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## X. Avatara-Divine Incarnation

### 1. Their Divine Nature

#### A. Polytarian and Trinitarian

Indian: “To what is One [Supreme Being], sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan” (RV 1:164.46). “There is no limit to my Divine manifestations, nor can they be numbered, O foe consumer. What I have described to you are only a few of my countless forms” (BG\* 10:40, p. 117).

New Testament: “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

It is often believed in the West that Hindus are polytheists worshipping a plurality of separate and independent gods. In such a case even the chief deity has a limited number of functions and would be under the influence of the other deities. Actually, Hinduism is monotheistic as is Christianity. One omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God (Saguna Brahman for the Vedantists, Ishvara) has innumerable (Polytarian) forms. Each is a separate representation and Divine personality of the one Brahman-God. Christianity teaches Trinitarian Monotheism (“one essence of God and of the three Persons or modes of existence”<sup>1</sup>), Hinduism Polytarian Monotheism, and Judaism and Islam Unitarian Monotheism. For the Indian, the number of Brahman’s names, forms, and functions are many. Of course, one must differentiate between the Higher Deities such as Mother Kali, Durga, Shiva, and the Divine Incarnations; and the lower nature deities who have specific limited functions. As Christians object to the tritheism

(three separate gods) interpretation of the Trinity, Indians reject polytheism as the highest ideal. The unity and oneness of God are necessary requirements for Divine omnipotence. At the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, Swami Vivekananda told his audience, “At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no polytheism in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images. It is not polytheism, nor would the name henotheism explain the situation.”<sup>2</sup> Swami Abhedananda asserted that Hindus “are not polytheists. They worship One God under different names and forms.... In their spiritual essence they are one and the same, but in their manifestations they are different... Shiva and Vishnu again, are one and the same in their spiritual essence; they are two manifestations of the One Infinite Being who is called Brahman in the Vedas.”<sup>3</sup> Henotheism is considered to be an evolutionary stage located above polytheism and below monotheism, of worshipping a single God as dominant while considering other deities as subordinate. Max Mueller’s kathenotheism refers to the ancient Vedic practice of worshipping one God as supreme for a long period of time, followed by another. One qualification, the worship of nature deities (the word gods is inappropriate) found in ancient Hinduism is polytheistic. But these deities (devas) are considered to be temporary positions held by one person for a long period of time and then another. They are titles, not a proper name. The Indian Polytheistic view is pluralistic in that it recognizes other religions as various aspects of the Divine, as paths to Brahman-God.

While the Essence of God is simple, the Christian Trinity is composed of three “Persons.” Vedantists could use the term persons to describe the various deities, but they generally prefer the terms manifestations, forms, aspects, or projections. Christians believe the term modes (Modalism) places too much emphasis on their unity and not enough on the distinctiveness of the three Persons. The term “manifestations” unlike “Persons,” implies that the forms of God are a manifestation of something else. For Vedantists they are manifestations of Nirguna Brahman and for Christians the Essence of God. While this is a prevalent idea among the Vedantists, the Essence of God is a term used in this sense less by the Christian thinkers. From a Vedantic standpoint there is only a single Essence of God for each of the three members of the Christian Trinity, which are Its manifestations.

Viewed from another standpoint some people might think of the Trinity as being both the unknown Essence of God and a Manifestation of God. As Essence of God the Trinity cannot be three or a Person. The relation between Essence and Manifestation might be comparable to substance and attribute, subject and predicate, or fire and its power to burn.

When Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna entered a Temple, he would have a direct vision of the presiding deity and would be filled with a blissful devotion for that particular aspect of God. When a disciple asked him if the gods and goddesses are real, he replied, "The one Godhead has many spiritual forms. All these forms are real. A seer can see them and talk to them."<sup>4</sup> "Never try to limit God. Infinite are his moods and aspects." The deities are celestial forms and aspects of the one Godhead, who in His ultimate nature transcends form and definition. God is both with form and formless having possibly an infinite number of aspects.<sup>5</sup>

For Christian Platonists like Origen the Father is similar to the Essence of God. Christians believe that "his only-begotten Son comes literally out of the Father's own being," which offers support to Origen's idea of the Father. Here the word "begotten" is used rather than "manifestation." Origen describes the Father as incomprehensible, immeasurable, incorporeal, simple without any composition, invisible to all even the Son, though the Son does knoweth the Father.<sup>6</sup>

There is also the Infinitarian concept that Brahman manifests in an infinite number of aspects and forms. This view that is held by some philosophers requires a universe infinite in dimension and/or infinite in time. This might be considered to be a version of the Principle of Plenitude (that God manifests in every possible way). The word "deities" is preferable to "gods" since the latter implies there is more than one God.

### B. Sat-chit-ananda and the Christian Trinity

Indian: "Brahman is truth, consciousness and bliss" (Br. Up. 3.9.28).<sup>7</sup> "In the beginning of creation, the great Vishnu, desirous of creating the whole world, became threefold: creator, preserver, destroyer.... Some worship Brahma, others Vishnu, others Shiva; but Vishnu, one yet threefold, creates, preserves, and destroys, therefore let the pious make

no difference between the three” (Padma Purana).

New Testament: “On him has God the Father set his seal” (Jn. 6:27; cf. 1 Pet. 1:2). “Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13; cf. Jn. 1:1). “Filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3-4).

