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# GODISM — A NEW PHENOMENON?

### **Godism Defined**

To this point in the book we have focused on the early revelation of God to His world through His chosen people. We should by now have a sense that God, as revealed in the Holy Bible and in personal experience, is consistent. He has made Himself known, and on His attributes we can depend. He means business — both with His chosen people and with the wider world. His attitude is not *laissez faire*. We have begun to see that this is the God Who takes the initiative; in principle we do not so much have to ‘discover’ Him as to respond to His self-disclosure. And we have begun to understand, it is hoped, that God does indeed have an absolute claim to that vast title of ‘good’ in spite of some genuine difficulties in our understanding of the way that He has sometimes chosen to act in history — what some people (wrongly) consider to be the ‘bad’ bits in the Holy Bible. Up to this point we have studiously avoided attempting to make a final definition of Godism although we have made a few clear observations about the phenomenon as well as posing some specific questions:

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- Is the Godists' god-focus or god-centric, god-positive but (selectively) religion-negative view of the deity correct?
- We use a small 'g' in speaking of the Godist 'god' because at its best it is simply a collection of ideas about the Eternal — and at its worst is inexcusably woolly thinking on the subject.
- A Godist is someone who believes that there are many paths to god and that no one religion holds all the answers.
- It is a debatable point as to whether human philosophies about God can ever be right, especially when they clash with His disclosure of Himself.
- For those sold on the idea of Godism, or even flirting with Godism, there are some uncomfortable and difficult questions that must be faced by anyone with any real integrity in this debate.
- There is real evidence that the whole idea of Godism is actually repugnant to God Himself, and that belief in Godism takes people further away from God, not closer to Him.
- According to Godist philosophy 'god', whoever 'he' or 'it' is, wants us all to live in harmony: our individual beliefs matter far less than the way that we conduct our lives. Concepts such as sin and salvation, if they are to be accepted at all, need to be reinterpreted and constantly updated to fit with the complex and diverse world in which we live.
- Only serious misdemeanours, offences against our fellows when we should observe a 'Golden Rule' of compassion, will achieve God's displeasure.

On this latter point about a ‘Golden Rule’ it is unlikely that all Godists would agree simply because at this stage in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the concept remains relatively novel. Godism, as with so many aspects of religion, defies easy definition to the extent that there will be many variances and many differing interpretations of the same basic theological data. That is why theology can never be a science in the deterministic and empirical sense that we understand the concept of science. We regularly think of science as a mechanism for achieving a thorough and truthful — and therefore exclusive — understanding of ‘natural’ mechanisms. Despite this there are enough similarities within the broad Godist approach that mean we can posit a definition that should be robust enough to withstand the inevitable changes and evolutions in this overall rather vague concept — a concept that can indeed accommodate diverse and even opposed views. In this overall attempt at a definition we find ourselves having first to define Godism by defining what it is not, because there are other theological concepts that are close to and overlap with Godism:

***Theism*** is a belief in the existence of God and gods and especially the idea that this God or ‘gods’ reveals Himself to His creatures. Theism represents a philosophical position not to be identified with any particular religion. But theistic lines of thought do develop within the established ‘religions’ — so some people speak of Hindu or Christian Theists.

***Deism*** is a belief in the existence of a supreme being arising from reason rather than revelation. Deism is both a religious and philosophical belief that a supreme ‘god’ exists which created the physical universe and that religious truths can be arrived at by the application of reason and observation of the natural world. Deists generally reject the notion of supernatural revelation as a basis of truth or religious dogma.

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These views contrast with the focus on divine revelation found in Christian, Islamic and Judaic teachings. Deists typically reject supernatural events (prophecy, miracles) and tend to assert that 'god' has a plan for the universe which 'he' or 'it' does not alter either by intervening in the affairs of human life or suspending the natural laws of the universe. What organized religions see as divine revelation and holy books, Deists see as interpretations made by other humans, rather than as authoritative sources.

**Monism** is any philosophical view which holds that there is unity in a given field of inquiry, where this is not to be expected. So, some philosophers hold that theology may support the view that there is one God, with many manifestations in different religions.

**Holistic Gnoseology** holds that only a global approach to reality, by means of a global knowledge, are people able to understand the truth. Holistic gnoseology is therefore a general way to achieve a supposed deeper and comprehensive reality.

It will be seen immediately that there are far too many 'isms' in this world! In the study of religions (or theology) there are a bewildering range of and ultimately innumerable number of belief systems. We mention the above simply as being the more prominent among them. Since Godism shares beliefs with each of the above philosophies, we spend a short moment now to explain why none of the above completely coincides with Godism. So, with Theism there is a belief in a 'god' or 'gods' and the comforting idea that this 'god' is involved in some emotional way in 'his' or 'its' creation. The idea of creation in Theism is a rather vague one. A Godist would hold these views but add that God is not holy and not completely moral in the sense that we

understand those concepts.<sup>1</sup> Theism would not necessarily be so bold.

A Godist would share with a Deist that God can be discovered through reason, although the Godist would add that this is not the sole means of an authentic encounter with the Eternal. And of course Godists, like Theists, believe that God is (by and large) actively involved in ‘his’ or ‘its’ creation project whereas Deists do not.

