

A CREATIVE, GENEROUS, AND COMAPSSIONATE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD FOR
THE 21ST CENTURY

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the spiritually curious.

Those they call the religious nones,

the unchurched,

and the spiritual but not religious.

Those that are seeking to discover

God, Self, and Enlightenment

outside religion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DECICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
Historical Background.....	2
Interest in the Topic.....	4
Purpose of the Thesis.....	6
Thesis Questions and Sub Questions.....	8
2. THE CONCEPT OF GOD.....	10
A Mutable God.....	13
When a New God is Necessary	16
Knowledge and Experience of God.....	19
God and His Chosen.....	20
Conclusion.....	24
3. ACCORDING TO FUNDAMENTALISM.....	25
The Word of God.....	27
Knowledge of God.....	28
The Work of God.....	31
Becoming Gods Type and the Toxic God Relationship.....	32
Conclusion.....	37
4. THE WEAKNESS OF GOD.....	38
Who is God?.....	40
What God Says.....	44
What God Does.....	46
Conclusion.....	48

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

5. BECOMING GODS TYPE.....	49
God as Constructive.....	53
Becoming Less Like Jesus Being More Like Self.....	56
God as Generous.....	58
God as Compassionate.....	62
REFERENCES.....	63

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Thank you to the faculty at McAfee for guiding me through my faith deconstruction process. I have been challenged in my theological thinking which has altered the way I conduct God-talk and self-talk. I have found a connection with God through self-authenticity that has empowered me to show up in the world as my whole self and inspire others to do the same. My time at Mercer has changed my life and I appreciate the professors that shared their passion and path for discovering God, self, and enlightenment.

ABSTRACT

KHAALIQ THOMAS

A CONSTRUCTIVE, GENEROUS, AND COMAPSSIONATE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Under the direction of ANGELA N. PARKER, Ph.D.

Since God is not something that can be geographically located to determine if what which has been said about God is truthful, we are left with the project of conceptualizing who and what God is and what God can be. Therefore, since God is manifested from the human imagination it is a product of human weakness. With religious fundamentalists concepts of God that inspire hate, violence, division, asceticism, and oppressive group thinking, the theological imagination is too weak of a tool to accurately depict God in reality.

The religious fundamentalists have constricted the concept of God making it difficult for God to function in our modern world and appeal to contemporary minds. The need to conceptualize a God that exists outside religion is essential to the functionality and relevance of a supreme being for today. Since it is the human mind, body, and spirit that encounters and conceptualizes God it is appropriate to theorize a God that is discovered through the activity of self-exploration and the exercise of human authenticity.

A constructive, generous, and compassionate concept of God is one where the process of deconstruction takes place. It means eliminating the notion of ultimate truth and embracing ultimate wonder and uncertainty by taking God outside religion. It means knowing God

empirically more than through scripture. It means allowing God to inform the believer of what it is and not the believer placing an identity upon God.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Exclusivist concepts of God advocate an “us against them” mentality causing division, disbelief in an ultimate being, and religious extremist.¹ The fundamentalism of Abrahamic religions have claimed stewardship of ultimate truth at the expense of their own lives and religious adherents holding opposing views. These fundamentalists have created a concept of God that resembles an authoritarian; merciless, self-gratifying, and demanding.² The God of the fundamentalist is difficult to relate to and is too radical and oppressive for the 21st century. Therefore, a constructive, generous, and compassionate understanding of God is needed making God useful to the global community.

All religions name and provide a solution to the human problem. The human problem is the universal mortal deficiency, an innate corruption, and moral depravity causing humankind to be separated from the Divine. Solving the human problem of sin, spiritual ignorance, and depravity inaugurates the believer into the holy family where a deep and meaningful relationship with God is exclusively available.

This is why you will never confuse the Christian God with Allah, or the Jewish God with either.³ Each God concept first and foremost serves the ambitions of the nation it has emerged from, and a unique understanding of the human problem addressed a unique conception of God.

¹ Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 1st Ballantine Books ed (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 1st Mariner Books ed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2008).

³ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Gramercy Books, 2004).

Today, a new definition of the human problem and a refined concept of God to address the problem is required.

Historical Background

The inquiry into who and what God is, has been of primary importance for humankind since the beginning.⁴ The beginning of this investigation was not the dawn of creation but precisely when humankind first realized its limitations. When the full extent of human will and authority had reached its boundaries, when the feebleness of human strength and health was experienced, and the ignorance of human intelligence was made manifest, our ancestors began to ask existential questions. At this point they realized they exercised no governance over the order, and purpose of reality and began to study, imagine, and construct the great mystery that did.⁵

Among the Abrahamic faiths, the assignment of a name, disposition, and will made the great mystery less cryptic and ambiguous and more predictable and approachable. The conceptualization of the great mystery localized God making the Divine a product of a specific culture, and steward and supplier of the society's needs.⁶ This anthropomorphic interpretation of God in Christianity and Judaism added explicit characteristics and absolutes.

⁴ Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God*, 1st ed (New York: Knopf, 2009).

⁵ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (London: Vintage, 1999).

⁶ Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Harvard Univ. Pr., 1979), p. 99.

A completeness was now given to the unseen enigmatic force making God resemble a supernatural human.⁷ This identification of God finalized who and what God is and limited what God could ever become.⁸

Each concept of God within this triad of faiths is focused on its people and how God is working through them in a transcendent response to the state of the world. Giving definite identity to God eliminates the possibility of God changing through further discovery and advances in interpretation of reality. The immutable quality of God is of paramount importance to the stability of the fundamentalist God concept. The premise is that an unchanging God can be trusted to perform as expected. My rebuttal is that God does not always act in a way that is consistent with the concepts given to believers by these faiths. Efforts should be undertaken that create room for God to be discovered in the activity of living and being.

The Abrahamic faiths use their concept of God to name humankind as Gods most revered and treasured lifeform in the hierarchy of creation. This favoritism fades when the value of adherents of other faiths are considered lesser than religious devotees. They become those that are pitied, lost, damned, and doomed to an eternal death. A dichotomy develops where humanity is divided between those helping God carry out a divine agenda on earth and those that work to prevent the fulfillment of that sacred work. God becomes one that is supportive of one religious perspective and people over another.

⁷ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969).

⁸ Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Westminster Press, 1981), p. 28.

Those outside the faith have no access to God without assimilation into the culture and membership of the religious community. Although each faith believes God created, and has given life to all things, a deep and meaningful God relationship, authentic experience of enlightenment, and a desirable afterlife is not complimentary. These are the accolades of those that dedicate themselves to religious standards, reshaping themselves to become God's Type by becoming less of themselves and more of what is said that God wants.

Interest in the Topic

Others have attempted to present a concept of God liberating the divine from the fundamentalist strongbox while still suggesting Gods loyalty to a single religious perspective.⁹ While we are all born into a culture informed and influenced by a particular religious framework there is no complete escape from a viewpoint from that source. My foundation is Christianity although I did not grow up "Christian" my household loosely incorporated Christian values, and an obligation to be productive Christlike members of society living fruitful lives.

Despite this degree of cultural informing, at 18 years old I tried to shake off my Christian seasoning when I discovered a deep interest in knowing more about God. Like my ancestors I had reached my limitations in understanding reality according to my own devices. I went on a journey from religion to religion trying to find a place that could offer a spiritual home. I eventually joined a group with the same interests, and through metaphysics, black nationalistic Islamic propaganda, Jewish mysticism, and Eastern religious philosophy I found my fitting.¹⁰

⁹ Soren Kierkegaard et al., *Fear and Trembling; and The Sickness unto Death* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*. (New York: Perennial, 2002).

A strict vegetarian diet, Buddhist mediation, Kabbalah study, chanting, Bible, and Quran reading was our daily routine.

After a few years I found the teachings to be spiritually retrogression, lacking universal love for all people, emotionally abusive, and sexually manipulative. After some time, I became a Christian and a dedicated member of a church serving on the board and leadership team. I felt called to ministry and started going to school to learn more about theology and religion. Undergrad was easy and unchallenging but early in my faith deconstruction process at Mercer I began to think differently about my concept of God.

Like many others that have left the church I realized the concept of God I held was one that was given to me.¹¹ I began to develop a concept of God that embraced individualism instead of religious assimilation. I explored ways to connect to God that were unique to who I was as an individual. This process led me away from Christianity and on a journey to redefine myself and what I believed. Building a deep and meaningful relationship with God for so long I had no room for Jesus. Although I tried to make it work for years, it always seemed like Jesus was a cool guy I knew from around the way that I would always try to find a reason for us to be best friends. My objective is to present a concept of God that is experienced through the authenticity of the individual instead of given to them by religion. A God that makes space for you to be all you were created to be and allowing others to do the same is a God that can be embraced by the unchurched.

¹¹ Norman G. Poythress, “Behavior Modification, Brainwashing, Religion, and the Law,” *Journal of Religion & Health* 17, no. 4 (October 1978): 238–43, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01532859>.

Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to present a constructive, compassionate, and generous concept of God for the 21st century, that is useful not only for the religious but the non-religious as well. The fundamentalist of the Abrahamic faiths will be my focus as they draw conceptualizations from the same God and have caused God to be misunderstood. God as an exclusivist does not work for modern times where a diverse group of people make up the societies, we live in.

In dealing with the fundamentalist one must dismantle their primary weapon, ultimate truth claims.¹² What one religion accepts as ultimate truth is different from another, but the truth can still be present in both. When truth expresses the purpose, nature, and identity of God and is not limited to being a thing that can be possessed through religious doctrine. Theological differences do not make one religion true and the other false because they each have different natures, identities, and purposes.

The truth of a religious message is validated when that truth corresponds to the characteristics that express the nature, and identity of God operating in a manner that is true to Gods unique qualities and characteristics. Interreligious agreement should be based on the character, identity, and purpose of God not religious claims of ultimate truth established according to doctrine and tradition. The reason is because traditions and doctrine can, and do change so God should be given the same luxury. A religion is built and maintained exclusively on claims of having access to the ultimate truth. That ultimate truth is expressed through the religion's beliefs, practices, and teachings which claim to have the ability to bring the human mind, body, and spirit to an authentic realization of God.

¹² Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York Boston: Twelve, 2009).

But how many ways are there to bring the human mind, body, and spirit to an authentic realization of God? Can a single religion using its unique philosophy be validated as ultimate truth? Can ultimate truth be limited to one, or two, or one hundred, two million philosophies, forms, traditions, ideas? Something truly ultimate has no limitations, no boundaries, no attributes of weakness, no places where it can't enter, no area it doesn't influence, no person it can't reach regardless of their religious affiliation.

Now the question which religion has ultimate truth takes on a different set of methods to answer the question. The criteria to validate ultimate truth claims now requires agreement not on doctrine, tradition, or the ability to transform the person; but on the ability of the religious message to correspond to the unique identity, nature, and characteristics of God – the truth of God embracing all people.

