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We have sought to analyse and deconstruct ideas that travel under the title of Godism, as we have defined it. This may seem to some readers to have had a negative tone, yet it is hoped that it has been positive insofar that we have looked at the beautiful nature of Almighty God, and have begun to explore the wonderful attributes of God and how these attributes combine perfectly and sublimely in the person and works of Jesus the Messiah. It is hoped that readers have themselves been blessed by looking to God, for ultimately there is no better place to fix our gaze. The focus of our book shifts in this final chapter to explore a subject that must have been at the back of the minds of many readers. Given that Jesus is, as He has said, *the way, the truth and the life*, then precisely what should a Christian's attitude be to the 'great faith systems' of the world? It is this author's view that Christians need to begin by recognizing that Jesus commands that we should love all people, even our enemies, and the apostle Paul taught that we should live peaceably with all men so far as the initiative lies with us (see Romans 12:18). After all, God has been very patient with us — He patiently waits for us to become more like His Son. He patiently takes us through the long process that

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theologians call sanctification which, in New Testament terms, has in mind the truth that at conversion a believer is ‘set apart’ and then, insofar as we are yielded¹ to the Holy Spirit, we are progressively made holy by God. This is not, it should be added, a self-reformation, rather it is an activity of God with which we are to co-operate. So there is an initial sanctification when we are born again, followed by a progressive sanctification through which we become more like Christ and our lives become more holy. In a ‘normal’ Christian life this process will be ongoing.

The challenge of interacting with other cultures and other religions is not as new as we might think. Certainly in the Roman world, where our New Testament was given to us, there were many religions and many ‘gods’. It is noteworthy that the Christian religion, that *Way* referred to by Jesus, was not accepted alongside *the religions* of the early New Testament period as just another set of religious people with just another ‘god’. From the beginning, Christianity was perceived as something different, both by its adherents and by its persecutors. Suffering through persecution would become a hallmark of the Christian church and the Christian life (see Appendix 5 in this regard). It is in the book of Acts that we see how the early *body of Christ* — His church — was persecuted, almost from the very beginning. Attacks against the church began in Jerusalem but were, from the antagonists’ viewpoint, ultimately counterproductive and merely scattered the church far and wide throughout the Roman Empire. In this, Christians see God’s providential hand at work. The gospel message continued to be preached, and the good news of peace with God through Jesus who

¹ ‘Yielded’ is a very passive term. By ‘yielded’ we simply mean the openness of the Christian to the Holy Spirit and our associated determination to work with Him and not to grieve Him. Christians should be daily asking for the infilling of the Holy Spirit so that we can live, quite simply, Spirit filled lives.

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is Lord of all (see Acts 10:36) was paramount. The apostle Peter affirmed that all the [Hebrew] prophets testify about Jesus, and everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name (Acts 10:43). In Acts 17, having experienced persecution, the apostle Paul has been escorted to Athens, that most cosmopolitan of ancient cities. Waiting for friends to join him, Paul was ‘greatly distressed’ to see that the city was full of idols (see Acts 17:16). No doubt today some Godists would be pleased to see a city full of idols and shrines as ‘valid’ expressions of their deity!

Paul’s reaction to this ‘distressing’ situation is instructive to the church of today. Monotheism would be at the very heart of Paul’s (Jewish) mind and teaching, and rightly so. Idol worship is forbidden in the Scriptures.² But rather than beginning by berating the clearly false religions of his day, Paul invited his listeners and critics to consider Jesus. Today, a Christian’s task and mission is to preach the gospel of righteousness: repentance, and faith in Jesus, crucified for us, and risen from the dead. We really have little to say about religions except, perhaps, to examine where they differ from the Way. We must start, as did Paul, from where people are and not from where we might want them to be. In wishing that circumstances were different, ‘we are where we are’ is a phrase often heard (with a sigh) in business and government as people face awkward situations, often with a history of mishap behind them! The same idea is used by Paul in Acts 17. Invited to speak at the Areopagus (Athenians loved new ideas and debate, and were happy to have Paul present his case in this important public debating chamber) Paul opens his address with the pertinent observation that the Athenians