The idea of unity as espoused by Monism is one that is certainly shared by Godists but Monism alone does not cover all the beliefs of Godists. Godists do believe in a unity among *the religions*, in spite of powerful evidence to the contrary, and to that extent their beliefs may be described as containing elements of Monism. Global Gnoseology is also similar to Godism in that Godism rejects the absolute superiority in any of the ‘scriptures’ of any religion — in other words ‘god’ is to be discovered in all the religious writings of the so-called higher religions (and some of the lower ones, too). Godism therefore depends to some extent on Gnoseology — in other words Godists have a knowledge of these matters which is hidden from the singular adherents of the higher religions. Godists have gone further and faster than the devout of *the religions* and they have a special knowledge of these matters. It should be added that Godists do not believe in the total veracity of any of the ‘scriptures’ all of which they believe have been corrupted by humans, so again Godists have ‘seen’ a greater truth than that acknowledged by singular adherents of *the religions*.

Hopefully readers are following the argument so far! We will return to that unfortunate word Gnoseology at a later stage as Godism, when practiced by people who attend

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<sup>1</sup> The Godist idea of a good/evil god is explored in detail in chapters 6 and 7

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Christian churches, does bear alarming resemblance to Gnosticism, which was the earliest and most destructive of the heresies encountered by the First and Second century churches. Indeed it is probably true to say that Gnostic beliefs have infected the church like a virus all through its 2,000 year history in more — and less — virulent strains.

Godism, then, is a belief system that is not systematic! As with much of theology, what it actually means varies with its audience. Some will have more developed ideas of their beliefs towards ‘god’ and their relationship to ‘him’ or ‘it’. Godism shares or borrows beliefs of all the religious philosophies. It is God-centric, to the extent that it believes in a deity or deities which have an emotional interest in the mortal. Some Godists are adherents of particular religions but they are *religion-negative* to the extent that where religion gets in the way of the overall thrust of Godism (and it frequently does!) then the Godist is happy to bypass or trample the religion, which is not allowed to stand in the way of the overall belief.

Godism then sits happily with the Western politically correct idea that all religions are essentially the same and it does not matter what you believe providing (a) you are sincere and (b) you do not hold your belief with excessive conviction. That Godism itself is intolerant of exclusionary beliefs that *are* held with conviction does not as yet seem to have made any inroad into the self-confidence and self-belief (not to mention self-justification) of Godism as a philosophy. Godists in point of fact are just as intolerant as any religion, but they purport to be otherwise.

It is important to add, however, that Godism is not itself a religion. It is more a series of beliefs that can be highly developed and well thought-through, or just vague notions about ‘god’ and *the religions*. Godism seeks to draw out

and amplify a theme that is seen by Godists to run through all the (higher) religions. A Godist then is someone who believes that ‘god’ exists, that ‘he’ or ‘it’ cares in some way about this world (which ‘he’ or ‘it’ may also have created) and that ‘he’ or ‘it’ has established religions to help humans to encounter ‘him’ or ‘it’. All religions contain good and all contain bad: it is up to the individual to discern what is good and to ‘follow’ that. Sin and salvation are aspects of belief that may or may not be held, but the Godist believes that it is ‘god’s’ responsibility to ‘save’ or ‘justify’ people and that the vast majority will be so justified. They will be justified because this life is perplexing and ‘god’ has allowed it to be so, to the extent that it seems impossible to fully live the lifestyle called for by *any* religion. God, although loving in nature, brought sin into this world either by acts of commission or by acts of omission,<sup>2</sup> so ‘god’ is ultimately to blame for all the woes of this world. To that extent Godists hold their ‘god’ culpable and answerable, even if ‘he’ or ‘it’ in turn has the power and the authority also to hold us responsible. Godist belief is, therefore, in a sort of mutual accountability but where ‘god’ will have the final say. Although not all Godists would fully concur with every aspect of the foregoing, they remain god–positive and (selectively) religion–negative in the sense that they see ‘god’ as the ‘deity’ who is to be followed in order to make sense of this life and to live it as well as possible. The best way of doing that is by selecting one of ‘his’ or ‘its’ religions and following that as faithfully as we can. Where the religion is seen to promote views that sit unhappily with the Godist’s idea of what is right and wrong, then the religion must give way. This supposed situation of religion

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<sup>2</sup> We return to this idea in chapter 13.

interfering with ‘god’s’ wishes is seen as being pollution of the divine by the mortal — in other words, men have messed around with the revelations of the divine.

As a belief, this philosophy can be ‘systemised’ more or less at the whim of the individual. In other words the Godist belief may be held and modified pretty much at will. Providing there is an acknowledgement of the deity and an attempt to live by what is seen as being the *good revelations* contained in ‘god’s’ various self-disclosures, then all will be well. Godism borrows from other religious philosophies, and seeks to unify them overall. Whilst some Godists see themselves as having reached this series of conclusions by the application of reason, others would simply say that all religions lead to ‘god’ because it would be unfair if they did not. So, to varying degrees Godists hold the slightly arrogant view that they can ‘see’ more perceptively than those of no faith (agnostics or atheists) as well as more clearly than those of *the religions*, who are limited only perceive the ‘truths’ within their own dogma. Whether Godists consider this special knowledge that they have as being a gift from their ‘god’ is unclear. Again it probably boils down to the whim of the individual.