A concept of God is needed that is patient, inclusive, and understanding offering a deep and meaningful relationship with all peoples regardless of religious affiliation. Claims of truth and knowledge of God expanded beyond religion give space for interfaith conversations and egalitarian concepts of God to take place. No matter how much we may claim to know God, there will always be unfamiliar places, deeper dives that the seeking of God will take you.¹³ As ultimate, God is a mysterious God located in more than one space, more than one time in history, has a sacred place amongst more than one people, as God has spent time and shared revelations with all peoples. We can no longer judge our faithful brothers and sisters of other religions as spiritually empty or theologically confused.

¹³ Theodore E. Long and Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Religious Conversion and the Concept of Socialization: Integrating the Brainwashing and Drift Models," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, no. 1 (March 1983): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1385588>.

When should we open ourselves up to the vastness of ultimate truth meticulously seeking those things that agree with the character, identity, and nature of God in our quest to discover more of God.¹⁴ When we allow ourselves to experience ultimate truth in a fashion that is more extensive than one religious foundation, we are forming a concept of God that is creative, generous, and compassionate. When ultimate truth is understood as a religious possession it becomes a tool to justify religious hierarchy and the segregation of people in religious and secular spaces. Ultimate truth is in every form of religion that supports and agrees with the identity, nature, and characteristics of a loving inclusive God.

Thesis Questions and Sub Questions

What is a creative, generous, and compassionate understanding of God for the 21st century? The thesis will mainly follow the corpus of Karen Armstrong augmented by other theologians and writers. The thesis presents a concept of God as all that can be said about God is conceptual and not actual. The concept of God is one that is functional in modern society yet open for further investigation expansion. Creative meaning: a new interpretation of God is needed for our time. An interpretation that conceptualizes a God that has made room for us all to be all we can be. One that meets humanity where we are now and helps us move into the future together. Creative means constructing ways to address the issues of the global community instead of separate and opposing religious communities. Creative also means developing new language around God and religion, methods of worship, and enlightenment.

¹⁴ Deidre Nicole Green, “A Self That Is Not One: Kierkegaard, Niebuhr, and Saiving on the Sin of Selflessness,” *The Journal of Religion* 97, no. 2 (April 2017): 151–80, <https://doi.org/10.1086/690465>.

Generous meaning a concept of God that is inclusive. One that is willing to work with other faiths to promote the progression and spiritual maturity of humankind.¹⁵ Compassionate meaning allowing people the space to be themselves without conforming to a God Type. It is the conviction that by taking on this identity we become spiritually attractive to God, checking all the boxes on God's soul mate wish list, validating ourselves as ideal partners. According to religion the only hope for legitimately discovering and knowing God, experiencing authentic enlightenment, victory in spiritual warfare and exploring our earthly and spiritual potential is by becoming God's Type.

We love God in a different kind of way when we love who and what we were created to be and a God that embraces diversity. Embracing our uniqueness, celebrating our individuality, and using it to connect to God in a meaningful way is worshiping God.¹⁶ When religion tries to mode us into a God type to fit in, we must remember God did not create us to fit in, we were created to stand out. We were created to be an example of the creative wonder of God by freely expressing our individuality.¹⁷

We were created to meet God where we are, experiencing, relating to, and growing with God according to the unique way we are wired and not according to a religious archetype.¹⁸

¹⁵ Mikael Stenmark, "Competing Conceptions of God: The Personal God versus the God beyond Being," *Religious Studies* 51, no. 2 (June 2015): 205–20, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412514000304>.

¹⁶ Dorothee Solle, *Creative Disobedience* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, n.d.).

¹⁷ James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God through Awareness of the True Self* (Notre Dame, Ind: Ave Maria Press, 1978).

¹⁸ Solle, *Creative Disobedience*.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPT OF GOD

It has been said that the greatest inventions of human history are the printing press, the light bulb, automobiles and planes, radio and television, vaccinations, the telephone, democracy, and the computer and internet.¹⁹ These inventions have helped to shape how we think, communicate, develop ourselves and the communities we live in. The act of making a thought reality, by bringing it from the field of imagination into the physical realm is a human superpower. Today, what has been birthed from these ideas is a testimony to the immensity of possibility and the power of the human imagination.

Taking into consideration the impact these inventions have made; they pale in comparison to an invention as ancient as the human being, God. The greatest invention of human history is not in transportation, communications, medicine, technology, or politics. Although this invention cannot be held, seen, or immediately located and shared to verify its identity. It is found amid worship houses, explained in lines of scripture, housed in the hearts of believers, and fashioned from the doctrine of religion.

God as an invention, was birthed from the ingenuity of the mundane human mind yet became transcendent, holy, and greater than its own inventor. Although God has been given identity, and ultimate authority influencing, informing, and giving power and purpose to the human experience it is still a figure of the imagination. What we have named God in all its glory and greatness is a human invention. It is a theory, a conceptualization, a perspective created, empowered, and dependent upon the human imagination for legitimacy.

¹⁹ “The Greatest Inventions in The Past 1000 Years | OSU eHistory,” accessed March 14, 2024, <https://ehistory.osu.edu/articles/greatest-inventions-past-1000-years>.

God as it is known according to the Abrahamic religions, has been constructed from the power of wonder and curiosity, and shaped according to the power of creativity. When considering what God is, an infinite number of concepts and applications become available for use. This myriad of possibilities does not emerge from the omnipotence of God's divinity, holiness, or transcendence but manifests from the inability to know exactly what God is, therefore God is many different things to different individuals, groups, and cultures. In relation to this, Armstrong states,

“Jews, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians had all insisted in their different ways that our human idea of God did not correspond to the ineffable reality of which it was a mirror symbol. All had suggested, at one time or another, that it was more accurate to describe God as “nothing” rather than the supreme being, since he did not exist in any way that we could conceive.”²⁰

What is known as God and what God is in reality are two different things. As God is not directly attainable to compare to what has been said about God to what is God, we are left with the task of conceptualization and giving shape and imagery to the unknown. Speaking on God as a concept Kaufmann says:

God is not a reality immediately available in our experience for observation, inspection, and description and speech about or to God therefore is never directly referential. Thus, we are unable to check our concepts and images of God for accuracy and adequacy through direct confrontation with the reality *God*... Our awareness and understanding here is gained entirely in and through the images and concepts themselves.²¹

²⁰ Armstrong, *A History of God*, 352.

²¹ Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 1st ed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981). 21

That imagery and assigned identity informs the theology and shapes the experiences of the God seeker. At this point, God is exclusively recognized according to the distinctive cultural and religious symbols of the individual. Conceptually God slavishly appears according to the imagery, speech, and ideas the religious group has determined to be true. The slightest change in the individuals' concept of God results in a completely new idea, image, and understanding about who and what both the believer and their God is and can be.²² A particular concept of God therefore belongs to a community of believers as an inimitable possession distinctive in its message, purpose, and activity in this reality and beyond. This prepackaged God idea is so different from the next that you'll never confuse the Christian God with Allah or Yahweh.

A concept of God makes room for a particular people with specific needs making it a God worthy of worship. The people that have conceptualized God give the figure authority over their life, and primary influence over their thinking and manner of showing up in the world. A believer comes into existence because a reason arises to attach belief, hope and faith to. Therefore, the legitimacy of the God concept is contingent on the dedicated believer for without an enthusiastic devotee the God concept is lifeless and irrelevant.

The God concept lives, dies, and evolves with the believer as they are interdependent beings, creators of that which they are dependent upon. As the philosophical, spiritual, and psychological needs of the people advance so must the God they worship for the sake of compatibility. As Karen Armstrong states in *A History of God*, "It seems that creating gods is something that human beings have always done. When one religious idea ceases to work for them it is simply

²² When a society establishes a new idea of itself its idea of God changes. God is tied to the human identity as it is from that identity that God is conceptualized and made to be necessary.

replaced. These ideas disappear quietly, like the Sky God, with no great fanfare.”²³ What we call God is a conceptual being we create, give name, purpose, and reason to, and call those characteristics absolute truth.

God stripped of human seasoning is what Kaufmann calls God the reality.²⁴ There does exist a supreme creative force that creates, directs, and guides but applying absolutes to such a mystery is presumptuous. The activity is as risky as naming and characterizing forms and shapes as absolute truth from an airplane window 40,000 feet away.²⁵ Instead of experiencing God for what it is and allowing it to inform us; we have done the informing and in the process determined who and what God can be.

A Mutable God

A God that never changes is the object of worship for the fundamentalist of the Abrahamic religions. For them Gods attribute of perfection and omniscience demands immutability.²⁶

²³ Armstrong, *A History of God*. p.4

²⁴ Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination*.

²⁵ This is not to say that God can't be know because God can be known to a certain extent. God has been studied and people have shared their experiences of God. The issue here is with the closing off of who and what Gods is by making final judgements based on those studies and experiences. When the knowing of God is closed off and determined to be a distinct identity God is cut off from being discovered as something else or found somewhere else. This prohibits God from being known as God actually is by limiting God to what has been traditionally known.

²⁶ “By his immutability we mean that it follows from the infinite perfection of God, that he cannot be changed by anything from without himself; and that he will not change from any principle from within himself. That as to his essence, his will, and his states of existence, he is “By his immutability we mean that it follows from the infinite perfection of God, that he cannot be changed by anything from without himself; and that he will not change from any principle from within himself. That as to his essence, his will, and his states of existence, he is the same from eternity to eternity.” Elmer Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason Ohio: Cengage Learning, 2002). 105

History has proven that a God that is the same today, tomorrow, and forever is incompatible with an ever-changing world.

Such a God has no universal value to the overall human community, has difficulty accepting diversity in human beings and functions to oppose a modern environment, mind, and individual. For a concept of God to remain expedient it must conform as worldviews, social and economic structures, and love, generosity, and compassion take on expanded definitions. For God to remain relevant, useful, and compatible with the developing world the concept must be versatile, and approaching with a creative mind as it can never be complete.

A healthy concept of God is adaptable, advancing as the religion or the culture that created it evolves becoming what the creating agent needs. It is also one that provides space for others to explore the Divine on their own terms and produce God concepts without subjection to violence or oppression. Ironically the more a contemporary concept of God moves away from the orthodox God of the holy books the more practical it is for society. The need for the God concept to be reformed is apparent when scripture illustrates a God unsympathetic in his thinking and activity. In the holy books of the Abrahamic religions, we see the Gods supporting violence expressing, toxic masculinity, and exhibiting a lack of emotional intelligence.

Qur'an 4.34:

“Men stand superior to women in that God hath preferred some of them over others, and in that they expend of their wealth; and the virtuous women, devoted, careful (in their husbands’) absence, as God has cared for them. But those whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them and remove them into bedchambers and beat them; but if they submit to you, then do not seek a way against them; verily, God is high and great.”