² We explored in chapters 3 and 4 of this book God’s condemnation of idol worship.

are in every way very religious people. They had many ‘gods’, each with their own set of shrines but, worried that they might have failed to discern some deity that needed to be assuaged, the Athenians had an altar dedicated TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Paul focused on this idea of an unknown deity as he said: **“That which you worship, then, even though you do not know it, is what I now proclaim to you”** (Acts 17:23, GNB). He went on to tell his listeners of the Creator God who needs nothing from human beings. This God, he told them, is not far from any of us: **God, who made the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by human hands. Nor does he need anything that we can supply by working for him, since it is he himself who gives life and breath and everything else to everyone.**

From one human being he created all races on earth and made them live throughout the whole earth. He himself fixed beforehand the exact times and the limits of the places where they would live. He did this so that they would look for him, and perhaps find him as they felt about for him. Yet God is actually not far from any one of us; as someone has said, “In him we live and move and exist.” It is as some of your poets have said, “We too are his children.” Since we are God’s children, we should not suppose that his nature is anything like an image of gold or silver or stone, shaped by human art and skill. God has overlooked the times when people did not know him, but now he commands all of them everywhere to turn away from their evil ways. For he has fixed a day in which he will judge the whole world with justice by means of a man he has chosen. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from death!” (Acts 17:24–31, GNB)

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Crucially, Paul was honest about the fact that in the past God had overlooked the ignorance of humans worshipping in pagan religions. No doubt a Godist today would want to assure the Athenians that their beliefs and shibboleths were valid expressions of deity which would help to instil godly values and help them to discern a godly concept of compassion. Indeed this passage in Acts is sometimes proffered by ‘liberal’ Christians as evidence that Paul was reconciled to ‘other religions’. That interpretation reads too much into what is recorded of Paul’s speech, however. Starting from where they were in terms of spiritual understanding, Paul simply pointed to the Creator God, of Whom the Athenians also wanted to be known as sons and daughters. ‘We too are his children’ was their assessment — but it was not necessarily God’s assessment!³ Either way, the offer of new life was made by Paul, based on the proof of Jesus’ body having been raised from the dead.

We need only to look again at the sublime teaching of Jesus to know that dialogue and gentleness are hallmarks of true Christianity. No one is forced into the Kingdom of God. The choice for all men remains today as it has been for 2,000 years: *to live* (in Him) or *not to live* (in Him). Blessed are the meek, said Jesus in Matthew chapter 5, for the meek will inherit the earth. Being meek does not mean lacking in courage to share the truth of Jesus, and its attendant choice to live (in Him) or not to live (in Him) which all humans must make. Meekness does not involve a failure to share truth because of a fear of causing offence! Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy, said Jesus. Christians are to be merciful with those of *the*

³ All humans are made in the image of God, but they are, it is suggested, *not* His children until adopted into His family by grace, through faith in Jesus, God’s Son.

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religions as much as to those of no religious beliefs, for all these alike are made in the image of God. Blessed are the peacemakers, said Jesus, for they will be called sons of God. We are to witness to all people who will accept it concerning the peace that passes all understanding — that peace which only Jesus, the Prince of Peace, can impart. Blessed, said Jesus, are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. ‘Righteousness’ is not a word much loved by this world (with its false idea of self-righteousness and all that flows from that). Those who follow Jesus will face persecution. Those who persecute only serve to show that Jesus was right.

Christian believers have the great commission to make disciples. It is hard to see how that could be achieved without talking with those of the various religions (as did Paul). Clearly, Paul had an accurate idea of what their idol worship amounted to. He would have had no illusions! But we noted above that in Athens Paul did not engage his hearers with an immediate, direct discussion about all the false religion he found. Rather, his witness was to what God had done in creating all things and in raising Jesus from the dead. Paul’s focus is on the mighty acts of the only true and living God. That proved to be challenging for Paul’s hearers who could quickly work out that their idols or deities had no voice, had never created anything, and certainly had no connection with resurrection! To find the right starting point for witness will require great sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, a clear understanding of what God has done for us, and a love for the person who is in the grip of another religion or belief system. Sometimes personal testimony is appropriate. Intellectual ‘head to head’ debate, though, is rarely fruitful unless, like Paul, one has a special call and (spiritual) gifting for teaching scriptural truths.

