visible to His creatures: **And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness"** (Exodus 34:6). There are many, many millions of people in the world today who would be able to echo that truth, having found God to be

precisely that — loving and faithful.

God is the prime and chief goodness. In God there is nothing but goodness; and our own goodness, such as it is, would be non-existent without Him: **I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.”** (Psalm 16:2). For the Christian believer God is the *summum bonum*. God is good by His own essence — good of Himself, eternally good and abundantly good. God is necessarily good, but He is also freely good. The necessity of the goodness of His nature does not restrict the freedom of His actions. This goodness is communicative with those He has created — in other words we can encounter it and understand it. What God gives out of goodness, He gives with joy and gladness. He did not only Will that we should be, but rejoiced that He brought us into being. He rejoiced in His works. **May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works.** (Psalm 104:31).

The goodness of God is a real and genuine characteristic. He has always been and will always be infinitely good. In His goodness He is prompted to deal bountifully and in kindness with all His creatures. God’s attribute of complete holiness emphasises His transcendence and condescendence toward His creation. **Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart** (Psalm 73:1). We noted earlier in this book that God’s progressive self disclosure as revealed through the pages of the Old Testament shows Him in ever clearer detail and increasingly in the pages of the Old Testament we see that self-disclosure leading, in turn, to love and worship on the part of His servants. At this point readers may want to pause to read in their entirety all of Psalms 103, 104 and 107, where we see and experience some of this outflow of love returned from God’s people to their God Who is fundamentally good.

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From the many references to the goodness of God we can draw certain clear deductions.<sup>6</sup>

### **God is originally good**

God is good of Himself and has been always. Creatures may be good, but any goodness is derived and granted to them by God, without whom there can be no goodness, since He is the source of all goodness.

God depends on no one else for His goodness; he has goodness in and of Himself. He depends on no one, but all things depend of Him. He is so good, that He gives all and receives nothing in return; He only is good, because nothing is good but by Him: nothing has goodness except from Him.

### **God is infinitely good**

God alone is infinitely good. His goodness is boundless and knows no limits; His goodness must necessarily be as infinite as His essence. All possible creatures are, and the entirety of creation is, incapable of exhausting the wealth and the treasures that the divine bounty is filled with. Since God is immeasurable, all His attributes or characteristics must also be without measure.

### **God is perfectly good**

As in Him we find the whole nature of entity, so in Him is the whole nature of excellency. As nothing has an absolute perfection except God, so nothing has an absolutely perfect goodness except God.

The goodness of God is logically the measure and rule

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<sup>6</sup> The author is indebted to website [www.tecmalta.org/tft140.htm](http://www.tecmalta.org/tft140.htm) ('Truth for Today') for permission to borrow the structure and some of the arguments set out in this section.

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of goodness in everything else; hence it must necessarily be perfect, as all the other divine attributes are perfect.

### **God is immutably good**

Glorified saints are now immutably good by divine power and purpose; elect angels are immutably good by God's original decree to keep them good; other things may be perpetually good by supernatural power, but not immutably good in their own nature. Only God is immutably good, from eternity to eternity, for there can be no change in God. **Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.** (James 1:17)

### **Goodness is not the same as holiness**

Again, God's goodness must be distinguished from His holiness, which is the rectitude of His nature, whereby He is pure, and without spot in Himself.

The goodness of God is the outward manifestation of His will, by which He shows Himself beneficial to His creatures.

The holiness of God is manifest to His rational creatures, and nothing else; but the goodness of God covers all the works of His hands. **The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.** (Psalm 145:9)

### **God's goodness is a communicable attribute**

Pure and perfect goodness is the royal prerogative of God; goodness is a choice perfection of the divine nature. This is the true and genuine character of God; He is goodness, good in Himself, good in His essence, good in the highest degree, possessing whatsoever is comely, excellent, desirable; the highest good, because He is the source of good. All gifts, all

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variety of goodness, are contained in Him as one common good. In reaching out to His creatures, and manifesting His goodness to them, this is certainly a communicable attribute. For His goodness is not only seen but is extended to others. A Christian may be a good person, but his goodness is the work of God in him and through him. Whatever goodness a Christian may have and exercise, he is ultimately a channel for the Divine goodness to reach out to others.