1 Samuel 15:3 “*Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel, and donkey.*”

If God is unchanging, it is a divine weakness. Gods' immutability requires us to take what we are told about God in the scriptures as a revelation of the fullness of what God is, and the end of what God can become. Since evolution, change, and diversity are intricate to all creation it would prove to be inharmonious to have a concept of God that was shut off from such activities.²⁷ In the case of Fundamentalist, the inability of God to change is a strength as the need of the Fundamentalist is for God to remain the same and the believer to live according to that invariable standard. The individual attempts to retain a worldview and cultural standing opposite of the secular and finds usefulness of God as one that is aggressively opposed to change.²⁸ An immutable God is one that contradicts the characteristics of an Omni God. Perfection is not validated according to an inability to change.²⁹ Divine perfection is validated according to Gods ability to consistently respond to human activity through wisdom, generosity, and compassion.

²⁷ Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God, Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1983), 24.

²⁸ Martin E. Marty, R. Scott Appleby, and American Academy of Arts and Sciences, eds., *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, The Fundamentalism Project, v. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

²⁹ Nash, *The Concept of God*, 25.

When a New God is Necessary

When it is necessary, when there is an immediate need, a new concept of God will emerge from the pain and suffering of his people able to shelter his people and eliminate the enemy.³⁰

The necessity for many Jewish Holocaust victims to make sense of God required a new concept of God to address this need. Why had God allowed his chosen people to endure such violence and subjectivity at the hands of Hitler?

This question led many in the Jewish community to adapt Zionism which conceptualized God as one that desired Jews to establish religious communities in the Holy Land by force.³¹ The objective was to escape the evils of modernity and all that threatened the progression of God's chosen people. The result was a fundamentalist movement that engaged in bloodshed, and oppression in the name of God.³²

The Neturei Karta (The Guardians of the City) rejected the Zionist and their concept of a God that encouraged their actions. They rebelled against the Jewish fundamentalist and when the State of Israel was established in 1948, they declared it was an act of Satan and not Yahweh.³³ Both the rebels and the fundamentalist had modified concepts of God as the Neturei Karta now have a hatred for their own people. This is a hatred that Yahweh makes room for as the acts of violence against the Zionist are seen as kiddush hashem (sanctification in God's name).³⁴

³⁰ Khaaliq Thomas

³¹ Armstrong, *The Battle for God.*, 202

³² Ibid., 210

³³ Ibid., 206

³⁴ Ibid., 207

There was a critical need for 19th century African Americans to establish an idea of God that was both loving, accepting, and protecting. Undergoing the horrors of slavery, Black Christians needed to establish a concept of God that made room for them in his divine plan. The God of the slave master gave no value, advantage, or promise to slaves. Slaves masters conceptualized a God that made them stewards over creation and designated black men, women, and children as eternal subordinates to whites.³⁵ To continue to find usefulness for God African Americans had to question why they were allowed by God to endure the atrocities of slavery.

A connection was made with the God of the Hebrew slaves as Yahweh granted his people freedom and led them to the promise land. This was a concept of God that African Americans could accept as true; one that was concerned about their suffering, was fighting for them against the forces of evil and had a plan for them to prosper. Jesus as the suffering servant was prominent in the concept of the God of the Black church. Suffering was not an experience to be ashamed of but one to take pride in as they believed God allowed those He loved to suffer.

Henry McNeal Turner, a young AME Church minister, developed a theodicy that made the suffering of Blacks in early America a divine necessity. In 1870 Turner preached that God ordained the oppression and suffering of Blacks due to their redemptive power toward the purpose of sanctification.³⁶ Turner conceptualized a Black God that sympathized for and suffered with the oppressed. This was a rejection of the blonde-haired blue-eyed God of the oppressors that condoned racism and the brutality inflicted on Blacks. The theodicy of Turner suggested that it was the plan of God to temporarily enslave Africans in America for the purpose of cultivating

³⁵ Anthony B. Pinn, *Why, Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

Africans into an advanced and educated people. The result of this condition according to Turner was to return to Africa and civilize the ignorant, godless nation saving the sinful people with what was gained from exposure to divine oppression in America.³⁷

Black activist and shop owner David Walker asserted that God was kind and loving and therefore did not use slavery and oppression as a tool to sanctify Black America. In 1829, Walker wrote his objections to this concept of God in the *Appeal* a book he had written and attached to the garments he sold at his shop. In the book Walker asked white America, “If god gives you peace and tranquility, and suffers you thus to go on afflicting us, and our children, who have never given you the least provocation would he be to us a God of justice?”³⁸ Walker conceptualized a God of justice that was against misconduct and oppression and called for the afflicted to take every opportunity possible to liberate themselves from dehumanization by killing or be killed.

Walker proclaims:

The man who would not fight under our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in the glorious and heavenly cause of freedom and of God to be delivered from the most wretched, abject and servile slavery that ever a people was afflicted with since the foundation of the world, to the present day ought to be kept with all of his children or family, in slavery, or in chains to be butchered by his cruel enemies.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., 53-56

³⁸ Ibid., 41

³⁹ Ibid., 42

For the newly “free” Blacks in America, the focus for the suffering believer was on a future salvation in the afterlife as the present world was hopelessly under the rule of the enemy.⁴⁰ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Roms 8:18 ESV). The concept of God for the oppressed was one that used suffering as a means of purification, salvation, or a call to fight for Gods desire of equality and righteousness. There is versatility in the activity of imagining who and what God is, does, and says that accommodates the individuals need to be validated. I many aspects the world has become a place where it is challenging for the individual to locate religious spaces to be who and what they are authentically therefore, a God needs to be conceptualized that makes space for the outcast, oppressed, devalued, and anti-religious in the creation of the universe.

Knowledge and Experience of God

We have determined that what is known as God has no geographical location where one locates it, no background that can be traced, no origin story that can be studied, no autobiography, and no official statement revealing itself to humanity.⁴¹ God is outside the capacity of human understanding and beyond the realms of logic, language, and reality. There is no objective understanding, identity, or image of the Divine that can be called ultimate truth despite religious claims to such a knowledge and experience of God. Since no God constructing power exists in this reality, we draw from the mystical to engage in God talk and determine a knowledge of God. Yet both reality and idealism are equally incapable of producing a system of knowing God in a way to produce a system of objective truth.

⁴⁰Ibid., 44

⁴¹ By official I’m referring to an unbiased document standing outside scripture that proclaiming knowledge about God.

Religion claims to understand God not based on human prowess but rather revelation of God by God through translation of the holy scriptures. To these faith systems knowing God does not result from unbiased observation and study. Knowing God is exclusive to God making himself known to the observer through scripture first and experience of God is interpreted according to this Divine self-disclosure. The trouble is that if God is a human conceptualization how can something birthed from the mind of humankind develop a language and power separate from it and speak for itself separate from its human creators? That which can be seen, shared, and agreed upon conclusively is non-existent in relation to God. Due to this inability to gather such objective knowledge, the state of knowing God in unequivocally is impossible.

Drawing from these facts the only rational conclusion is that knowledge of God being that it is theorized should be open to change and not confined to ultimate truths. The holy books should be a starting point in the quest of know God not a destination. As many nations have encountered and conceptualized God attention should be given to what has been gathered to develop a knowledge of God that is universal including instead of singular.

God and His Chosen

Although the God of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity is the same God each religion presents a concept of the God that is incompatible with the other. In the discussion of the concept of God leading to the more prevailing question of what is a constructive, generous, and compassionate concept of God for the 21st century, it is important to first examine the historical concept of God amongst Abrahamic faiths. Each religion claims to have a concept of God so accurate that it is ultimate truth. This claim is not based on what has been suggested by the followers of the faith but according to the God they worship specifically through inspired scriptures.

All three are monotheistic faiths viewing God as the supreme being and creator of the heavens and earth with no beginning or end.

Allah for the Muslim is a transcendent God in the fullest sense of the word. Allah has no image, likeness, or another other physical depiction which prevents Muslims from committing the sin of idolatry. For the Muslim and the Jew Gods superiority prohibits God from occupying a physical body. The application of any physical quality is subtracted from the Islamic concept of God including a gender and other anthropomorphic characteristics.

The foundational idea of the Islamic concept of God is *tawhid* meaning oneness. Allah is exercising this oneness by having no collaborators, offspring, or council assisting in the divine governing of affairs.⁴² Allah does however have a messenger, Muhammad who was responsible for giving the Quran to the world and the subsequent start of the Islamic religion.⁴³ In the chapter of the Quran named The Unity (*Al-Ikhlās*) a comprehensive understanding of this characteristic is demystified. Ascribing any attribute of Allah to another and denying the oneness of Allah is called shirk, meaning idolatry.⁴⁴

The Quran is clear that there is no likeness, lineage, or dependance Allah has on another to exercise the power of being Allah and one third of the Quran deals with the oneness of Allah. This is quite different from the Christian concept of God where there is a lineage, incarnation, trinity, and likeness ascribed to God.

⁴² “Unity of Allah (Tawhid),” December 19, 2012, <https://www.al-islam.org/allah-yasin-t-al-jibouri/unity-allah-tawhid>.

⁴³ Armstrong, *A History of God*. 140

⁴⁴ “Unity of Allah (Tawhid).”

The claim to being a people that worship God in the truest manner and most untainted form is largely due to the concept of God that has no partners, or physical manifestations. God is represented as one that is beyond comparison to anything created, written, or said.

Christianity presents a concept of God that is opposite in many ways to that of both Judaism and Islam. The Christian God is a monotheistic omni-God represented by and exercising his godliness through a Holy Trinity. For the Christian, God is the supreme being and creator of the universe and all life that occupies it but is expressed through the Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. This apparent three deity council should technically eliminate the Christian God from the category of being monotheistic, but it does not. God in his oneness is the three equally and this characteristic has been challenging to explain and even more complicated to understand.⁴⁵

Regarding the Trinity Armstrong states, “The Trinity only made sense as a mystical or spiritual experience: It had to be lived, not thought, because God went far beyond human concepts. It was not a logical or intellectual formulation but an imaginative paradigm that confounded reason.”⁴⁶ The Christian God is unique in the anthropomorphic representations attached to him as a male carrying out human tasks such as fighting, thinking, deciding, plotting, having a residence, presiding, saving, and condemning. His decent onto earth through the second person of the Trinity, Jesus connected him with humanity in a way the God of other faiths did not. God died for the sins of humanity to reestablish the relationship they enjoyed in the

⁴⁵ Armstrong, *A History of God*. 23

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 117

beginning of creation.⁴⁷ God is personal, listening to prayers, granting blessings, and leading humanity to salvation.

In Judaism where the Abrahamic faiths concept of God originated, God is an Omni-God that has created all things alone. Like Allah the Yahweh is a God that is beyond human comprehension. Yahweh started out as a warrior God but was transformed into a transcendent deity. Upon the transformation of the concept of God Yahweh became a God that related to Israel through prophets, secular events, and personal visitations.⁴⁸ Armstrong states, “The God of Israel had originally distinguished himself from the pagan deities by revealing himself in concrete current events, not simply in mythology and liturgy.”⁴⁹

Yahweh was a God that entered a covenant with Israel and became their God. In return he asked for loyalty, and commitment to his guiding and being a people that were Holy and separated from the nations. The separation was not a statement of superiority of the chosen people but rather a testimony to the greatness of the God they worshipped. The Israelites would be those that abstained from impure thoughts, actions, and improper worship. In exchange for their dedication Yahweh promised to make them into a great nation, a wonderful people to be admired and their God praised.