In this book we deliberately avoid engaging in too much philosophy, or in trying to describe the higher religions and their associated philosophies. Readers who want to look more deeply into this will find material on the internet (generally not quality controlled, so be careful!) and in other types of religious study material. The author finds the later printed editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* useful as a high quality overview — with at least the knowledge that the overall *Britannica* enterprise is rigorously quality controlled in a scholarly sense. But philosophy and theology are ultimately dead-ends. If God is moral then we have a

right to assume that He will have disclosed Himself in ways that we can comprehend and in ways that do not mislead. If God is not moral, even when measured against man's faulty standards of morality, then it is questionable whether further philosophical study of Him will yield good or valuable results for humankind. As, in this book, we work through the issues raised by Godism, we will inevitably posit challenging questions to its philosophy as well as highlight its inconsistencies. We will also continue to review God's self disclosure as revealed in the Christian Scriptures — what we continue to call the Old and New Testaments, or as the author increasingly prefers, *the promise* and *the promise fulfilled*. As we look at these Scriptures and highlight from their perspective God's holiness, His righteousness and His love as expressed through Jesus His Son, ***the apparent promise offered by Godism*** — of 'peace' between *the religions* and the benefits that are thought to flow from this, ***may be found to be wanting.***

**It does not matter what you believe — so long as you are sincere**

It is a default position of the Godist philosophy that belief is less important than action. Sincerity is a word that conjures images of kindly people doing kindly things. The fact that the Nazi guards at Auschwitz and Dachau death camps sincerely believed they were serving *the Volk* in their day to day work and that this was an honourable duty perhaps begins to belie the idea that sincerity is *ipso facto* a good thing. I may sincerely believe that 2 and 2 make 5 but that does not make my belief either right or valuable in any effort to discern truth. We need to tease out and examine this idea that sincerity in beliefs held is of more importance than *what* you actually believe, and by this people usually

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mean dogma. Again the word dogma seems to engender in most people almost the opposite of the word sincerity. If people are dogmatic they are failing to acknowledge diversity and are narrow minded. If I believe that 2 and 2 make 4 however, and maintain this position rigidly in spite of suggestions and even evidence that the sum might be 3 or 5, I am being dogmatic. When Winston Churchill decided to fight on, alone, in 1940 after the military defeat at Dunkirk, there were plenty of people who thought his dogmatism was just plain wrong. Its interesting to wonder how different the world might today have been if Churchill had not been dogmatic on this matter in the face of very real opposition in 1940.

A Godist therefore seems to echo the debate encountered by the very early church about the necessity of both faith *and* works. In preparing this book the author encountered Christians — or at least people who claimed to be Christians — who openly doubted the veracity of the Scriptures and who even claim that God is both good and evil (the broad Godist position). But they seemed to think that *if* they are wrong on the theological questions, God will still see them alright in the end because ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ What they seemed to mean was that they acknowledged the danger inherent in their philosophy (which might be called heretical) but think that if they are wrong, then God will weight more heavily their investment in ‘service’ to mankind — so deeds, they think, ‘trumps’ faith. Some ‘Christian Godists’ will be aware that this is addressed by the apostle James (widely assumed to be the Lord Jesus’ earthly sibling — in other words one of Mary and Joseph’s naturally born children after Jesus their first born) in his letter *to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations* — a coded phrase denoting the entire early church. It seems that

even in the early church there were some who considered that good deeds were more important than faith in Jesus, which suggests that (a) they were attempting to earn some of their salvation and (b) in fact they may have been engaged in some known but un-repented sin in which they thought they could continue, and buy-off God's wrath by their good works. This debate was conclusively resolved in James chapter 2, and readers may want to pause to read it in its entirety. In summary we can say that the New Testament position is that *it is possible to have a dead faith in Jesus*. In other words to 'believe' in Him in a conventional intellectual way, and even in an orthodox scriptural sense, but still to have a heart that is far away from Him, as evidenced by a lack of practical service in His name (works). If one loves Jesus as Lord and as Saviour, then good works are bound to follow. Conversely, it is possible to have a lack of faith in Jesus — or perhaps more pertinently to have a vague faith which one does not want to solidify — and so to offer to God the compensation of 'good works' in lieu of faith. As mentioned earlier, such a mindset seems typically to be motivated by some known sin that the 'Christian' concerned is unwilling to renounce. Churchgoers who are in this particular mindset need to acknowledge that **God is not mocked** (Galatians 6:7) and that we reap what we sow. To summarise the scriptural position on this subject for Christians we can say emphatically that justification is by grace through faith alone, so readers may want to read Romans 3:24, Romans 5:1 and Ephesians 2:8 — but, as always, read around these verses to ensure you get a grasp on the context. These verses were penned by the apostle Paul and are fully in agreement with James, who points out that true faith will inevitably lead to true deeds/good works. Godism, then, tends to elevate behaviour above belief. In

practice this may often be a smokescreen for continued sin. Again in the author's direct experience, when Godism is expounded by churchgoers specifically, one often becomes aware that there are other inconsistencies in that person's life.