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Sometimes people will genuinely ask serious questions about how Christian beliefs differ from those of *the religions*. If this is genuine seeking for the true God, then it has to be a good thing and Christians should wisely and politely explain what the Bible has to say. In the post-Christian culture of the West, and particularly in the UK with its so-called ‘religious hatred’ legislation, there seems to be a willingness on the part of (mainly left-wing) central and local government and increasingly politically correct business corporations to muzzle any expression of orthodox Christianity, on the dubious pretext of protecting people from ‘offence’. Strangely, it seems that others can offend Christians with impunity, and this is because, it is said, Christians are a dominant majority who need no protection! Christians need to be wise, then, in interpreting questions and conversation from at least some quarters, as there is increasing evidence of the willingness of people with a *hidden agenda* to engage in normal discussion about current affairs, invite discussion on religious matters, conduct and conclude these discussions on friendly terms, and later to return and claim they have been offended or feel harassed! In the UK of the early twenty-first century, Government advice on the interpretation of such difficulties appears (at the time of writing this book) to confirm that the perceptions of the person claiming to have been offended or harassed ‘shall be paramount’. It is sad that Britain’s once proud claim to be a nation of free speech is genuinely under threat from what some observers have suggested is a shift from a democracy to a ‘victimocracy’.⁴

Still, in spite of the foregoing, Christians should be will-

⁴ For example, see David Green’s short book called *We’re Nearly All Victims Now! How Political Correctness Is Undermining Our Liberal Culture* (Civitas – ISBN 1-903386-53-5, 2006).

ing and pleased to tell others about Jesus, for that is what He wants of us. We are to be His *witnesses*. We remember again the *great commission* of Jesus to His church, to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:19f). Note that the Lord Jesus said we were to teach people to obey *everything* He had commanded. This seems to preclude any idea that we tell people only what they want to hear or things that will not offend them. We remind ourselves once more that the Christian gospel is a ‘scandal’ to some (see chapter 12) and that, through the witness and preaching of believers, the good news of Jesus will spread everywhere. To some that gospel will be a fragrance of life. To others it will be the stench of death (2 Corinthians 2:14–16). To those who *are perishing*, the good news of Jesus will be fearful, and will have about it the stench of eternal separation from God (death). We can readily see that the good news can be to some people an absolute scandal! Yet it is that very uncomfortableness, that notion of a God Who has died for each one of us, if only we accept it, that encourages so many people to respond by undertaking those three basic steps of ‘A, B and C’ — to recognize or **A**dmit their need of Jesus, repenting before Him for their sins; to **B**elieve in Him; and to **C**ommit their lives and futures to Him. From scandal to joy in three easy (or, in reality, not so easy) steps!

So talking to others of whatever religion can be good. It is essential for witness and communicating the word of truth. Without it, people often live with fears, uncertainties and misconceptions about their neighbours. They may well be living with erroneous views of the Christian gospel. How can faulty perceptions be corrected if people are

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unable and unwilling to converse? This has to be done in love. Scripture uses a number of different words which are translated in English 'love'. Here we mean 'agape' love, which has the very best eternal interests of the other person at heart. In humility but with confidence that we know the One of Whom we speak, we are to have compassion on those who know nothing of the life we have been privileged to begin to experience for ourselves. If people will not accept the good news of Jesus, then ultimately that is their decision. But if our witness can help even one lost soul to come into the kingdom, with all its benefits and promises, any embarrassment, discomfort or inconvenience (or even persecution) is worthwhile.