Yahweh had proven himself to be protector of his people and keeper of his word to Abraham. He emancipated the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery, leading them to the promised land, and making them a great nation. According to the Torah, the Israelites ruled for 200 years before the fall of their kingdom and enjoined countless victories, riches and success. Yahweh

⁴⁷ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. I Peter 3:18ESV

⁴⁸ Ibid., 42

⁴⁹ Ibid., 43

was also at times a brutal God that ruled with an iron fist leading his people into captivity by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires.

The Jewish consider themselves to be the chosen people of God as do Christians and Muslims. This religious election of a chosen people subsequently appoints a rejected people. This creates the paradox that God as loving and wise chooses some and rejects others. This ideology has fueled religious nationalism, social injustice, minority oppression, and violent fundamentalist inspired world events. The belief that God is working with and through a single group of people exclusively erroneously gives that group authority to execute despotic religious agendas without encumbrance.

Conclusion

The religious fundamentalist of the Abrahamic faiths are motivated by the ideology of being Gods chosen. They believe this title gives them the divine authority to carry out what they believe to be the will of God on earth. They are called to battle the forces of evil that are set against God and preventing God from doing great works. The chosen act as Gods military bravely standing up in the face of Gods enemies with the mission to convert them or reject them. That rejection at times is through condemnation, excommunication, oppression, or violence.

The concept of God for the fundamentalists is an authoritarian superhuman. He is slow to accept sexual diversity, gender equality, and modern science. Because of these perspectives the New Atheist Movement have argued against the existence of God based on weaknesses of this God concept. Understanding who God is, what God does, and what God says from a fundamentalist standpoint will allow us to dive deeper into this study of the concept of God before presenting my own.

CHAPTER 3

ACCORDING TO FUNDAMENTALISM

Fundamentalism arose as a response to secular modernity which offered a scientific source for the creation of the universe, and an objection to God based on human logic and reasoning. Philosophers such as Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx gave science, human reason, and logic enough power to render God optional if not useless. These were not new ideas as atheists have always been contributors of the theological conversation. But during the 18th and 19th centuries, the adequacy of God was jeopardized as the individual took office as self-master, savior, and authority over his own life. Darwin's theory of evolution proclaimed that God was no longer a legitimate option for creator and director of the affairs of creation.

Conversations in philosophy and theology explored the benefits of abandoning the fear of, and dependence on God and embracing less mystical alternatives for answering ultimate questions about self, purpose, enlightenment, and the creation. Albert Einstein considered the physical Universe to be a legitimate alternative to God.⁵⁰ A long history of war, genocide, oppression, and the weaponization of religion complicated the rationality of the existence of an all loving, perfect omni-God. It was no longer taboo to believe that the God of the Abrahamic faiths was an impractical source for moral conditioning, peacemaking, and personal development.

Modern ideas about religion made room for the possibility of personal and existential fulfillment without living to satisfy the desire of God as a prerequisite. God had become an optional accessory, something you chose to pick up and put to use or leave in its box and ignore.

⁵⁰ Albert Einstein and Bernard Shaw, *Einstein on Cosmic Religion: And Other Opinions and Aphorisms*, Dover ed (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2009).

For this reason, fundamentalism emerged as the self-appointed defenders of all that is righteous, true, and good. They saw this mass unabashed ridicule and denial of God as a sign that humanity was becoming increasingly evil and immoral. To the Fundamentalist this choice of secular over spiritual living and thinking not only hurt the unbelieving individual but had serious consequences for humanity as a whole.⁵¹

The Fundamentalist proclaims that throughout history, the existence of natural disasters, terrorism, war, and homosexuality result from reckless misuse of free will, and a divine response to our apostasy. Therefore, Fundamentalist understand themselves to be holy warriors ordained to fight against the influence of Satan and for the preservation of the Kingdom of God and his will for humanity.⁵² As the people of God, his chosen, they have a responsible role in the manifestation of the will of God on earth, the defeat of the forces of evil, and the salvation of humanity. Those individuals are amongst the community of believers as nonbelievers are thought to be both unwilling to participate in the distribution of righteousness and of no great use being absent of sanctification. The ideas and convictions of the fundamentalist come from what they believe to be the very mouth of God. The scriptures are guidelines for living a life that is satisfactory to God and conducive to the coming of the Kingdom of God.

⁵¹ This ideology is adapted from a literal reading of a biblical narrative present throughout the Bible. The narrative is that one negative action from a group member harms the entire group. If a negative activity was carried out by a member of the group, the entire group was subject to suffer for the actions of that person. We see this in the Biblical story of Achan where his disobedience caused his entire family to be put to death. While the Israelites were at Mt. Sinai God considered wiping them out and starting over due to the complaints and ungratefulness some of them, expressed. We also see this example in Genesis with the sins of Adam and Eve bringing separation from God upon the entire human race.

⁵² Martin E. Marty, "Explaining the Rise of Fundamentalism," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 46, no. 5 (February 1993): 57, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3824960>.

What is misunderstood by the fundamentalist is that an objection to God does not signify the denial of the existence of God. The objection here is based on a particular concept of God rather than the existence of an ultimate being. Fundamentalists believe in a perfect God, flawless in character actions. A loving omni-God that has created a world where the possibility of evil exists, visiting both young and old, should be held responsible for its existence. Knowing the evil acts of humans and the presence of dark spiritual forces have residency in a world created by a loving omni-God forces us to reconsider the traditional concept of a God.

The fight against evil is the chief objective of the fundamentalist. Yet evil is defined strictly as that which does not agree with the religious doctrine and agenda of their own faith system. The mega churches in the United States do little to combat the evils of social injustice, political agendas to oppress civil rights, systemic racism, economic inequality, or police violence against African Americans. Evil in the world is not hard to find but a concept of God that is an advocate for equality in all its possibilities for all people is missing in the theology of the fundamentalist.

The Word of God

A human scriptural writer stating that a holy book is true based on his own convictions is not an efficient source for claiming ultimate truth. Therefore, the claims of religious ultimate truth do not come from the notoriety of the writer but from the one that he is writing about. God is credited with revealing the truth of himself, humanity, the world, and eternity in the scriptures. What the reader is experiencing is the actual story of God acting in human history as experienced and shared by God himself.⁵³ Acceptance of the scriptures as the literal word of God is acceptance that what is being stated are historical, verifiable facts by a trustworthy source.

⁵³ Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge London: Harvard University Press, 1972), 10.

Literal readings of scripture are supported as there is no error in what God has said to humanity. This, however, causes problems as the reader must accept the mythical world of events presented by scripture over logic, science, and history. If such an irresponsible method of reading is done it creates an image of God that exhibits toxic masculinity, abuse of power, sexism, a lack of emotional intelligence and a spiritual hierarchy. If the scriptures are accepted as inerrant and authoritative we witness God confessing to committing crimes against humanity. Considering this, one can agree that the Abrahamic religions holding a doctrine of scriptural inerrancy present a God that has been used to justify the oppression of others.⁵⁴

In contrast to doctrines of inerrancy, accepting the scriptures as guides for the discovery of God, self and enlightenment is a productive use of the holy books. The belief that the literal word of God is found in the scriptures puts divine limitations on God and members of society. What has been insinuated about the spiritual possibilities of members of the LGBTQ+ community, the role of men and women in society, and non-believers creates an image of God that is limited in intelligence, compassion, and insight.

Knowledge of God

The knowledge of God is exclusive to Gods self-revelation through the scriptures which is essential for claiming absolute knowledge of God, humankind, and creation.⁵⁵ Fundamentalist believe God cannot be subjectively “discovered” because God objectively reveals himself to the world through scripture. For the individual knowing God is not done in the process of doing

⁵⁴ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

⁵⁵ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, Reissued, The Harper Perennial Resistance Library (New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi Auckland: HarperPerennial, 2019).

religion but in accepting given knowledge, what has been said about God according to a specific hermeneutic. For the fundamentalist knowing God is not conducted through personal exploration but according to what has already been said and corporately accepted as accurate. In support of this idea Torrey writes, “when one makes his philosophy his authority, it is not a long step until he makes himself his own god. His own reason becomes supreme in his thinking and this reason becomes his lord.”⁵⁶

A believer must reject their personal ideas of God when they do not support the corporate concept of God.⁵⁷ Truth about God is not mined from the empirical experience of the individual but is shaped according to the scriptural interpretation of the religious leadership. Who and what God is, is not freely discovered by the believer but is prepackaged and handed to them as they leave the secular world and enter the church. The freedom to gain a knowledge of God not strictly informed by the religion is impossible as the believer is said to be incapable of engaging in such an activity independently due to an inability to commit righteous acts. The liberty to think about who and what God is autonomously is a threat to the continuity of the fundamentalist community as adherence to one mind is imperative.⁵⁸

For the fundamentalist knowing God is less of an exploration than it is the assignment of a standard set of beliefs and concepts to the believer. A constructive God allows space for the individual to know God according to the specifics of the individual’s situation. That situation

⁵⁶ R. A. Torrey, ed., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, Repr. without alteration or abridgment from the orig., four-volume ed. issued by the Bible Inst. of Los Angeles in 1917 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1998). 113

⁵⁷ Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, The Fundamentalism Project 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁵⁸ Hoffer, *The True Believer*. 101

includes but is not limited to their moment in history, cultural background, and access to religious material. As process theology suggests, God evolves with creation because when constraints are placed on how knowledge of God is obtained it limits access to God and what God can become.⁵⁹ If God can only be known through particular sources the claim that God is omnipresent is illegitimate.

A knowledge and an experience of God are not one in the same. Experiences are the building blocks of knowledge therefore experience should play a crucial role in the justification of what is and is not knowledge. If my experience of God suggests a defect in my knowledge of God, I should investigate further, working to obtain a balance between my experiences and my knowledge. To accept given knowledge of God that does not align with experience leads to erroneous concepts of God, incorrect ideas about yourself, and reality. When it comes to God, we must be careful not to accept given knowledge as the absolute truth, placing it above our empirical knowledge.

A subjective knowledge of God should be used to confirm the objective knowledge of God not vice versa. The starting point for knowledge of God in a constructive concept of God gives legitimacy to a discovery of God outside as well as inside religion. The inability to conceive of a true knowledge of God outside religious sources produces a concept of God that is weakened by closed minds and imprisoned in a cell of traditionalism. If knowledge of God does not result in the celebration of your authenticity it leads to the same prison that antiquated God is speaking to you from.

⁵⁹ Daniel A. Dombrowski, *A History of the Concept of God: A Process Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 216.