### **God's goodness is not lessened by His punishment of sin**

When offenders are punished, we do not conclude that the Judge is devoid of goodness, but rather that the Judge is righteous. God's vindictive justice is as naturally His as is His goodness; both are necessarily His, and one does not exclude the other.

God is not bad because He is just; nor unrighteous, because He is good. God being infinitely good, cannot possibly intend or act anything but what is good: **You are good, and what you do is good** (Psalm 119: 68). Whatever God does is good, whether it may be pleasant or painful to His creatures. To punish evil is right, and therefore good.<sup>7</sup> We need to bear in mind the following points:

1. The justice of God is a part of the goodness of His nature. (See Exodus 33:19.)
2. Evidence of the goodness of God is the fact that He has made laws, and indeed has added to them warnings about what is involved in transgression. The design of laws, and the purpose of upholding the honour of those laws by the punishment of offenders, is to promote goodness and

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<sup>7</sup> In Romans 1:24, 26 and 28 we learn that God will 'give us over' (NIV) to our sins. In this we understand that where a persistent and determined rebel/sinner decides he is going to attempt to be 'like God' in determining right from wrong, God will reluctantly allow them to have full rein for a period and endure the full consequences of that sin. But a time of judgement will come.

restrain evil. That is actually a normative legal position which would be recognized in secular jurisprudence as well as in theology.

3. It follows, then, that failure to punish evil would be evidence of a lacking in goodness. We need to remind ourselves, though, that punishment as an end in itself is negative. On the positive side, God in His mercy seeks the salvation of all.

4. Punishment is not the primary intention of God. When He created, His intention was fundamentally to manifest His goodness. He actually calls the act of his wrath His strange work, His alien task (see Isaiah 28:21). Finally, He finds no pleasure whatsoever in the death of a sinner (see Ezekiel 33:11).

### **God's goodness is manifested in various ways**

God's supreme goodness is displayed in:

#### **a. The creation**

Just as His wisdom was the cause of making everything in order and harmony, His goodness was the cause of the very act of creation. He pronounced it 'very good,' that is, such as became His goodness to bring forth into being. So:

1. *Creation proceeds from goodness*; From the biblical perspective, we can affirm that God extracted vast numbers of things out of the depths of nothing. We can say this biblically in spite of and theories about creation or about evolution. Because God is good, things have a physical being. It has rightly been observed that *by God's goodness, the whole was brought out of the dark womb of nothingness*.

2. *Creation was the first act of goodness external to Himself*; the Persons of the Holy Trinity are good to each other (*ad intra*). The creation is the proof of God's goodness *ad extra*.

3. Especially in the case of man, *God's goodness is made manifest*. He empowered humankind with choices over and above any other creature; humankind was made a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour above any other creatures (Psalm 8:5).

4. *God provides for man*, as His supreme Benefactor.

**O Lord, how excellent is thy Name in all the earth**

(Psalm 8:1, 4).

5. When man sinned, God, in His goodness and for man's sake cursed the creation with the inevitable consequences of that rebellion. Creation still today *groans* because of Man's sin. But creation will finally be delivered from bondage (see Romans 8:20–22).

#### **b. Man's redemption**

The core of the gospel can be justly said to be a mirror of divine goodness, a special kind of goodness: 'Goodwill towards men' (Luke 2:14). Although if we read Luke 2:14 more accurately we need to add, in the words of the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, that God's peace is lavished upon humans with whom He is pleased. God's good will *does* extend to all men in the sense that He desires their salvation and makes it possible. But His highest goodwill is lavished upon His disciples.