Jesus gave His *great commission* to His church, and this of course begins with your own life: your primary responsibility is to go on believing in Jesus and go on walking in obedience to Him, your Lord and Saviour. Jesus' invitation, His teaching, His promises are always personal — addressed to you, His disciple and witness! The apostle Peter affirmed the personal responsibility of each human to respond as he told he crowds in Jerusalem in Acts 2:40 to save themselves from their sinful generation. That clarion call has come down with the church for the past two thousand years. To some, the call is a fragrance of life. To all too many it is a fragrance of death. We still need to tell the good news of salvation and the bad news of eternal loss and hell. (Jesus spoke as much about hell as He did about heaven.⁵) Jesus' disciples in this dark world must point to the one true Light; they must highlight the truth that the (only) way to the Father is through Jesus, warn of eternal

⁵ It is important to note that our Lord's warnings were often addressed to his disciples, as much as to the world at large. Protestant Christians often fail to note this, presuming that all is well and will continue to be well in their relationship with God.

dangers, and proclaim the joyful possibility of eternal life. A Christian's task is to witness to and preach Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead. God the Father draws people towards Jesus (see John 6:44f.) and God the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgement (see John 16:8).

Questions and answers

We have already noted that it is not always appropriate for Christian believers to tackle head on the beliefs of *the religions* or those of no faith, but that sincere questions should be welcomed when they come from the genuine seeking of someone who really wants to know God. The Gospels provide examples of those who were genuinely seeking God. They asked Jesus questions, which He handled with the very greatest wisdom and understanding. He knew where people really are (or, as is often said today) where they were 'coming from'. Other questions, though, were mere trickery, designed to set traps, and they got some very different (but again, of course, immensely wise) answers which challenged their twisted, wicked opposition to the Lord. Had those questioners been open to the truth, they could have learnt from Jesus, and their stony hearts could have been changed. Some of the conventionally 'religious' establishment came with questions which were, to say the least, mischievous or worse. Jesus knew what was in their hearts as He uttered exactly the right words for each encounter. But how can we know? How can we have such wisdom when we have 'dialogue' with unbelievers? Quite simply, we need the Word and the Spirit. We must know and believe our Bible, accepting its divine inspiration; and we must go on being filled with the Holy Spirit, and constantly asking God for wisdom and discernment in

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everything we say. Of course this is true in the whole of life, but the need is especially obvious in the situations we have in mind here. We need to know, as Jesus did, where others are ‘coming from’ — what is in their spirit. Are they open to the truth? Are they truly seeking the one true God? The answer begins with guarding your own walk with the Lord, ensuring there is no unconfessed sin, letting your attitude to others be like that of Christ Jesus. Then: pray before meetings; pray before speaking; do not say what is not clearly testified in the Bible. Listen constantly to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you (which will only ever be words that glorify Jesus). Without the in-filling and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the resources of a good knowledge of the written Word, you are going into situations of dialogue without essential equipping!

Turning now to the opportunities for dialogue today, one could say that it is ironic indeed that the so-called religious hatred legislation in the UK (and perhaps elsewhere) is likely to chill openness, make dialogue less likely and lead to greater misunderstanding. Truly, politicians can often achieve the exact reverse of what they purport to want. In the UK in their claimed attempt to prevent ‘harassment’ of minorities our politicians seem actively to want to chill open discussion between adherents of different faiths. There must be a residual suspicion in the UK that some politicians, at least, have deliberately framed legislation in an attempt to cut the UK further adrift from its Christian roots. In this they are surely, we would argue, aided and abetted by some of the media and in particular the BBC (see our Foreword).⁶

⁶ In July 2008 the BBC screened a drama series called *Bonekickers* with a plot line in one episode of ‘extremist Christians’ beheading a moderate Muslim. A year later the BBC Trust, a group of ‘independent’ trustees supposedly working in the public interest, rejected public complaints. By implication this made Christianity fair game for this sort of treatment by the BBC. It is perhaps superfluous to add that other religions would never be treated in such a way.