The Work of God

For the Fundamentalist human expressions of love for the world translate as hatred toward God and a rejection of all that is holy (John 2:15). Just like Moses for the Jew, Jesus for the Christian, and Muhammad for the Muslim, the fundamentalist, appointed to fulfill the office of the chosen, is honorably burdened with the task of doing the work of God. This work involves the espousal of the will of God in an environment that is believed to be violently opposed to it. The understanding is that the continuation of life and liberty for the community of believers and the proclamation of God's will is dependent on the tenacity of the active, uncompromising believer.

The work of this role is to undertake a comprehensive national missions initiative aimed at refreshing the minds and hearts of humankind with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ The fundamentalist defines this Gospel as a literal reading of the Bible ignoring modern criticism, which foolishly uses human logic to understand the mind and actions of God. They believe the modern Gospel of academia utilizing historical evidence, archeological findings, and critical thinking to understand the Gospel corrupts the word of God. The response from the fundamentalist was an announcement of the fundamentals of the faith, through a 12-volume series of books. The series establishes Christianity from a fundamentalist perspective boldly proclaiming it as the correct way. Stock writes, "The times demand of us a vigorous reassertion of the old truths, which are the very foundations of the Gospel system."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Arthur Pierson, "The Testimony of Foreign Missions to the Superintending Providence of God," in *The Fundamentals A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. VI, XII vols. (Chicago, IL: Testimony Publishing Company, n.d.). 14

⁶¹ John Stock, "The God-Man," in *The Fundamentals A Testament to the Truth*, vol. VI (Chicago, IL: Testimony Publishing Company, 1917). 62

Becoming Gods Type and the Toxic God Relationship

During my sophomore year of college, I met Sanetta through a mutual friend. That afternoon the three of us spent hours discussing music, 90's sitcoms, and the difference between spirituality and religion. From that day forward, I took advantage of every possible opportunity to share space with Sanetta. Although we were able to develop a solid friendship, I hoped we could be in a more exclusive relationship. But in more ways than one it became clear that I was not Sanetta's type, which made moving beyond an amicable friendship impossible. So, to materialize a deep and meaningful relationship with Sanetta I slowly and intentionally became her type.

Becoming her type meant that to nourish and sustain the new relationship between us, I became less like myself and more like her type. I surrendered the freedom of being myself in the relationship, and in life collectively. I was no longer showing up in the world as Khaaliq but as a pseudo identity, Sanetta's type. I was incapable of occupying spaces as a whole person because parts of myself, aspects of my disposition, and elements of my spirit and truth became suppressed by self-censorship. I foolishly believed that becoming her type was superior to being myself, as it deceitfully empowered me to be deeply loved, openly accepted, and enthusiastically welcomed into Sanetta's life.

The fundamentalist church believe God is like Sanetta because God too has a type that we must become to move from an amicable friendship to a divinely magnificent love affair. The God Type is the ideology that God is only interested in a deeply loving and meaningful relationship with those God is most compatible with. Believers must show up in the world in a particular way, have the same concept of reality, perception, theology, and concept of self. Not becoming this one type of person and embracing the shared identity of the believing community disqualifies you from a deep and meaningful relationship with God and acceptance into the

community of believers. The relationship is toxic as God keeps us in the friendzone; being cordial, granting basic blessings for our wellbeing, exhibiting kindness, and concern but a more intentional, spiritually productive, and existentially beneficial connection occurs when a deep and meaningful relationship is established by becoming God's Type. The relationship is toxic because it's based on the believer becoming someone instead of being themselves.

The believing community is populated with God Types connected through a particular language, code of conduct, dress, moral and ethical code, and worldview. To become a believer, one must become what is said to be what God is looking for, and what compliments the progression of the community of believers, the God Type. It is the conviction that by becoming God's Type we become spiritually attractive to God, checking all the boxes on God's soul mate wish list, validating ourselves as ideal partners. According to the church the only hope for legitimately discovering and knowing God, experiencing authentic enlightenment, victory in spiritual warfare and exploring our earthly and spiritual potential is by becoming God's Type.

For the fundamentalist, if you don't share the corporate identity of what God has said a believer must become, you're not Gods Type. Therefore, if you're a man that has sex with men, you're not God's Type. If you are transgender, lesbian, bisexual, fluid, pansexual, queer, polysexual, or sexually curious and experimental you're not God's type. If you're not a Christian, you are not God's type. If you do not believe Christianity is the only way to God, you are not God's type. As a woman if you are unwilling to accept your position in the church as being exempt from preaching in the pulpit, you are not God's Type.

If you are a woman and unwilling to accept your place in your marriage as the submissive, and subservient one, you are not God's Type. If you are unwilling to accept your position in society as the weaker and vulnerable one that needs leadership from a man, you are not God's

Type. If you do not pay your tithes, you are not God's Type. If you are not slain in the spirit every worship service; catching the Holy Ghost, running up the aisles, speaking in tongues, and shouting in the sanctuary you are not God's Type. If you are unable to turn the other cheek against your oppressors, forgive and forget those that have attempted to destroy you, and love your most ruthless neighbors, you're not God's Type.

The problem is none of us are born God's Type, we must change and become a person that God is compatible with. In this understanding God has no compatibility with who we are naturally as individuals but is rather interested in conforming to a religious prototype and sharing the corporate identity the denomination has deemed desirable by God. A contingency to the God relationship requires the individual to become Gods Type as opposed to cultivating what can emerge from within the believer naturally. This presents a problem as the individual is faced with an ultimatum; be what the church says you must be or be without a God relationship. This divine rejection results in the mundane rejection of that person in spaces that share this philosophy of how a God relationship works. To the Fundamentalist the person is not rejected due to any prejudice on the part of the church but according to the desire of God to reject those that are incompatible.

This grants the church the divine right to reject individuals based on their incompatibility with God by not taking on the identity of The God Type. Christian members of the LGBTQ+ community are subjected to spiritual experiments of conversion therapy in attempts to make them more attractive to God. Their authenticity is of no value and can offer nothing to the kingdom of God without conversion to a God Type. This toxic relationship dynamic suggests that God is not interested in cultivating the uniqueness of the individual because greater value is recognized in becoming the God Type rather than being yourself.

In a healthy relationship there must be space for each person to be themselves. Research in the psychology of relationships shows that a healthy relationship is one that provides space for each member to be themselves. To be free, safe, and confident in your self-expression allows you the space to be more authentic and confident in the explorative journey of discovering who you are. The Michelangelo Concept shows that a healthy relationship is one where your partner encourages you to be the best version of yourself and not attempt to shape you into their image of an ideal mate.⁶²

To move to a compassionate understanding of a God relationship one must imagine a God that recognizes value in individuality. A God that is an advocate for healthy relationships, religious pluralism, the LGBTQ+ community, and equality for women and minorities. A healthy God relationship is one where both partners are given space to be who and what they are without threat to conform to a standard. A healthy God relationship is one where the individual is nurtured to be the best person possible and discover God through that activity. A relationship where it is understood that God has reserved space in the creation of the universe for the individual to be all they can be.

In the relationship between God and the believer, both are limited by several factors: time and space, a physical reality, a particular geographical location, cultural background, theological understanding, and unique perspective of their environment. God is also oppressed in the relationship by being made into a type as well, what the believer wants. God becomes exclusive, cultural, familiar, and unchanging. As God is conceptualized according to a particular lens and theological understanding God becomes that which can be compatible with.

⁶² “The Michelangelo Effect | Psychology Today,” accessed February 3, 2024, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201901/the-michelangelo-effect>.

The possibility of God being other than what has been conceptualized is eliminated when God is exclusive to a single religious framework.

Likewise, a legitimate relationship with God is one where the individual remains a unique and one-of-a-kind entity. There is no struggle between God and the individual where God is requiring the individual to be transformed into someone that can be tolerated taking on the shared identity of the God Type. The activity of demanding that one becomes something other than themselves to maintain the relationship is a sign of an unhealthy relationship.

A God relationship is not based on finding a compatible mate as human relationships are based on. The God relationship is based on relating to God as your unique self. We are already compatible there are no steps to be taken to make ourselves worthy of a relationship with God. The fact that we possess uniqueness in our identity is enough.

We find that the God relationship is most productive when it is allowed to flow organically. With God being God and the person being fully themselves. The value of a person to God is not in becoming more compatible the value is in the uniqueness of the person themselves. Therefore no one is excluded in a God relationship because all are welcomed as they are without the need to conform to an identity foreign to their uniqueness.

Conclusion

Little room is available for personal exploration of God and how God compliments the life of the individual. The individual needs a healthy relationship with God which entails respect, space, and encouragement. As a partner in a healthy relationship provides spaces for the partner to freely express themselves and grow into who and what they are, God also should possess this characteristic.

What is needed is a concept of God where the individual and God share an innate connection that is inseparable. The relationship is not based on adherence to religious doctrine and guidelines but rather on the grounds of the connection between creator and creation. God is not a dictator running the world in a way that only please God. The operation of the world and the manifestation of human experiences are a result of the joint creative activity of humankind and God. The individual and God are connected to each other and communicate through the ultimate truth of personal authenticity. As the individual acts out who and what they are authentically God is present in a unique and personal way to the individual.

CHAPTER 4

THE WEAKNESS OF GOD

The suggestion made by the New Atheist movement that God is not real, is legitimate.⁶³ The accuracy of the statement is not based on empirical evidence, or results from objective studies proving that God in general is imaginary. The truthfulness of the statement is verified according to a case of mistaken identity, where a difference is noticed between God the unseen reality and God the human conception.⁶⁴ God the reality is God in full authenticity; mysterious, active, and unseen absent of the attachments of name, gender, identity, and religious affiliation. While God the human interpretation and religious conceptualization of that mysterious being.

The New Atheist investigation and subsequent rejection of the existence of God result from an interrogation and critique not of God the reality but God as conceptualized by the religious mind. This God is less agreeing with modernity, scientific investigation, academia, and contemporary concerns making him remarkably incompatible for our moment in history.⁶⁵ Therefore, when talk of the nonexistence of the Christian God is carried out by the New Atheist the activity is done based on a supreme being that is easy to dismiss and gain support for rejection of his existence and necessity.⁶⁶

⁶³ Anthony B. Pinn, *The End of God-Talk: An African American Humanist Theology* (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

⁶⁴ A separation must be made to avoid confusion between separate concepts of God. I am not assuming two Gods exist but rather distinguishing between the God concept of religion and the God the reality. There is not two Gods but rather two concepts of God.

⁶⁵ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 77.

⁶⁶ Hitchens, *God is Not Great*.

This God is an anthropomorphic being that created life but face adversities due to a powerful evil nemesis, and the exercise of human free will. This God has a plan of salvation to address the human problem of sin and moral corruption through the acceptance of Christianity. He speaks openly and comprehensively in the Bible. He possesses all power, knowledge, strength, and occupies all space simultaneously making him the sole controller of all circumstances for believers of nonbelievers.⁶⁷ This God requires believers to accept mythology over science and logic.⁶⁸ He is said to be a good God, faithful, and worthy of worship. Considering the violence of the Crusades, the Slave Trade, the Holocaust, World Wars, Sandy Hook Elementary, and the current situation in Gaza the phrase God is good is questionable as God is seemingly not a good protector of his people.⁶⁹

For the Atheist, the existence of God is contingent on the plausibility of a supreme being that works for modern times and is compatible with an intelligent modern mind.⁷⁰ For the Atheist, belief in God is a primitive activity. It is a step in the evolutionary process that will disappear as humans advance to more complex ways of being. The issue with this thinking is that viewing God through the lens of closed off ideas and theories as absolute truth leads to misunderstanding of what God is.