Another facet of Godism is its willingness to make excuses for behaviour that the Bible calls, quite simply, sinful. We find, then, that sexual sin is often claimed to be caused by orientation — so a person cannot be held fully accountable (or according to *some* Godists, held accountable at all!) for their sexual behaviour. Violent behaviour may be 'caused' by social circumstances or upbringing, so once again a person cannot be held fully accountable. Financial cheating may well be caused by the 'selfish gene' which itself is part of the evolutionary psychological make-up of individuals, so once again a person cannot be fully accountable for their financial shenanigans. In fact it is difficult to find peccadilloes or sins for which anyone is fully accountable! Because 'god' allowed these things to develop or evolve, the Godist will explain that 'god' must assume some of the blame. One avowed Godist who happens to be involved with a Christian church told the author that his son might in the future sin (actual words 'go wrong') and that if so he, as father, would be partly to blame for not bringing him up the right way. He seemed to be pre-positioning or pre-conditioning his friends for a probable active rejection by his son of Christianity with the obvious possibilities that this might entail for questionable moral behaviour thereafter. Now of course there may have been an element of truth in the assertion: perhaps the gentleman concerned had been less than perfect in his upbringing of his children (no parent is perfect, after all!) but it was the author's strong impression that there was a critical sub-text

at play in this comment: since ‘god’ is both good and evil simultaneously, ultimately ‘he’ or ‘it’ is partly responsible for children going off the rails. The key point being that the parent had (selflessly and honestly, as they would see it) acknowledged their own fault, and silently nominated God as co-defendant, so his children would bear only one third of the guilt for any sins that they may subsequently commit! Most authentic Christians would view this as being a reflection of the moral relativism now common in the post-Christian culture in which today we live. No one is truly to blame for anything anymore, although God is being increasingly cited as carrying a share of the guilt!

That some Godists would repudiate this view is almost unnecessary to state. Some would say that ‘god’ is indeed guiltless, but would still maintain that humans can ‘argue’ a case for clemency because of what an economist might call the moral ‘hygiene factors’ at play in their lives — all those things in their personal environment and personal experience that keep them away from the truth and beauty of ‘god’. However, the above does seem to be the logical conclusion of the overall Godist philosophy, so it cannot easily be swept under the carpet.

### **Does Godism matter?**

At one level we are bound to say that Godism matters little. Its adherents generally consider that their beliefs represent and unify the claims of the ‘higher religions’, but in practice they achieve nothing of the sort. So it is unlikely that millions will leave *the religions* in order to become Godist in one of Godism’s various philosophical guises. Godism is patently false in the sense that it must at key points deny, holding as false, major planks of belief in all *the religions*.

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Godism is also primarily a Western phenomenon, borne out of the greater (boasted, but more apparent than real) educational advancement of westerners who believe they today have oversights and insights of all the major religions and indeed have encountered them all in some limited way through the medium of foreign travel. Godists in that sense exhibit the tourist's mentality to religion, sampling a little here and there on a fortnight's vacation, and returning home declaring themselves as 'A Traveller'! Its like the old idea of the 1950s American whistlestop tour of Europe: 'Its Tuesday so it must be Brussels!' Some westerners are apt to read a pamphlet about a religion, visit a temple and then believe they have a meaningful insight into its teachings! In these ways Godism frankly matters little. As a Western preoccupation it may decline along with the Western population which is shrinking in absolute terms, as well as in proportion to the populations of the rest of the world.

But Godism also holds out at least the prospect that it is wrong and injurious to the spiritual needs of those who find comfort in it. If God is good (and Godists seem to believe 'he' or 'it' is good, in spite of the 'bad' or 'evil' that they also detect) then one might think they would hope that He would provide us with a good and fully dependable means of forming an eternal union with Himself. If God has provided multiple paths to peace with Himself, as Godists unquestionably do believe, and yet has done so in the knowledge that these multiple paths will bring tension and even conflict between religions, as well as confusion among humans as to which path (or paths) to choose for their own life, then even by our faulty human understanding of morality, we can readily see that such a God would have to 'answer' for the woes, wars and sins that inevitably flow from this multiplicity of belief systems. The Godist in

particular, but with the wholehearted agreement of much of the wider world, has decided to put God into the dock. When the vague beliefs of Godism are expressed by the wider world, in other words by plain ordinary people who have not much troubled themselves with religion, one detects a certain desire to attempt to lock God into a box. If all religions lead to God and God has a ‘duty’ to ‘save’ all, then it does not matter too much how you live because this sugar-daddy God will see you alright in the end! If God *cuts up rough* and tries to lay any moral charges at our door, we will quite simply say that we tried to live in broad agreement with *the religions*. We were confused by the multiplicity of choices that God gave to us so we cherry picked what we thought were the best ‘bits’ of each. And we certainly could not be expected to choose one to the exclusion of others because each of them had ‘bad’ or even ‘evil’ facets and we could not in good conscience ally ourselves wholeheartedly to *any* such Faith system. Rather we tried to do our best — and if that’s not good enough, then we know whose fault it is!