It might be said, then, that God's goodness was the inspiration for His plan of redemption. It must have been an unimaginable and a miraculous goodness that impelled the Father to expose the life of His beloved Son to the difficulties and uncertainties of this world, and ultimately to death upon an evil cross of crucifixion, for the redemption of wicked rebels. God's great objective, perhaps, was to give a precise and unmistakable demonstration of the liberality of His nature (see John 3:16–17).

Redemption comes out of pure goodness. God was under

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no obligation to pity our misery or repair our ruin — but He has done both. This is the *good news* of a God abounding in His own blessedness (2 Timothy 1:8–11). Hence we may estimate the extent of God’s goodness in the great act of salvation to be much greater even than that of creation. God’s goodness is amply demonstrated when we consider Whom He ‘gave’:

1. His Son is a greater gift than creation itself (Hebrews 1:2–3).
2. His Son is the only-begotten, the unique Son of God, not an angel.
3. His Son was given the task to rescue us from eternal damnation (Mark 8:36–38); He was made poor that we might become rich in Him (2 Corinthians 8:9).
4. Jesus is the epitome of goodness. The Lord Jesus through His love became what we humans are – mere flesh and blood, so that He might then bring us to be, ultimately, what He is — holy and beloved of God. An amazing thought! As someone once said: the Son of God became the Son of Man, so that the sons of men might become Sons of God.

### **c. Providence**

Psalm 107 celebrates the goodness of God in the continued supply of His providence throughout all the ages. It credits to God’s goodness all the advantages men meet with as they seek to serve Him. God helps them in their actions, presides over their plans, reviews and understands their different circumstances, and perpetually cares for them. The emphasis in this Psalm is expressed in the first and last verses (v. 1: **give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever**; v. 43: **whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord.**)

1. This goodness is obvious in the care God exercises over all creatures. There is a special goodness displayed to His

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people; but this does not take away His general goodness to the world. The earth is still ‘full of His riches’ (Psalm 104:24).

2. His goodness is seen in the preservation of all things. **O LORD, you preserve both man and beast** (Psalm 36:6; see also 65:9,10; 107:35,36). Every day He ‘prepares a table’ for us (Psalm 23:5), and proves to be the ‘stronghold of our life’ (Psalm 27:1).

3. In His goodness He employs His angels on our behalf, to help and assist us, in ways most often unknown to us (Hebrews 1:14).

4. The goodness of God is seen in taking care of the meanest rational creatures — as servants and criminals. Widows, orphans and foreigners are under His care.

5. His goodness is evident in the preservation of human society. Because of His power He is able to do it, but because of His goodness He is willing to do it. This idea is often summed up in the idea of *common grace*.<sup>8</sup>

Much of what we have explored so far has been found in the pages of the Old Testament. As noted previously the author finds it helpful to consider the Old Testament as *the history of the promise*, and the New Testament as *the promise fulfilled*: the Old Testament points towards the promise of the Messiah, and the New Testament shows the nature of that same Messiah who shares with the Father the absolute claim to be good. Jesus challenged the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16–17 (repeated in Mark 10:17–31 and in Luke 18:18–30) in this way: **“Why do you ask me concerning what is good? There is only one who is good .....**” (GNB). Jesus challenged the young ruler,

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<sup>8</sup> Readers who want to get a good biblical perspective on this subject may want to read N. R. Needham’s short (30 page) booklet *Common Grace* published 2008 by the UK Christian Institute (ISBN 978-1-901086-38-6).

but He did not rebuke him for assigning that title to Jesus Himself. The New Testament also reminds us that **God is light, and in Him is *no* darkness at all** (1 John 1:5). As we will explore in greater detail the good news of the New Testament elsewhere in this book, we will conclude our thoughts on the goodness of God with these general observations: there is an absolute perfection in God's nature and being. There is nothing wanting to it or defective in it, and nothing can be added to it to make it better. All that emanates from God — His laws, His creation, and His providences — cannot be otherwise than good. As is made clear in Genesis chapter 1 in several places, as God surveyed all that He had made He saw that it was — good.