When the mystery of God is removed, and God is given to us in a complete package fully assembled the potentiality of God is compromised. All that can be said about God must be

⁶⁷ What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction Rom 9:22 ESV

⁶⁸ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

⁶⁹ Pinn, *Why, Lord?*, 58.

⁷⁰ Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 67.

understood to emerge from the deficit of resources to communicate God in fullness.⁷¹ Surely when presented with alternative concepts of God, disbelief of the existence of God and ridicule of believers will continue by the New Atheist Movement.⁷²

The goal is not to convince the reader of the existence of God but rather present a functional concept of God that is missing the characteristics that have made such a being challenging to accept and easy to dismiss. I'm not suggesting such a concept does not exist outside Christian fundamentalism because it does. There are many progressive Christians that accept a concept of God that is inclusive, compassionate, welcoming. The difference presented here will be a God that is available and active outside religion and through the activity of self-discovery.

In their critiques of God, the New Atheist Movement has succeeded is presenting the weaknesses of the concept of God. For the Atheist, the belief that God does not exist is proven through these weaknesses. Many flaws are presented by the Atheist, but I will share a few that I agree with and believe are the most important in helping to construct a concept of God that is compassionate, considerate, and relevant for the 21st century. These weaknesses are concentrated on who God is, what God says and what God does.

Who is God?

Who is God? This statement suggests that an identity, defined set of characteristics and activities are assigned to God. When the statement is made about God the response emerges from an experience of observing how God shows up in the world.

⁷¹ Alister McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove, IL: Ivp Books, 2010), 37.

⁷² "I am not attacking any particular version of God or gods. I am attacking God, all gods, anything, and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been or will be invented." Dawkins, *The God Delusion*. 57

A unique entity such as God shows up in the world, acts in the lives of individuals, and makes itself known through experience.

In the holy books of the Abrahamic faiths God reveals himself as an anthropomorphic omni-God with body parts, hair, and human clothing.⁷³ We witness God laughing, speaking, deciding, fighting, and expressing emotions. God who made man in his image is himself a manlike entity with immeasurable power and ability. The weakness with God being presented according to an anthropomorphic representation suggests that God is a bigger more advanced human instead of an entity altogether different.

The humanlike manner used to describe God justifies the characteristic of a personal God answering prayers, available for worship, and entering into a relationship with the believer.⁷⁴ God sits on a throne, and since the beginning has been building and overseeing a heavenly kingdom and requiring believers to be his servants before entering into a deep and meaningful relationship with them. Knowing that these humanlike assertions placed on God are simply ways to describe a complex entity they are still optional.⁷⁵

Stories where God has intervened in human history show him seeking advice from humans, and changing his mind, which make the image of God as one trying to figure things out.⁷⁶ If God

⁷³ Towns, *Theology for Today*.

⁷⁴ Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation.,: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*, 1. ed (New York: Anchor Books, 2007).

⁷⁵ When examining the concept of God in eastern spiritual practices we are presented with a formless supreme consciousness connected to both believer and nonbeliever without prejudice.

⁷⁶ This is supportive of process theology where God works with humanity as co-creators in the process of creating.

is to be divine a more abstract concept of the appearance and form of God should be adapted. The locality of God as omnipresent yet vacant from the individual until conversion gives a God that is not perpetually present in the individual.⁷⁷

For an Omni-God nothing is unknown, unseen, unattainable, or unheard. As creator of the heavens and the earth God possess all power and knowledge available in the universe he created. As omnipotent God requires omniscience to properly exercise the power to control and direct history and human experience. A sinful act of a believer results in repercussions from God leaving the individual at the mercy of an unrelenting force.⁷⁸ The believer may also be negatively affected by the sinful activity of the secular population. Their immoral actions provoking the anger of God resulting in universal human judgement.

For the fundamentalist the evil in the world poses no challenge to the ability of God to be omnipotent and omniscience. It is not the unwillingness or incapacity of God to powerfully and wisely, prevent evil from occupying the world. The onus is on the actions of the free-willed individual being influenced by the Satan who appeals to the sinful nature of humankind. Therefore, God is exonerated in the search for the guilty party, in order to retain the title of a good God.

A weakness is exposed when considering the immeasurable power, and knowledge of God when considering the problem of evil. How can one make sense of an omnipotent, good God, that doesn't stop the evils in the world from occurring?

⁷⁷ God is always with the individual and that presence is not limited to adherence to a religious code or the salvation ritual, where the Spirit of God comes into the believer.

⁷⁸ The Man of God from Judah in 1 Kings 13

For the Atheist a good God doesn't allow bad things to happen which is one of the strongest objections to the existence of God. For a Good God to exist a good world void of bad things must logically be the result of his supreme goodness in action and his creative activity.⁷⁹

It [the doctrine of depravity] supplies the key to the course of human history and shows why so much of it has been written in blood and tears. It supplies an explanation of many problems which sorely perplex and puzzle the thoughtful. It reveals why the child is prone to evil and must be taught and disciplined to anything that is good. It explains why every improvement in man's environment, every attempt to educate him, all the efforts of social reformers, are unavailing to affect any radical betterment in his nature and character. It accounts for the horrible treatment which Christ met with when He worked so graciously in this world, and why He is still despised and rejected by men.⁸⁰

If God is believed to be the sole creator of the universe and evil exists in that universe the presence and management of that evil does not escape the responsibility of God.⁸¹ We cannot create a narrative where evil and suffering are manifestations of the work of Satan and humankind with God and humanity being victims of such evil. If we do accept this as truth, we are in essence asserting that Gods wisdom, and power are thwarted by lesser beings. To say God is in charge yet blame the broken dishes, and unpaid bills on the children only makes God irresponsible and unqualified to be called a good God.

Can God still be good while evil is present in what God has created? The answer requires a shift in the interpretation of good God.

⁷⁹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

⁸⁰ A. W. Pink, "*The Total Depravity of Man*", accessed November 5, 2023, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/depravity_nook.html.

⁸¹ Richard Swinburne, "Why Does God Allow Evil?," in *Questions About God: Today's Philosophers Ponder the Divine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 19–35.

If we define good God as one that performs actions that are guaranteed to result in good, we will forever be without such a being. When we interpret good God as one that acts according to good intentions, we move beyond needing to be witnesses to the good results. In a world like ours, God is working according to the best intentions yet is doing so with individuals that have been given the ability to create various realities, some good and others unfavorable.

I believe the elimination of evil in the world is unrealistic but at the same time I still believe God has good intentions in cocreating reality with us as beings ignorant to the ultimate results of our actions.⁸²

What God Says

The second weakness of the fundamentalist concept of God exposed by the New Atheist I will focus on concerns what God says. What has been said by God is limited to and legitimized by the holy books of each faith. These revelations are precise, unchanging and prohibit any addition or subtraction to them. This is a limitation to who God is known as and what can be said about God. A God that is exclusively reveled in the scriptures of a holy book is limited to being only that which is contained within those scriptures. This grants supremacy to that religious perspective while giving no legitimacy to what other religions, and spiritualities say about God.

What God says is not simply truthful but ultimate truth making the scriptures themselves inerrant. The validity of religious truth is built and maintained on claims of exclusively having access to what God has said, ultimate truth. That Ultimate Truth is lived out through the

⁸² It's like working with an inexperienced partner on a masterpiece. The inexperienced partner keeps doing things that the more experienced and wiser partner and leader of the project would never do. The more experienced partner continues to work with the apprentice to create the ideal project. This is not a fully fleshed out theodicy but simply a starting point to answering the problem of evil in a way that does not exonerate God. As God did create and that creation does have the potential to produce good and evil.

religion's beliefs, practices, and teachings which claim to have the ability to bring the human mind, body, and spirit to a realization of God. But how many ways are there to bring the human mind, body, and spirit to a realization of God? Can a single religion using its unique philosophy be validated as Ultimate Truth? Can Ultimate Truth be limited to one, or two, or one hundred, two million philosophies, forms, traditions, ideas? Something truly ultimate has no limitations, no boundaries, no attributes of weakness, no places where it can't enter, no area it doesn't influence, no person it can't reach regardless of their religious affiliation.

Another limitation to the doctrine of the fullness of scripture on Gods revelation is found in the resulting cutting off, of new discoveries about God now and by future examiners. If the scriptures are ultimate truth and present God in his fullness, then we have all there is to know about God and further knowing is impractical. This cutting off what can be known contradicts the characteristic of an immeasurably vast and unknowable entity as God is made known and complete in the scriptures. As the scriptures make what God has to say final about Godself, they also present a God that is silent on several modern issues.

Knowing God for the individual is limited to who religion has informed them of who and what God is. To use what scripture says as a guide for discovering God is a valid method but the endeavor to discovery God is corrupted when personal exploration of God does not agree with scriptural understanding. The fundamental reason an individual cannot, from the fundamentalist perspective, discovery God through personal exploration outside religion is due to the nature of the individual being corrupt and untrustworthy. What God says about humanity is troublesome. The individual is totally depraved, unable, and unwilling to be in faithful submission to God.

This incapacity to be useful to God creates a separation between those that are believers, friends, or children of God, and those that are not, making them enemies of God.⁸³ The value of the individual is based on their membership and dedication to the kingdom of God.

What God does

The third weakness is based on what God does. An important assertion about the activity of God is that God is engaged in spiritual warfare with a fallen angel. Christianity claims that Satan desires the same prize as God which is the souls of humankind. Each entity works to influence the individual to submit to their will. The will of God described as being the pursuit of all that is good and righteous while Satan works for the manifestation of evil and corruption. The battle has been going on since the beginning of human history, preceding The Fall. The world is the work of Satan and in opposition of the will of God. Therefore, allegiance with God demands one give up the love of the world and look upward toward a future home in heaven.

God offers salvation to the individual to emancipate them from the grip of the world. God is not fighting for his own sake but for the sake of his beloved creation, humankind. The weakness is that while salvation grants the individual a place in heaven but not safety from the activity of Satan. The promise of God is delayed as the fullness of such a promise is offered in the afterlife.

⁸³ We see this same scenario play out in society as religious groups separate themselves from those that do not agree with their beliefs. The believers are considered wise and on the side of God while the nonbelievers are labeled as being those that are in opposition to God and his kingdom. The work of God and the benefit of what such a work produces can only be experienced by those that are believers. Non-believers are enemies not only to God but also the believer as their allegiance, and life energy are aimed at fulfilling what they believe to be the will of God.