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Some religions, or at least their more vocal members, demand ‘respect’, and some politicians connive at this demand. The Oxford dictionary definition of respect is *deferential esteem*. This has to be a dangerous aspiration in an open society. Could it be said that Jesus ‘respected’ the scribes and Pharisees? Did Paul show ‘respect’ for the idolaters of Athens? Certainly Jesus and Paul (led by the Spirit) knew exactly where their hearers stood. Their words indicated that they had no intention of somehow using force to make their questioners or interlocutors change their minds; yet, needless to say, we can be certain that neither Jesus nor the apostle entertained any notion that man’s idolatry itself could have the slightest scrap of validity. Again, needless to say, any true Christian today would hold precisely that position in his or her heart, mind and spirit. We can only ever see idolatry and the worship of other gods as abhorrent and deceptive, holding souls in darkness and captivity from which we know that the word of truth will bring release when there is a response of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We respect, as the Son of God did, and as the apostle did, the responsibility of the other human being to choose. We acknowledge their freedom to decide for themselves. We would be lying if we pretended to respect *beliefs* which we believe to be both false and dangerously misleading.

Respect, we remind ourselves, is something that has to be earned, it can never be a right. Certain politicians who are fond of demanding respect for what they see as ‘victim groups’, are themselves willing to be grossly disrespectful of other groups with which they disagree. We are hardly surprised that Christians are increasingly persecuted all around the world. Jesus foretold such persecution.

We believe that God has given men and women freewill,

including the freedom to accept or reject the claims of Christ. The New Testament certainly does not deny, cover up or gloss over the fact that there are differences between Christians and others. So we should not be beguiled by the ‘respect’ slogan into denying differences, especially as between *the religions*.

Returning to our discussion of dialogue, and bearing in mind the biblical material we have considered, it needs to be said that we should be realistic about the likelihood of disagreement. But disagreement does not have to mean that people part on bad terms. Disagreement is not, *ipso facto*, a bad thing. The right kind of respect (i.e. respecting others’ right to choose) surely means that we should be able to disagree in an open and caring way, without undue fear of offence. People may be saddened or frustrated that they cannot agree, but should certainly not be offended. We really do need to be seen to set an example as we speak and relate to others.

A dialogue of ever closer union?

Freedom of religion is affirmed in the terms of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18(b). That should inhibit governments from restricting our liberty to preach, teach and witness to everything in Scripture. Yet this freedom, as we have noted, is under real threat. Christians affirm this right. Do others? This right is enshrined in international law but is increasingly breached in various parts of the world.

In everything, we should exhibit a humble confidence in Jesus, noting carefully the words the apostle Peter uses: **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear**

conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (1 Peter 3:15f, NIV).

The word rendered ‘respect’ is translated as reverence in the NRSV, as in the older RSV. A literal translation of the New Testament Greek for ‘gentleness and respect’ would be ‘meekness and fear’, but the NIV, GNB, RSV etc are surely closer to the mark in today’s parlance. ‘Meekness’ can be misunderstood, and the word ‘fear’ may also be misunderstood in this context. But it is quite clear that we should have a humble confidence in the good news of Jesus.

The idea that all religions are true and equally valid is not as ‘tolerant’ as those who propound this philosophy like to think. It is actually rather arrogant, when the adherents of those religions all say something which (as we have shown) is very different. The biblical response to the syncretistic and/or Godist view has been examined at length in this book, but we affirm again that a correct scriptural response must inevitably be (a) Jesus is God (John 8:58f); (b) Jesus is Saviour (1 Timothy 2:5f; Acts 4:12); (c) Jesus is alive. Whilst all three points will be controversial as regards other religions, Christians see Jesus’ resurrection (and consequently His being alive today) as His guarantee that our final enemy – death – has been defeated and trampled underfoot.