To prepare, as many people seem to, what they consider to be such a ‘legal defence’ against (a) the Judgement that we all suspect may one day happen and (b) any uncomfortable moral requirements that God may place upon us and which in turn we do not want or intend to fulfil, may indeed appear to get us ‘off the hook’ as regards our relationship (or lack of it) with God. To recap, the mentality seems to be: ‘I’m sorry God if I did not choose the right path. I did my best. It was your fault that there were so many paths — so I simply cannot be held responsible.’ Meaning, in turn, that God is responsible. Such a thought process may be superficially comforting but is unlikely to bring lasting peace because many such people will also suspect that, in practice, it is a

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rather weak excuse for sitting on the religious fence. What is more important, such a legalistic defence may not cut any ice with a Holy God.

Godism also seems to many people to hold out the comfort of safety in numbers. If, as humans, we can all agree with the basic Godist position and genuinely try to be respectful of all religions and cherry pick the best bits of all of them, then God will not be able to condemn all of us, because if He does then there will be virtually nobody left to 'save'! We have, we think, painted God into a corner and the only way that He can judge us and pronounce us guilty, is by finding his 'heaven' just about empty! Some have called this the *failure of God's great experiment in creation* — if most are lost then God is in some sense a failure.<sup>3</sup>

If Godism matters at all, then, it is in the manner in which it tries to create what must be pronounced a false sense of security as regards God, and His requirements of those He has created. Since most of *the religions*, not just Christianity, have some idea of a hell or an awful judgement for those who transgress, then we must at the very least take seriously the real prospect that *the religions* are NOT all equal, and that conversely just one may represent the true path to peace with God. This immediately sets hackles rising as it is politically *extremely* incorrect, but since people's eternal destinies may be at stake it seems not unreasonable that people may want to 'test' this Godist position — if necessary to destruction — in order to ascertain whether it is a right and a safe path for the individual to take.

Readers will sense where this argument is heading and may immediately object: 'if you say that Christianity is the right path then God must be held accountable for all

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<sup>3</sup> Nowhere in the Christian Bible do we find any idea of an 'experiment in creation'.

of Christianity's wars!' Ironically the one 'war' (or series of wars) that most people see as being 'Christian' are the so-called crusades of mediaeval times. In the UK some will speak of the Irish Troubles also as being a 'Christian war'. And there may be other conflicts cited depending on the historical knowledge and/or prejudice of the individual commentator. Whilst it is impossible to deal with these objections definitively in a short book (and it is rather beyond the scope of this book in any case) a few pointers may be given. In relation to the mediaeval crusades, critics often forget or choose to ignore that the crusades themselves were preceded by nearly 400 years of aggressive westward Muslim military expansion that had seen many formerly Christian kingdoms destroyed. The wars must be considered in the geo-political context of the time. The fact that there was a religious (Roman Catholic) imprimatur placed over the whole enterprise does not ultimately render it into a 'Christian war'. Since Jesus' kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36) and we are told to invest our futures in the next world in preference to this one (Luke 12:33), straight away we must conclude that *the fighting of aggressive expansionary wars is always in direct contradiction to the primary teachings of Jesus* — and to this extent is not only un-Christian, it is actively anti-Christian. Not for nothing is Jesus known as the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6) and He commanded His disciples to 'turn the other cheek' when they are attacked for being His followers (Matthew 5:39). Many Christians conclude that fighting defensive wars is allowable for true Christians, but defining 'defensive' at a practical level and unravelling true motives has always been highly problematic. Some Christians have therefore developed a *totally* passive concept (conscientious objection) in relation to warfare. In this sense there can truly be no

such thing as a ‘Christian war’, much as people may wish to conclude otherwise, whereas warfare among the other religions is specifically allowed and in places encouraged. God has made the need for peace between Himself and human beings and between His followers and the world at large abundantly clear (Romans 12:18 — **if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men,** NKJV).<sup>4</sup> Where people choose warfare and cover it with *any* idea of God’s approval, saying that this particular war is a Christian act or a Christian service, then ultimately they delude only themselves. In a very real sense they are taking the name of God in vain, in so doing, and are breaking the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 10 commandments. **“Do not use my name for evil purposes, for I the LORD, your God, will punish anyone who misuses my name”** (Exodus 20:7, GNB). It is to be expected that God will always consider warfare to be an evil purpose, so it remains for the Godist to explain why so many of *the religions* actively flout this law.

Does Godism matter? As we continue in this book to explore God’s revelation of Himself through the person of Jesus, we will continue to tease out inconsistencies in the Godist position versus God’s self-revelation as found in the Holy Bible. We will hopefully conclude definitively whether this ‘god’ of all religions has any right to be called moral. But for the time being we will lay down this question as we take up others. Only this final comment needs to be made: we have noted that there is a good deal of self-justification behind the man in the street’s desire that all religions should lead to ‘god’. It really seems to the author that *all too many*

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<sup>4</sup> Here the apostle Paul seems to recognise the possibility that there will be circumstances where un-peaceableness is forced upon Christians, which others have interpreted as the right to legitimate and proportionate self-defence. Within the context of a society, this might extend to warfare.