The idea of an omni-God having to battle for what he created with a lesser entity that he also created makes the attribute of God being both omniscience and omnipotent challenging to accept. God defeated the army of Egypt to free the Hebrew slaves who could not defend themselves, as well as other nations while they occupied Israel, but Satan seems to be more difficult to defeat. How is it that Satan, after his decision to reject God, obtained power that makes him a formidable foe to God? Where did this power come from, and how does it exist in the creation to be able to reject the creator? In the First Testament we see God and Satan collaborating on an experiment testing the strength of Job's loyalty to God. This very cruel, sadistic, abuse of power makes God out to be one lacking good judgement and faithfulness to his worshippers.

If Satan and a third of the angels, who resided in heaven with God, can be influenced by evil what spiritual difficulties, and corrupting influences await the believer in heaven? It seems that heaven has the same issues earth does and making it to heaven may not be a solution to the problem of sin and human depravity. Salvation seems to have some complications in sheltering the believer from evil, oppression, terrorism, and injustice on earth and based on the suggested activity in the realms of heaven, an unknown corruption of the soul is also possible behind the pearly gates.

The salvation God gives is valid only on Earth as it promises entrance into an eternal existence of peace and closeness to God. Salvation is for the purpose of purification and reconnection with God but the full benefits of peace and all that is good are to be experienced at the ending of the spiritual war between God and Satan. Until this war is over, the believer is not safe on earth nor in heaven from corruption and evil influence.

God's activities include the condemnation of non-believers. The desire for God is to have a deep and meaningful relationship with every member of humanity. This is done exclusively through active and dedicated membership in the community of believers. Nonbelievers have no excuse as they have been offered salvation by God through the work of Christ at some point in their lives. Therefore, the rejection of the offer of salvation of God condemns the individual to eternal separation from God.

The weakness here is found in the denial of an individual's unique cultural, historical, and religious setting. A person from a Muslim country, Jewish background, or eastern spiritual perspective has deep roots in their own God concept. Dismissal of the importance of the cultural theological voice that has spoken into the lives of individuals suggests a God that is unaware that nations have encountered the Divine in their own ways. For God to require an individual from one religion to first convert before being saved and the human problem addressed are the actions of an insensitive authoritarian God ignorant to the richness of diverse culture religious understandings.

Conclusion

Traditional religious ideas about God inform and constrict the concept of who and what God is and who and what God can be. The Fundamentalist have constricted our understanding of God in several ways. The identity we give to God, and what God does and says presents a concept of God that is limited by the mind of those that invent such a God. The New Atheist Movement has taken the concept of God presented by the fundamentalist and exposed the weaknesses of the concept and have made the God hard to accept. Taking their objections into consideration we can construct a concept of God for the 21st century.

CHAPTER 5

BECOMING GODS TYPE

As we have seen in the previous chapters, both the Fundamentalist and the New Atheist envision and hold faith in a God that is mythological, restrictive, exclusive, and ultimately dangerous. These inapt characteristics make the necessary space for a God that supports a human hierarchy giving divine attention and value to a preferred type.⁸⁴ For the Fundamentalist Christian, to be a true believer the individual must self-sacrifice by surrendering their unique identity and taking on the shared identity of Gods Type. This person is a conceptualization that necessitates the corresponding concept of God that requires a type. Hoeffler states, “The less justified a man is in claiming excellence for his own self, the more ready he is to claim all excellence for his nation, his religion, his race, or his holy cause.”⁸⁵

The God Type is a divinely preferred human identity, which is the model for all believers to become to be compatible with, salvaged by, effective for, and desired by God.⁸⁶ It is the personification of the ideal human. The divine need for a type of person makes no room for unique human personal identities, and free expressions of selfhood, but necessitates a singular

⁸⁴ This type refers to the God Type. Religion works to transform the person into an ideal person that can be accepted by and is compatible with their concept of God. Becoming The God type is a goal believers ascribe to achieve in order to be in a deep and meaningful relationship with God.

⁸⁵ Hoffer, *The True Believer*, 16.

⁸⁶ Since the God type is something that we must become this questions that value of who and what we are already. It suggests that individual authenticity is not adequate in establishing a deep and meaningful relationship with God. The shared identity of the Type is preferred, demanding that you become less like yourself and more like Gods Type which is a shared community identity, beliefs, and manner of showing up in the world.

identity, humanity must embrace as a prerequisite to enlightenment, contribution of beneficial work in the kingdom, and a deep and meaningful relationship with God.

For the sake of his relevance, God is solely for his Type, (believer) and against those of another identity. Therefore the existence and relevance of God is contingent on the progression of The God Type.⁸⁷ Collectively the community of believers take on the single identity of the God type consisting of; linguistic uniformity, a common worldview, and philosophy of life resulting in a distinctive manner of living out one's existence.⁸⁸ Showing up in the world in a manner that supports the concept of God worshipped, establishes divine value, and need for the God Type as God is formed by their hands and granted the breath of life through them.

Because the concept of God does not come into existence on its own but is imagined, conceptualized, formed, and energized by the God Type the adaptation of this identity is a prerequisite to the welcoming into a believing community populated by the homogenous identity of Gods Type.⁸⁹ As universal conformity is a rejection of individualized freedom of expression, becoming God's Type is a burdensome endless task one must commit to.

⁸⁷ The believers are the creators of the God they worship. The language, image, and philosophy supporting God emerges from the mind of the believer.

⁸⁸ This disposition pairs with the God concept in which they accept as ultimate reality. The God Type is a very specific person with a particular system of language and communication, a methodology, a method of comprehension and strategy of perception, a set of values, interpretation of self-identity and self-awareness. It is a concept that religion has succeeded in conveying as a prerequisite for God's ultimate love, acceptance, and eternal blessings. It is believed that becoming the God Type is an unequivocal marker for those that genuinely love and honor God and in return are cherished and highly favored by God.

⁸⁹ For there to be unity and progression of any religious movement there must be a shared mindset that's dominant and recognizable and characteristic of the community.

It is a role one must play, an alternate reality one must accept, a mask one must put on.

Becoming the God Type is a drama one must act out if there is to be any legitimate acceptance of the individual by God.⁹⁰ The self-sacrifice involved in becoming Gods Type is justified through the rejection of the self in general.

Hoefffer states:

To ripen a person for self-sacrifice he must be stripped of his individual identity and distinctiveness. He must cease to be George, Hans, Ivan or Tadao. The most drastic way to achieve this end is by complete assimilation of the individual into the collective body. When asked who he is, his automatic response is that he is a German, a Russian, a Japanese, a Christian, a Moslem.⁹¹

Christian Fundamentalism gives no value to an idea of self that is righteous, and spiritually productive outside the religious sphere.⁹² The power of self is found in the surrendering of that self and the picking up of the shared identity of Gods Type according to Christian standards. The value of self is not found in their propensity to be themselves but rather in their ability to become Gods Type. To convince a person that self-sacrifice is necessary he must first be led to believe that self is corrupt, and individuality in some way leads to evil.⁹³

⁹⁰ Fundamentalism teaches that this is the only type of person that God can establish a deep and meaningful relationship with because the God Type is the only person God is willing to be in a deep and meaningful relationship with. The God Type is a divine campaign advocating for a single human identity, one homogenous mind, will, perspective, and cause.

⁹¹ Hoffer, *The True Believer*. 78

⁹² Hoffer, 77.

⁹³ A mass movement attracts and holds a following not because it can satisfy the desire for self-advancement, but because it can satisfy the passion for self-renunciation. They look on self-interest as something tainted and evil; something unclean and unlucky. Anything undertaken

Any concept of God constitutes a concept of a type of person for which that God is necessary and makes space for in the creation of the universe for. When African American Christians rejected the God concept of their slave masters, they created a new concept and in turn a new God Type emerged that complimented such a God.⁹⁴ The God concept was on the side of the oppressed, patient, hopeful slave, which was the God Type. When minorities create new concepts of God that embrace social justice, equality, liberation, and freedom of expression the result is Queer Theology, Womanist Theology, Black Liberation Theology, etc. All of which require a concept of God that is unique in its focus and purpose addressing a particular issue for a particular people during a particular moment in history making accommodations for them.

The development of a constructive, generous, and compassionate concept of God for the 21st century does not ignore the manifestation of a corresponding Type. The difference is that human selfhood and individuality takes centerstage instead of conformity, and assimilation. In a positive God Type, the God Type is not an identity that one must take on at the sacrifice to the natural identity. Here the God Type is the one that chooses to be authentic in who they are and find discovery God, Self, and Enlightenment in that activity. The type is free from the responsivity of working to be what God wants and finding value in that project. The value of the person for the positive God Type is innate, like wet to water, and heat to fire. My attempt is to conceptualize a God that is located not in a heavenly realm but lives in the activity of being true to your

under the auspices of the self seems to them foredoomed. Nothing that has its roots and reasons in the self can be good and noble. Hoffer, 83.

⁹⁴ Pinn, *Why, Lord?*

individuality and discovering God in that activity instead of becoming a God Type to be accepted by God.⁹⁵

To have a concept of God that works for the 21st century and beyond it needs to be one that encourages, fosters, and honors self-advancement. Human improvement is carried out through the expression of one's unique individuality and activity of authentic self-exploration without depriving others of the same freedoms. This is because self-development is done with and among a community and the honoring of others development nurtures your own.⁹⁶ The future of religion rests on the concept of a constructive, generous, and compassionate God for the modern landscape; a God that is equally accessible, valid, and effective through both secular and holy sources.⁹⁷ One that celebrates the diversity of humanity instead of demanding conformity to the prototype of an ideal person.

God as Constructive

A constructive concept of God is one where God makes room in the creation of the universe for the fulfillment of selfhood by taking God outside religion. Traditionally, God judges, rewards, and condemns human activity and self-expression based on how such activity models a God Type. A constructive concept of God considers authentic self-expression and self-advancement to be the purpose of humanity and as an act of Divine worship. There is no imaginary prototype to which the individual must strive to duplicate and represent out in the

⁹⁵ Being and becoming are important concepts here when considering the individual and God. To be able to hold onto your individuality and celebrate it personally and with God is how value is found in the self.

⁹⁶ Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination*. 61

⁹⁷ Secular sources are those outside the Christian religious toolbox.

world over and above their own authentic activity. In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton explains the connection between individual authenticity and glorification of God.

Each particular being, in its individuality, its concrete nature and entity, with all its own characteristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art.⁹⁸

God is the agent for self-development of the individual according to what distinctively appeals to and leads the individual to a personal discovery of enlightenment, spiritual growth, and compassion for creation. The overall purpose of life is to be who and what you are instead of modeling yourself after a religious leader, founder, or prototype.

Merton states:

If I never become what I am meant to be, but always remain what I am not, I shall spend eternity contradicting myself by being at once something and nothing, a life that wants to live and is dead, a death that wants to be dead and cannot quite achieve its own death because it still has to exist.⁹⁹

Therefore, the Christian need not work to “become” more like Jesus to have a relationship but simply “be” more like oneself utilizing this position to build an authentic relationship with God. The suggestion is not to get rid of Jesus but to do as Christ did by establishing a unique relationship with God through authentic self-expression.