Dialogue leading towards ever closer religious union is an aim held by some Godists, but, unrealistic as that regrettable aim may be, it is nonetheless likely that pressure will build through the EU and the UN for *the religions* to align, in return for which there may be increasing levels of state support, direct and via NGOs,⁷ as well as concessions

⁷ EU = European Union; UN = United Nations; NGO = non governmental organisations

made at political level — especially in the UN, where some nations and religions are beginning to learn that they can pursue partisan religious agendas as well as partisan national agendas. The UN lent its name and support to the United Religions Initiative (URI), a pressure group, so as to support financially the URI's *International Year of Reconciliation* in 2009. In chapter 13 we noted that the Bible points towards a coming global religion under the Antichrist. Religions are likely to cooperate with these developments, either through coercion by the state or by the allure of worldly rewards.

A more likely scenario than *dialogue towards union*, surely, is suggested by 2 Timothy 4:4–6. Here the apostle tells Timothy plainly that he should be prepared ‘in season and out of season’ (or more prosaically *whether the time is right or not* in the words of the GNB translation) to share the good news of Jesus, and to make the most of the present opportunity because a time will come when people will reject sound doctrine:

I solemnly urge you to preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience. The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own desires and will collect for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear. They will turn away from listening to the truth and give their attention to legends. (GNB).

Since Western society is today throwing off what it sees as the yoke of Christianity it will certainly want something of a religious nature to replace it. If *the religions* generally are facing political pressure as well as pressure from the average man (and woman) in the street, then perhaps the time will seem to many to be ripe for some new religion

that appears to unite or absorb the world's older religions. But the key point made by Paul to Timothy is that people will 'gather around them' a 'great number' of teachers, who will tell them exactly what they want to hear.⁸ Politicians will be all too ready to fall in line with this new religious teaching. Are they, even today, gathering around them just such 'teachers'? And if so, is this a case of the blind leading the blind? (Matthew 15:14).

Honesty: can Christianity interact with *the religions* outside of a multi-faith agenda?

In spite of the dangers suggested in the previous section, Christians should remain committed to spending time with non-Christians, listening to their questions and exercising spiritual wisdom and discernment. This leaves room and opportunity to bear witness to unbelievers, and our model should always be the manner in which Jesus and the apostles related to people (rather than some modern, secular models of dialogue). In chapter 1 we explored that popular and rather desperate idea that by aligning *the religions*, peace and compassion might prevail. Such an outcome will never emerge. Politicians are apt to announce 'peace' when it does not exist. In Britain we remember with sadness Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returning to London from Munich in 1938 and waving a scrap of paper over his head with the fervent announcement of 'peace in our time' — on the eve of the Second World War. The duplicity of mankind in its quest for peace on its terms, whilst simultaneously denying that most basic cause of conflict — sin — is revealed

⁸ The point is well made that the context in which Paul wrote his warnings to Timothy was that of the church itself. The world at large is always willing to gather to itself teachers who will tell them what they want to hear. It is a double tragedy when it is church people who eagerly gather teachers who refuse to preach 'sound doctrine'.

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by the prophet Jeremiah, with acerbic accuracy:

**From the least to the greatest,
all are greedy for gain;
prophets and priests alike,
all practice deceit.
They dress the wound of my people
as though it were not serious.
'Peace, peace,' they say,
when there is no peace.**

(Jeremiah 6:13–14)

This has ever been true. The love of gain is paramount in the hearts of ungodly men and women. Sometimes even prophets and priests practice deceit — and this was certainly true in the time of Jeremiah. All too often today we see even churchmen saying that sin is not sin ‘as though it were not serious’. Sins today are explained away by circumstances and upbringing. And what was once thought of as sin is today celebrated. Alongside politicians, at least some clergy are wont to announce peace with the world, whether it is by finding peace with our sins, or in telling us that war will one day, through our own efforts, become a distant memory. They forget, perhaps, that it was Jesus Himself who warned of wars and rumours of wars (see Matthew 24:6–7) until the end comes. When warfare is absent, we are forever fearing the next war — and with some justification. Politicians will always be announcing peace, for in many respects that is part of their job description. For politicians to, as they see it, create peace between religions may for a short time enable them to announce ‘peace, peace’. But they will create a peace of their imagining, just as so many people today create a God of their own imagining, which

surely is the ultimate outcome of Godism.