*people want all religions to lead to God because this takes the heat off them and places it back upon God. It relieves them of the obligation to faithfully observe any religion. They can cherry pick the bits they like and ignore the bits they don't like. And when that inevitable day arrives when they have to face God (if 'he' or 'it' exists at all!) then they have their defence at hand — it was all much too confusing, so what chance did they really have of getting it right? This seems like cleverness — even deftness — but will God be so easily fooled? It seems that the answer is a resounding 'no' as God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7), as we have already noted. We should bear in mind then, a comment in the Old Testament book that we call Proverbs — actually Proverbs 21:30. We give it here in two different translations, although they each make exactly the same very profound point — *we cannot judge God.**

**No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord (RSV)**

**Human wisdom, brilliance, insight – they are of no help if the LORD is against you (GNB)**

We are never going to sit in judgement on God, and He cannot be tricked into missing our true motives. But God promises that He *will* judge us.

### **A Godist king for Britain?**

It is hoped that non-UK readers will forgive a diversion into a singularly British question. Whilst in a real theological sense Godism may matter for little as noted in the preceding section, it is undeniable that the process of political correctness, which is morphing into *political correction* (and has alarming echoes of the re-education schemes so beloved of Communist aparachiks) is elevating the whole concept of a confluence of religions. We noted in Chapter 1

that there is a political imperative to this development, as governments throughout the West in particular see *religion management* as being a key plank in their cohesiveness policies for society at large. We noted, also, that the UK media — especially in the shape of the powerful BBC — are keen promoters of the idea of multiculturalism and therefore generally opposed to what they see as old fashioned and even damaging homogeneity within society. With these two undeniable developments within society it is not surprising that the assumed future King of the UK, (Prince Charles, *heir apparent* to Queen Elizabeth II at the time of writing this book), should take an interest in the subject of faiths. It is, at a high level, a part of his job description to be seen as a figurehead for all communities. Interestingly this idea of *all communities* already suggests that a form of societal Balkanisation is underway in the UK, but that is beyond the scope of this book. Prince Charles has for many years taken an active interest in comparative religion. It seems likely, taking into account past statements of the Prince and his very high profile and enthusiastic association with faith groups, that he would consider himself to be a Christian Godist, although he might well balk at the terminology.

In 1994 Prince Charles famously declared that as future King he wanted to be ‘Defender of Faiths’ rather than the *Defender of the Faith*, which is one of the official titles of the UK monarch. He went on to declare that he wanted to defend belief ‘of the divine in existence, the pattern of the divine which is, I think, in all of us but which because we are human beings, can be expressed in so many different ways.’ In practice this would not be as straightforward as the Prince seemed to have assumed and it appears that he was warned off this formulation by his advisers. Instead, and to mark his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2008, the Prince modified

his long held ambition by declaring that he wanted to be known as ‘Defender of Faith’. This was so subtle a change that its importance may at first glance still be missed: as there were so many faiths, would the Prince be willing to defend them all? As was queried in 1994, would Charles for example defend Satanism — today an officially recognized religion? To circumvent this difficulty, Charles would simply see himself as defender of the concept of ‘faith’ itself, allowing him to defend peoples’ rights to their own belief systems, and then to cherry pick those on which he would lavish royal patronage and recognition.

Charles’ proposed change would mean the monarch, as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, would no longer be known as *Defender of the Faith* for the first time since the reign of Henry VIII — in other words for the first time in 500 years. Ironically, the Monarch has been known by this title ever since it was bestowed upon Henry VIII by the Pope in 1521 for Henry’s early support for Roman Catholicism! Today there would be considerable obstacles to overcome before Prince Charles could fulfil his desire. It would, for example, require Parliament to agree to amend the 1953 Royal Titles Act which came into law after changes were made for the Queen’s Coronation in the same year. Vernon Bogdanor, a constitutionalist and, at time of writing this book, Professor of Government at Oxford University, commented that in 1953 when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne, Britain was very much an Anglican society. Today the Prince of Wales would be expected to become king of a nation that is multi-faith, albeit that one predominates. Professor Bogdanor postulated the idea that after any future ‘broadly Anglican’ Coronation at Westminster Abbey, a second religious service might be held for other denominations and faiths, such as Muslims

and Hindus, as a way of acknowledging their importance in the UK. This seemed to be a way to side-step potential constitutional difficulties whilst allowing the Prince to continue with his project.

On 14 November 2008 a major UK newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph* commented in its online edition about the massive implications of the Prince's proposal. Their commentator Andrew Pierce noted that, on the face of it, the loss of the grammatical *definite article* from the royal title carried by every English monarch since Henry VIII might seem a harmless gesture, but Pierce asserted that it was nothing of the sort. The proposed formula, he suggested, would cause considerable harm, not least because 'Defender of Faith' was just too vague a phrase to interpret clearly. Pierce continued that 'The Faith' in the original title referred directly to Christianity, originally Catholic, then Protestant; and in recent decades understood to mean Christianity in general. The Monarch's title, Pierce argued, was a specific recognition of his or her responsibility to preserve the unique and sacred status of Christianity in British society. In contrast, Pierce asked, what would 'Faith' without a definite article mean? Sociologists were still unable after 200 years to agree on a definition of religion, let alone one for faith! And where would we draw the boundaries of the 'Faith' that the future King wanted to defend? Would Scientology be considered a proper faith? Or Spiritism? How would the future King tiptoe through the theological and constitutional minefield exposed when unscrupulous, bizarre or extreme religions demanded Royal protection — as they surely would?