⁹⁸ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions Paperbook 1091 (New York: New Directions Book, 2007), 30.

⁹⁹ Merton, 34.

Why do we believe we have to become like our religious and spiritual figures? Is it because we desire to have what they had? The same outlook on life, the same kind of spiritual experiences, the same level of enlightenment, the same kind of connection with God? The truth is becoming more like them will not give us what they had with God, because what they had with God results from the relationship they had with God. A relationship with God can't be duplicated it's a one-of-one experience, meticulously customized to who you are. Every relationship with God is a different experience, no two people have the same relationship with God just as no two people have the same relationship with a mutual friend.

Since the God relationship is specific to each person, then spiritual understanding is unique as each person. Since spiritual understanding is unique to each person the God experience is unique to each person and can't be replicated or manufactured by becoming more like a spiritual or religious figure, pastor, guru, priest, church member, or friend. So, when religion says you must be more like Jesus, the Buddha, Prophet Muhammad, Abraham, etc., what are they saying about the value and spiritual potential of being yourself?

Each relationship with God reflects who the person is and what is needed to ensure the progress and longevity of the God relationship. God communicates and relates to me in a different way that God does with you. It's the same quality of communication, it's just done in a manner that is specific to each of us to ensure relatability. God takes into consideration who you are, your strengths, your weaknesses, your personality, spiritual maturity, and idiosyncrasies.

If you're trying to be someone else, how can you honor your divine uniqueness? If God is trying to make you into someone else, is this the activity of a loving God?

Is this not the setting for a toxic relationship?¹⁰⁰ Because God is communicating and relating to you in a way that is specific to who you are, you jeopardize a deep connection because you're trying to become less of yourself and more like something else. The key to having a deep and meaningful relationship with God is having the confidence to come into the relationship as yourself, whole, complete, and enthusiastic. Space must be made in a healthy relationship for each person to develop into the fullness of themselves.

Merton states:

We are at liberty to be real, or to be unreal. We may be true or false, the choice is ours. We may wear now one mask and now another, and never, if we so desire, appear with our own true face. But we cannot make these choices with impunity. Causes have effects, and if we lie to ourselves and to others, then we cannot expect to find truth and reality whenever we happen to want them. If we have chosen the way of falsity, we must not be surprised that truth eludes us when we finally come to need it!¹⁰¹

Becoming Less Like Jesus and Being More Like Yourself

Becoming more like Jesus is an activity that is exclusive to Jesus himself. Only Jesus can be more like Jesus. Only Jesus can live like Jesus and have the kind of relationship with God he has. What manifests from the activity of being Jesus is only possible when Jesus embraced his authenticity by being Jesus.

¹⁰⁰ A toxic relationship is when one partner is not given space to be who they are authentically and room to develop into themselves in the future. The stronger more influential partner manipulates the weaker partner into being other than themselves. The weaker partner must adhere to this identity for the sake of keeping the relationship alive.

¹⁰¹ Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 37.

What would the relationship between Jesus and God look like if Jesus were trying to become more like Moses instead of being Jesus? What great works would God not have been able to do through Jesus if he was trying to become more like Abraham instead of being Jesus?

The identity of Jesus was not affirmed with the virgin birth it was affirmed when Jesus knew and accepted who he was. The notability of Jesus did not begin with the first miracle it began when he believed and accepted who he was. The work of Jesus did not begin with his baptism, it began when he accepted it was him that was the one to come. The ministry of Jesus did not begin after Jesus was tempted in the wilderness; it began when he accepted that he is greater than the one that is in the world. It all began with Jesus choosing to show up fully and unapologetically as Jesus and not Moses, Abraham, Isaiah, Elijah, or David, but Jesus.

The problem is that when we're trying to be like Jesus or any other prominent spiritual figure, we're failing to do what they themselves did which was to authentically and constantly be themselves and discover God through that activity. It is through the activity of being yourself that our religious figures found themselves in a very one-of-a-kind relationship with the creator, humanity, and themselves. They were empowered by how God was informing, guiding, and adding to them very specifically and very personally. The key therefore is for us to embrace the activity of being ourselves and be empowered by how God is informing, guiding, and adding to you very specifically and very personally.

Our spiritual and religious figures were adamant about staying true to themselves, going inward, and discovering the Divine in a way that was unique and meaningful to them. They embraced who and what they were and used that as the foundation for enlightenment and a profound discovery of the Divine within themselves, in others, and out in the world. They broke away from the spiritual conditioning of their time and discovered who God was for themselves.

Just as they discovered God, Self, and Enlightenment through their own deep look inward, and spiritual exploration of the Divine, we should be inspired to do the same deep exploration for ourselves. A constructive God encourages us to more like ourselves and less like our spiritual and religious figures in a way that is spiritually productive, God honoring, and makes room for others to do the same. Let's celebrate the mastery of the creator that gave us our uniqueness by embracing all of who we are and coming to God as our whole selves.

God as Generous

For a concept of God to be generous it must be egalitarian, granting equal access to itself upon any investigation. The ultimate truth should not be a religious possession but a phenomenon to be explored and discovered throughout a lifetime. In Indian philosophy God is not known primarily through scripture or doctrine but is realized and encountered personally.

One does not merely know the truth in Indian philosophy; one realizes it. The word which most aptly describes philosophy in India is darshan, which comes from the verbal root *drs*, meaning "to see." "To see is to have a direct intuitive experience with the object, or rather, to realize it in the sense of becoming one with it."¹⁰²

Drawing from this understanding what is and can be known about God is gathered from multiple sources including the empirical experiences of the individual. Making sense of a generous God must be exploratory and exhaustive with religion being a starting point not a final destination.

A generous God belongs to no single religious tradition and moves amongst them all that recognize a supreme force as the creator of life and source of love from which all things obtain meaning.

¹⁰² Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ed., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, 12. ... pr (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Pr, 1989).

Existing within and outside religion a generous God is accessible without restriction or need for a priest, guru or gatekeeper. Excluding the characteristic of exclusivity God works for humanity in general and not a specific religious cause. The agenda of God is to foster a deep and meaningful relationship with the individual and for the individual to do the same within the wider human community. This community is not limited culturally, or religiously but consists of the entire human population which is intrinsically connected by their ability to express unique ways of being. The self is discovered in communities and through experiences therefore the importance of others is essential to discovery of one's fullest self.

God as generous not shut off from engaging with the individual in a way that is outside their expectations. This God is unrestricted in how revelation and guidance of the individual takes place. When we recognize and understand God according to an expectation, we limit God to being no more than what we have historically encountered. In this situation the generosity must come from the individual to allow God to be God. Through the understanding of a constructive and generous God and how that concept gives space for the individual to be free from religious conformation to a God Type, the individual now emancipated, must liberate God.¹⁰³

For a generous God to be real, and functional it must have people, cultures, and societies, governments, and institutions that are dedicated to duplicating this characteristic to establish Gods existence.¹⁰⁴ Generosity insists that in the planning of creation God made space for the

¹⁰³ This is a call to allow God to be what God is instead of making God into something through assignment of definite identity.

¹⁰⁴ This was covered in the previous sections of this chapter where it was discussed that for any concept of God to exist and be functional it must have a corresponding Type to promote it. In this case the Type is not one where the individual must conform to surrendering self in the process. This Type is one that is engaged in the activity of being an individual authentically and discovering God in the process of doing so.

individual to be all they were created to be. This includes any oppressed, condemned, or targeted groups of people that have been deprived equality, respect and access to certain communities and opportunities.

The doctrine of the chosen individual vs the hell bound person collapses in the presence of divine generosity. With the purpose of humanity being authentic self-expression leading to personal development and spiritual enlightenment, the pursuit for salvation from oneself and the world requires a new understanding. Salvation is found in a dedicated effort to be who and what you are authentically and allowing others the freedom to do the same.¹⁰⁵ Since connection and relationship with God occurs through graceful authentic tolerant living salvation is a calling away from actions that disturb the loving exercise of self-expression to take place.

A generous God calls for the individual to be graceful and tolerant because we depend on each other to facilitate authentic selfhood. Selfhood is result of a collection of experiences of which are understood and interpreted based on community and cultural associations.¹⁰⁶ We are not who we are on our own and through our own abilities, both strengths and weaknesses. We are who we are, or we have come to know ourselves based on cultural, geographical, and societal criteria. Therefore, the development of self is not an individualistic project but one that involves all creation.

¹⁰⁵ “For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore, the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.” Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination*, 65.

God as Compassionate

A compassionate God feels the suffering of humanity and works towards the reduction of evil and suffering. If God is immutable there is no change in the position or being of God when humanity suffers. With no change in God the suffering and evil experienced by humanity gives no need for God to act to reduce it. God would be in an eternal state of happiness, sadness, or somewhere in between regardless of the circumstances of humanity.

It is difficult to pray to a God that is emotionless or possessing one or two emotions being absent of a range of emotional states to comprehend what the one praying is experiencing. God as one that decides or has decided in the past requires the ability to experience and express diverse emotions to create and correspond with emotional beings. A compassionate God feels and loves all equally.¹⁰⁷ A compassionate God has no chosen people, no elect group, no individual that is not considered significant, value is innate, present in all creation.

Doctrine of religious salvation as specialized system aimed at gaining a deep and meaningful relationship with God and the reward of eternal life are unnecessary with a compassionate God. Work towards self-fulfillment and allowing space for others to do the same is the answer to the human problem and a lack of closeness to God. Through the activity of being who you are, God is found in the mist of that endeavor. A compassionate God makes room for diversity and is open to receive each of us according to how we uniquely experience the love, and fulfillment of being one with God.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Śaṅkara Śaranam, *God without Religion: Questioning Centuries of Accepted Truths*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (Dallas, Texas: BenBella Books, Inc, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ George T. Ladd, "The Biblical and the Philosophical Conception of God. II," *The Old and New Testament Student* 12, no. 2 (February 1891): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1086/470675>.

A compassion God addresses the problem of evil and suffering by moving humanity to embrace difference and reject conformity. A God possessing the characteristic of influencing and celebrating diversity over desiring membership to a religious group removes the grounds for claims of religious superiority and the demonization of nonbelievers. The act of loving, not only thy neighbor but also the other is inspired though Gods negation of a chosen people and a specific ultimate truth. This God exists outside the confines of religious spaces demonstrating allegiance to no particular people or doctrine making itself available to the curious seeker.

With compassion, instead of doctrine being the path to enlightenment and salvation God becomes richly available to humanity unrestricted by theological interpretation. The daily practice of compassion becomes the act of service in the worship of a compassionate God. The scripture being written daily moment by moment as the compassionate actions of the individual establish holiness. The image and representation of a compassionate entity is open to the conceptualization of the individual. Each has the freedom to accept it as a universal sovereign entity, a guiding force, or a spirit that moves through creation energizing and adding meaning to life.

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