In passing we note that it is rather sad to see encounters between *the religions* where children are involved as, for example, in multi-faith services or other multi-faith enterprises, for young children are easily swayed. The danger is that the ‘difficult’ parts of *the religions* are swept under the proverbial carpet, and the endeavour is always to find ‘common ground’ or some *golden rule* of compassion.

What Jesus requires of us

We have deployed many arguments in this book which challenge and question the Godist position. We have especially challenged the Godist philosophy where it is expounded from within the church. Readers will not be surprised to learn, perhaps, that we have only begun to explore the heart of God on this matter — the God so clearly revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. There are certainly many other ‘arguments’ that could be deployed, but there is a sense in which there comes a time when enough has been said. If people have neither understood nor accepted the position set out in this book, then in all probability they are unlikely to do so, and so further arguments are superfluous. The idea that all the (supposedly ‘higher’) religions are of God will not withstand the test of Christian Scripture. Jesus’ comments in Mark 4:11–12 and 7:6 are both instructive and a clear warning to us today. In explaining the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1–20) Jesus affirmed that the secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to ‘you’. He meant the twelve disciples but the comment is for all His disciples down through time. But to ‘those on the outside’, those with stiff necks who are determined not to yield to Him:

**“ . . . they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
and ever hearing but never understanding;
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”**

Jesus was quoting Isaiah 6:9–10.⁹ There are religious people who ‘search’ for God, but ignore the great salvation that He has provided. They ‘search’ for Him in religions, but only frustrate themselves. They look in philosophy, in education, in the writings of non-Christian religions; they even convolute sex and religion, and search in the occult. People determined not to yield to Jesus will look directly at Him but not perceive Him, and they will hear the good message of salvation, but not understand. It is sad, but true.

The God-given task of Christians is to witness to others about our crucified, risen, living Lord Jesus Christ, and we are to pray fervently for people to hear and understand, repent, and believe in Him. We must do this faithfully and persistently in obedience to our Lord.

It is sometimes inside the church that great danger lies. We find people who have been exposed to teaching about Jesus,¹⁰ but then say that He is only one of a number of paths. Is there is some unrepented sin, some area in which these people are unwilling to yield to Jesus?

Our primary responsibility is to cooperate with God in His saving work in us, but it is not a case of ‘every man for himself’ spiritually. In witnessing for Jesus we will encounter difficulty, opposition and persecution — even,

⁹ The apostle Paul quoted the same passage in Acts 28:23–28.

¹⁰ The point is fairly made that in some churches where, sadly, unsound doctrine is preached, there will be Christians who have not genuinely been exposed to all that Jesus has to offer. Nevertheless, even to Christians who have not been fed a good or nourishing spiritual diet, the claims of Jesus will generally ring loud and clear. They cannot easily shrug them off in their dalliance with Godism.

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for some, to the point of death.¹¹ But witness we must, for that is what He has commanded, and indeed Christians love to do this, because He is so good and, no matter what the question, spiritually speaking, He is the answer.

The encounter with the rich young ruler is instructive (see Luke 18:18–30). Jesus recognized what was holding back this otherwise respectable man from becoming part of the Kingdom of God; it was his money, his wealth. Some are held back from entering the Kingdom of God because, rather than loving Jesus, they love ‘religion’ (or even religions). Unwilling to lay these aside, like the rich young ruler, they go away, sad. Knowing and quoting the Bible does not make a person a Christian. Even the devil quotes Scripture (see Luke 4:4–12). The devil’s tactic is to lead us to query or doubt what God has said. (‘Did God really say...?’ has been the devil’s lie throughout history, see Genesis 3:1.) And today there are people even in the church who doubt the claims of Jesus to be the way, the truth and the life. It is interesting that those who publicly doubt what Jesus said on this are also those most likely within the church to doubt what the Scriptures declare for example, on sexual ethics. The devil always offers us the mirage of being ‘like God’ in perceiving ‘new’ religious teachings at variance with what Scripture actually says. That many would be deceived in the end times is something about which Jesus Himself warned (see, for example, Matthew 7:15ff, Matthew 24:24f). That there is a stumbling block preventing people from yielding to Jesus is also made clear in scripture. It is man’s hatred of Jesus (see John 15:18). Mankind, the apostle John noted, loved darkness (see John 3:19f); so many detest the Man who is the light of the world (see John 8:12 and John 12:46).