Measured in the way the Bible uses the word 'good' it can easily be seen that we tend to misuse and devalue the word good in our everyday language. Some Bible teachers assert that they try to avoid using the word 'good' at all in common parlance, and instead reserve it only with reference to Almighty God. Whilst on the face of it this may seem slightly eccentric, it is actually biblically sound. If we all were to adopt that approach to this word, then we would probably enlarge immeasurably our understanding of the goodness of God.

### **Could a good God 'reveal' Himself in different guises?**

We really do now have to throw down the gauntlet to the Godists on this question. The goodness of God is amply demonstrated in the pages of the Holy Bible. It is amply demonstrated in the lives of individuals who have put their trust in Him. It is amply demonstrated in the life and teachings of Jesus, His Son. We might first pose the question, why should such a God feel the need to invent other and conflicting 'messages' about Himself? What,

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precisely, is the deficiency in His biblical revelation and in His revelation through Jesus that needs to be remedied by other revelations? Just how can it be good to allow the confusion of multiple religions? How can it be good to demonstrate deity in *many* religions that demand from their followers salvation by works, and just *one* that allows salvation by grace? In many religions that reach up, and just one that reaches down?

How could a good God reveal Himself in commands and concepts that are diametrically opposed? How could He allow such massive confusion to reign? How could He allow the inevitable conflict of ideas and aspirations and understandings and still merit the title ‘good’? Some examples of what we mean are set out on the next three pages, but please consider this cautionary note:

### **IMPORTANT NOTE : NO REAL COMPARABILITY!**

Many terms have meanings that shift dramatically in the context of each religion, as each has its own belief structure. Not only does the word ‘god’ or ‘God’ have very different meanings, so do words like ‘heaven’, and so on. Therefore, at best, this can only be a rough illustration of some areas where clear differences in understanding and conflicts in practical outworking on fundamental issues are very obvious. There are many other differences, and nothing is explored in depth in these brief notes! Beware: even the expression ‘believe in’ has different meanings, as the Christian believer’s relation to God the Father — through faith in Christ Jesus (and being found ‘in’ Him) — is unique; it differs from the modes of ‘believing’ found in any of ‘*the religions*’ as it signifies a personal relationship with the risen, *living*, ascended, glorified Lord Jesus, the only way to the Father. Believing in (or ‘on’) a living person is not just believing that something happens to be true (though it certainly does entail belief that certain claims are historically true!) It is not possible to quote documentary sources for beliefs of *the religions* as they are so diverse. There are, of course, many other religions besides those mentioned, so these are just a few examples of how they all differ radically from true, biblical Christian faith.

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*The Bible teaches . . .*

### **GOD REACHES OUT TO PEOPLE**

**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:1–18). For God so loved the world that he gave his only son (John 3:16–21). The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men (Romans 1:18–2:6).**

*But ‘the religions’ teach . . .*

- Buddhists do not believe in God.
- Hindus believe in many ‘gods’ (circa 7,000 with about 20 important ones). Some maintain that ‘god’ is one but revealed in thousands of guises.
- Muslims believe in ‘Allah’. They ascribe to ‘Allah’ many names but do not see ‘Allah’ as reaching down to rescue mankind.

*The Bible teaches . . .*

### **WE MUST FACE DEATH ONCE, THEN JUDGEMENT**

**Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement (Hebrews 9:27).**

*But ‘the religions’ teach . . .*

- Buddhists believe in reincarnation — their concepts of ‘heaven’ and ‘hell’ (very different meanings) are considered allegorical.
- Hindus believe in reincarnation.
- Muslims believe in a ‘paradise’, also called ‘The Garden’, a place of pleasure, with lofty mansions, delicious food and drink, and virgin companions. There are thought to be seven ‘heavens’.