The implications, however, may go much further than most commentators have so far suggested. There are without doubt constitutional issues: the constitution of the United

Kingdom is the set of laws and principles under which the UK is governed, the UK having no single constitutional document comparable to those of many other nations. It is therefore often said that the country has an ‘unwritten’ or *de facto* constitution, but the bulk of the British constitution does in fact exist in written form in the shape of statutes, court judgments, and treaties, together with other unwritten sources, including *parliamentary constitutional conventions* and the *royal prerogatives*. The bedrock of the British constitution has traditionally been the doctrine of Parliamentary sovereignty, according to which the statutes passed by Parliament are the UK’s supreme source of law. It follows that Parliament can change the constitution simply by passing new Acts of Parliament. The UK’s membership of the *European Union* arguably complicated this principle and the UK today applies all EU law (and repeals any provisions of its own laws which conflict) that the Union passes in common with other member states.

UK Acts of Parliament in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century remained among the most important sources of the constitution. According to the traditional view, Parliament retained the ability to legislate however it wished, and upon any subject it wished. For example, much of the iconic mediaeval statute known as *Magna Carta* was in fact repealed by Parliament in 1828,<sup>5</sup> despite previously being regarded as sacrosanct. It has traditionally been the case that the courts were barred from questioning any *Act of Parliament*, a principle that can be traced back to the mediaeval period. The sovereign remains the Supreme Governor of the established Church of England, with Archbishops and Bishops appointed by the monarch, on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Crown’s

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<sup>5</sup> In 1828 the Offences Against the Person Act was passed, which repealed clause 36 of *Magna Carta*.

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role in the Church of England is mainly titular; the most senior clergyman, the *Archbishop of Canterbury*, remains the spiritual leader of the Church and (at the time of writing) of the worldwide *Anglican Communion*. The monarch is an ordinary member of the *Church of Scotland*, but he or she holds the power to appoint the *Lord High Commissioner* to that Church's *General Assembly*.

There seem to be two constitutional difficulties with Prince Charles' overarching desire to be known as *Defender of Faith*. The first difficulty is in relation to the 39 Articles of the Church of England, which state all the main distinctive beliefs of this Reformation church. Officially the Church of England accepts the full and final authority of Holy Scripture as the basis for all that it believes. Some of these beliefs were summarised in the historic creeds and at the time of the Reformation, the Church adopted those 39 Articles as giving a concise and systematic statement of the teaching of Scripture. The legal definition of the Doctrine of the Church of England can be found in the *Church of England (Worship and Doctrine) Measure 1974* which accords with what is also stated in *Canon A5*, which concerns the ordination of new ministers. These state clearly that the doctrine of the Church of England is particularly to be found in the 39 Articles, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal. Indeed Ministers of the Church of England are still required to affirm their acceptance of the Church's doctrine but the wording of the declaration is now such that many feel able to say it without meaning what a simple reading might suggest.

The official text is that found in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer but is easily obtainable online. The 39 Articles cover the Doctrine of God and the human response to God's grace. They can be summarized as follows:

Article 1–5 (The substance of faith)

Articles 6–8 (The rule of faith)

Articles 9–18 (Personal religion)

Articles 9–14 (Doctrines connected with justification)

Articles 15–18 (Doctrines connected with sanctification)

Articles 19–39 (The Household of faith)

Articles 19–22 (The Church)

Articles 23 & 24 (The Ministry)

Articles 25–31 (The Sacraments)

Articles 32–36 (Church Discipline)

Articles 37–39 (Church and State)

The centrality of the 39 Articles has been acknowledged since the time of King Charles I who stated that, ‘...the Articles of the Church of England ... do contain the true doctrine of the Church of England agreeable to God’s Word ... no man hereafter shall either print, or preach, to draw the Article aside any way, but shall submit to it in the plain and full meaning thereof: and shall not put his own sense or comment to the meaning of the Article, but shall take it in the literal and grammatical sense.’ Key among the 39 Articles that might be problematic for a future King who would defend all faiths *as essentially equal* are these:

### ***I. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity***

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

### ***II. Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man***

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from

everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

***IV. Of the Resurrection of Christ***

Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day.

***XVIII. Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ.***

They also are to be had accursed that presume to say, That every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law, and the light of Nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.

How would an effectively Theist, if not actively Godist, King deal with these clear and unambiguous statements? The idea that the UK Government might amend the law to enable Prince Charles' ambition was viewed with no small alarm by many commentators, as it could entail the disestablishment of the Church of England by the back door. The Labour Party of Tony Blair in the 1990s and of Gordon Brown in the first decade of the 2000s was seen as being particularly keen to reduce the influence of the Church

within the civic life of the land. Would the Prince present them with their opportunity?

To finally understand how this desire of the future King might affect the constitutional position we need to look at the promises made by his mother, Queen Elizabeth, in 1953, promises that, in effect, the future King would abrogate simply by not making them. Note that what follows is not the full text of the Coronation service (which again, is freely available online) but merely the parts that neither a Theist or indeed a fully Godist monarch could in honesty affirm without heavy amendment. The 1953 Coronation service was divided into distinct sub-sections, the headings of which we adopt below:

#### IV. The Oath

*The Archbishop shall minister these questions; and the Queen, having a book in her hands, shall answer each question severally as follows:*

**Archbishop:** Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel?

Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law?

Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England?

And will you preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges, as by law do or shall appertain to them or any of them?

**Queen:** All this I promise to do.

#### V. The Presenting of the Holy Bible

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*When the Queen is again seated, the Archbishop shall go to her Chair; and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, receiving the Bible from the Dean of Westminster, shall bring it to the Queen and present it to her, the Archbishop saying these words:*

Our gracious Queen:  
to keep your Majesty ever mindful  
of the law and the Gospel of God  
as the Rule for the whole life and  
government of Christian Princes,  
we present you with this Book,  
the most valuable thing that this world affords.  
Here is Wisdom;  
This is the royal Law;  
These are the lively Oracles of God.

### VI. The Beginning of the Communion Service

#### The Introit

O God, who providest for thy people by thy power,  
and rulest over them in love:  
Grant unto this thy servant ELIZABETH, our Queen,  
the Spirit of wisdom and government,  
that being devoted unto thee with her whole heart,  
she may so wisely govern,  
that in her time thy Church may be in safety,  
and Christian devotion may continue in peace;  
that so persevering in good works unto the end,  
she may by thy mercy come to thine everlasting  
kingdom;  
through Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord,  
who liveth and reigneth with thee

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in the unity of the Holy Ghost,  
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

*And the Gospel ended shall be sung the Creed following,  
the Queen with the people standing, as before.*

I believe in one God,  
the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
And of all things visible and invisible;  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only-begotten Son of God,  
Begotten of his Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
Very God of very God,  
Begotten, not made,  
Being of one substance with the Father,  
By whom all things were made:  
Who for us men, and for our salvation  
came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,  
And was made man;  
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.  
He suffered and was buried;  
And the third day he rose again  
according to the Scriptures,  
And ascended into heaven,  
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father.  
And he shall come again with glory  
to judge both the quick and the dead:  
Whose kingdom shall have no end.  
And I believe in the Holy Ghost,  
The Lord and giver of life,  
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,  
Who with the Father and the Son together

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is worshipped and glorified,  
Who spake by the Prophets.  
And I believe one Catholick and Apostolick Church.  
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.  
And I look for the resurrection of the dead,  
And the life of the world to come. Amen.

### VII. The Anointing

*The Creed being ended, the Queen kneeling at her faldstool, and the people kneeling in their places, the Archbishop shall begin the hymn, VENI, CREATOR SPIRITUS, and the choir shall sing it out.*

*Then shall the Dean of Westminster lay the Ampulla and Spoon upon the Altar; and the Queen kneeling down at the faldstool, the Archbishop shall say this Blessing over her:*

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God,  
who by his Father was anointed with the Oil of gladness  
above his fellows,  
by his holy Anointing pour down upon your Head and  
Heart  
the blessing of the Holy Ghost,  
and prosper the work of your Hands:  
that by the assistance of his heavenly grace  
you may govern and preserve  
the Peoples committed to your charge  
in wealth, peace, and godliness;  
and after a long and glorious course  
of ruling a temporal kingdom  
wisely, justly, and religiously,  
you may at last be made partaker of an eternal kingdom,  
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Plainly the 1953 service was thoroughly Christian.

Although the wording has evolved and changed over the centuries, it is clear that the generic coronation service does not simply represent 450 years of Christian and Protestant observance — it represents in excess of 1,000 years of Christian tradition over the British lands. Prince Charles' attempt to end this reality by tinkering with the wording of the coronation service surely carried with it implications far beyond those he apparently had in mind. So why the constitutional difficulty? Have we not already observed that words can be changed? Why cannot at the end of the day, the King be the *defender of faith* as a concept, and indeed of multiple faiths? Surely Parliament could do the trick? And, at the time of writing, parts of it are itching to do so!

The true constitutional implication seems to be this: that England/the United Kingdom is a Protestant land by tradition. The monarch would defend that Protestant position if need be with his life (and it was genuinely that serious a matter for example, for the first Queen Elizabeth) because he or she understood that by so doing he was *personally preserving access to the Heavenly Father for his subjects through Jesus the Son without the intervention of Priests and all that this implied under Papacy*. This defence was bound up inseparably with and personified in the life of the King (or Queen). Without this singular role, which certainly cannot be personified by Parliament, there actually is no need for a monarch at all. Defender of *the* faith is *the* prime task of a British monarch. If that task is gone, there is surely no reason why Parliament cannot assume the role of defender of faiths or of faith. Indeed with its various religious hatred laws in the UK, it has begun to do so. Parliament at a practical level can be argued as defending peoples' health through the National Health Service, a task that need not be personified. It can be argued as defending

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the state through the military, something again that need not be personified. Parliament defends the laws of the land against the monarch — and fought a civil war to prove the point! If the monarch no longer defends *the* faith and if need be with his life, then the defence of people's rights to worship as they please can surely be guaranteed by Parliament. In deciding (arguably) to abandon the Protestant faith, Prince Charles may unwittingly have called into question the monarchy itself.