¹¹ Jesus was candid about what it would ‘cost’ to follow Him. See Matthew 8:18; 10:21–31 and 38. Also Matthew 16:24–28.

This world, as we have noted before, is not anti ‘god’. This world is anti-Christ.

Drawing to a close

That Jesus was born to die from before the creation of the world is scripturally accepted (see Revelation 13:8). That God foresaw the need for a Saviour and gave His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, is also scripturally clear (see Hebrews 2:9–18). Sin must be atoned for, and Jesus is that atonement.¹² Normally kings expect their people to die for them, but King Jesus died for His people. To become part of His Kingdom, however, I need to have a relationship with *Him*, and one vital aspect of that relationship is that I become His disciple; He is my Teacher. As we go through life, Jesus teaches us how to live and sends His Holy Spirit to empower us. Repentance is vital. The call to repent of my sins and believe (and go on believing) in Jesus has always been an integral, essential part of the preaching and witness of Christians. God the Father welcomes into His Kingdom those who repent, believe in and love His Son, Jesus Christ, and follow Him obediently. Having turned from sin, they follow Him in His strength and not their own. They owe all to Him. *Christianity is not so much a religion as a relationship* —like a loving relationship of a child to parent. We recognise that this statement may bring some pain to those who have never enjoyed such a relationship. To such readers we would only say this: whatever you may

¹² The atonement is a huge subject. Readers may want to look at this as a separate study. In summary: atonement is an English composite word meaning reconciliation (i.e. at-one-ment, but this does not mean unified ontologically, there is always a distinction between man and God). The word atonement translates in the Old Testament from the word ‘kaphar’ – to cover. Meaning thereby that sins were covered by the blood of the sacrifice, and that the sinner and God had become reconciled. Today in theology, the word atonement has come to include the whole theme of redemption through the blood of Christ.

THE EMPTY PROMISE OF GODISM

have missed out on in terms of earthly relationships, you *can* most certainly enjoy a loving relationship with God through Jesus, and with His Holy Spirit living in you. Taste and see that the Lord is good!

That the Christian church often does not look very Christ-like must be acknowledged. When we invite people to follow Jesus, or to ‘convert’, to use a slightly old fashioned word, we are not inviting them to convert from one religion to another ‘religion’. Rather, as people respond in repentance and faith in Jesus, God converts sinners from their sin so that they can have the righteousness which comes from God, the righteousness of Jesus rather than depending on their own (supposed) ‘righteousness’. Jesus converts people from their love of self (selfishness and self-centeredness) to love for Him, because of His work — His suffering and saving death for them on the Cross at Golgotha. Where people of *the religions*, and indeed of no religion whatsoever, have a genuine encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, and repent, believe and determine to faithfully follow Him as their Lord and Saviour, they are born again; and they find themselves to be part of His body, the church. Sometimes converts must exercise caution, and sometimes there will be physical danger, but sooner or later God will provide the opportunity for them to have fellowship with other true believers. Whether an institution or not, this fellowship becomes church. Public and faithful witness to Jesus must be done in the world at large, but also must be done in the context of a body of believers.¹³

The choice, then, for all people is basic and simple: eternal life (in Jesus Christ) or rejection of His offer of forgiveness and new life. Godism, that philosophy which

¹³ Again the subject of the church is a huge one! Readers may want to look at this as a separate study.

DIALOGUE

holds that all religions are valid expressions of deity, might seem superficially to offer a promise, but the promise is a chimera. It is a false promise and indeed a promise broken before it is even expressed. People face many empty promises in this life, why should their hopes be raised with yet another one? God has made Himself known, through Jesus, and invites us to live — in Him.