*The Bible teaches . . .*

### **JESUS’ SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS IS ALL SUFFICIENT**

**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace (Ephesians 1:3–14). Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God (1 Peter 3:18–22).**

*But ‘the religions’ teach . . .*

- Buddhist beliefs about Jesus defy quick summary. Some believe he moved to India and became a Buddhist.
- Hindu beliefs about Jesus defy quick summary. Some believe he is one and the same as ‘Krishna’, ignoring the fact that Jesus was born a Jew in a particular place, was crucified, dead and buried; and that he was raised from the dead and is alive now, reigning in glory.
- Muslims – do not believe that Jesus was crucified. A recent Islamic booklet in UK is titled *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?*

## IS GOD GOOD?

*The Bible teaches . . .*

### **GOD IS THREE PERSONS IN ONE GOD**

*See Deuteronomy 6:4; Galatians 3:20 (see also verse 16);*

*1 Timothy 2:5; James 2:19.*

*But 'the religions' teach . . .*

- Buddhists do not believe in God.
- Hindus believe in many 'gods' (circa 7,000 with about 20 important ones). Some maintain that God is one but revealed in thousands of guises.
- Muslim beliefs vehemently condemn the Christian understanding of Holy Trinity – God in three Persons. Muslims think this signifies three gods.

*The Bible teaches . . .*

### **REDEMPTION**

*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).*

*But 'the religions' teach . . .*

- Buddhists – The concept as the Bible expounds is not recognised. Self effort is stressed.
- Hindus – The concept as the Bible expounds is not recognised. Self effort is stressed.
- Muslims – Think 'paradise' awaits those who have followed the Muslim way of life; hell for non-believers. Essentially self effort.

*The Bible teaches . . .*

### **THE NEED TO BE BORN AGAIN**

*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. (See John 3:1–21)*

*But 'the religions' teach . . .*

- Buddhists – do not believe in God – concept of new birth leading to regeneration is not recognised.
- Hindus – believe in many deities – concept of new birth leading to regeneration is not recognized.
- Muslims – this concept is not recognized.

*The Bible teaches . . .*

**THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD**

**The Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command . . . and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). (See also 1 Corinthians 15:35–58.)**

*But ‘the religions’ teach . . .*

- Buddhists – reincarnation.
- Hindus – reincarnation leading to ‘nirvana’. The position of women is unclear.
- Muslims believe that Muslims will be ‘resurrected’ but the concept is quite different from that of Christianity.

The ‘god’ of the Godists has a lot of explaining to do if ‘he’ or ‘it’ has made key revelations as contained in the comparison above in so many different and opposing ways. It can be argued that the message of Christianity is fiercely logical, is internally consistent, and is self-authenticating in the lives of true Believers.<sup>9</sup> It must of course be readily acknowledged that true Christian Believers may not always see eye to eye on every theological issue within Christianity. In point of fact the apostle Paul does seem to have made provision for this by acknowledging that the church is analogous to a body, with many parts, but still living in harmony with itself: **Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage;**

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<sup>9</sup> Some Christian denominations resist the pull of logic and prefer to emphasise the mystical traditions of Christianity. Providing that these traditions do not run counter to clear biblical teaching, there seems to be no harm in exploring these mystical dimensions of God’s revelation.

**if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.** (Romans 12:4–8).

Whilst the above seems to talk of individual church communities, the lesson of diversity can surely be applied to the wider church and by extension to the so-called denominations. Western Christians sometimes consider it to be a strength, rather than a weakness, that God has allowed and empowered a broad church — providing that this broad church treads a narrow doctrinal path. Looking again at the comparisons set out above, it is a fair comment that the biblical truths set out would be gladly acknowledged by the vast majority of practicing Christians, no matter their denominational affiliations. The glaring inconsistencies demonstrated by comparing biblical Christianity with the beliefs of *the religions*, even allowing that we are only able in such a short discourse to highlight a summary of these classic religious beliefs, means that either the Godists' 'god' is inconsistent and therefore not to be trusted, or that *the religions* are in fact 'external noise' that clutter the clear and simple message of the gospel. A 'god' who, it must be argued, callously and carelessly fails to harmonise even the basic tenets of faith and of peace among the majority of the people who inhabit this planet, cannot warrant the title 'good'. It is for Godists to demonstrate otherwise.