The following agreement is found between the Hindu and Christian theologians as to the basic characteristics of the three members of their respective Trinity’s.

Indian: Sat: existence (Madhva, Vivekananda)

Chit: intelligence-wisdom (Keshab Sen), knowledge (Madhva, Vivekananda, Bede Griffiths)

Ananda: joy and holiness (K. Sen) bliss (Madhva, Vivekananda, B. Griffiths)

Christian: Father: existence (Origen), Being-Itself (Aquinas), Self-existent (Upadhyaya), being (B. Griffiths)

Son: wisdom, knowledge (Origen, Upadhyaya, B. Griffiths), understands being (Aquinas)

Holy Spirit: desires being (Aquinas), bliss, joy (Upadhyaya, B. Griffiths)

The founder of Dvaita (Dualistic) Vedanta, Madhva (1199/1238-1278/1317) the Medieval Indian theist remarked that Sat-chit-ananda describes Brahman’s nature. Sat refers to the Self-existent causal being of Brahman, chit to His omniscience, and ananda to His blissfulness. Each of the three attributes is a perfect expression of Brahman’s (God’s) essential nature and is one with It. Each attribute is inseparable from every other attribute, due to the fact that Brahman is One and free from all internal contradictions.<sup>8</sup>

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84) a leading Neo-Hindu and leader of the Brahmo Samaj explained that for the Indians and Christians there is one God and substance, and three expressions of divinity. “The Trinity of Christian Theology corresponds strikingly with the Sat-chit-ananda of Hinduism. You have three conditions, three manifestations of Divinity. Yet there is one God, one Substance, and three phenomena. Not three Gods but one God.” Sat is equivalent to the Father as the creator, truth, and force; Chit to the Son as the exemplar, intelligence and wisdom; and

Ananda to the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier, joy and holiness. They are three manifestations or aspects of one God, but not three distinct persons as in the Christian Trinity.<sup>9</sup>

In relating Sat-chit-ananda to the Christian Trinity Swami Vivekananda stated, “First is existence [Sat], second is knowledge [Chit], third is bliss [Ananda]-very much corresponding to your Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Father is the existence out of which everything comes; Son is that knowledge. It is in Christ that God will be manifest. God was everywhere, in all beings, before Christ; but in Christ we become conscious of Him. This is God. The third is bliss, the Holy Spirit. As soon as you get this knowledge, you get bliss. As soon as you begin to have Christ within you, you have bliss; and that unifies the three.”<sup>10</sup> “We are ‘Existence, Knowledge, Bliss’ (Sachchidananda). Existence is the last generalization in the universe; so we exist, we know it; and bliss is the natural result of existence without alloy.... we see Sachchidananda as Trinity—Father, Son, Holy Ghost. Sat=the creating principle; Chit=the guiding principle; Ananda=the realizing principle, which joins us again to the One. No one can know ‘existence’ (Sat) except through ‘knowledge’ (Chit), and hence the force of the saying of Jesus, ‘No man can see the Father save through the Son.’”<sup>11</sup>

In this example, Vivekananda present Sat-chit-ananda as following a logical series, as does the Christian sequence from the Father to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. This applies to a dynamic not a static Deity. That which is more universal and exists in more things is logically prior. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) the Italian Catholic and great Doctor of the Church stated, “The more widely, then, one thing underlies others, the more directly does that thing proceed from a higher cause.”<sup>12</sup> An entity must exist (Sat) to be conscious (Chit), but need not be conscious in order to exist. To experience bliss (Ananda) one must be consciousness (Chit), but to be consciousness one need not be blissful. From this standpoint, existence is the most universal concept and bliss the least of the three. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) the French philosopher and mathematician remarked, “I think therefore, I exist,” implying that existence logically precedes thought.

The interpretation of the Greek Christian Church Father, Origen of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 185-254) bears some resemblance to that of Vivekananda, “Thus the working of the Father, which endows all with

existence, is found to be more glorious and splendid, when each one, through participation in Christ in his character of wisdom and knowledge and sanctification, advances and comes to higher degrees of perfection; and when a man, by being sanctified through participation in the Holy Spirit, is made purer and holier, he becomes more worthy to receive the grace of wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>13</sup>

For Thomas Aquinas the three members of the Trinity exist as a unity of essence differentiated by real relations, which are not accidents. In the Trinity, “The intellect first apprehends Being Itself [the Father]; secondly, it apprehends that it understands being [the Son]; and thirdly, it apprehends that it desires being [the Holy Spirit]. Hence the notion of being is first, that of truth second, and the notion of good third.”<sup>14</sup> “The Son of God is the Word and conception of God understanding Himself.”<sup>15</sup>

Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907) considered to be the founder of Indian Christian Theology was a classmate of Vivekananda, a friend of Keshab Sen, and an admirer of Sri Ramakrishna whom he made contact with. Later as an Indian Catholic monk, in 1897 and 1900 he offered a Christian interpretation of Sat-chit-ananda. “God comprehends Himself by one act of eternal knowledge. The knowing self is the Father, the known self or the self-begotten by His knowledge is the Son; and the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of reciprocal love proceeding from the Father and the Son.” “He is Sat-existing by himself; He is Chit—Self-knowledge, knowing Himself without any external intervention; He is Ananda—supremely happy in His Self-colloquy.”<sup>16</sup> Sat is the Self-existent Father by Himself, the root of existence; Chit is Jesus Christ the Son, the Logos and Word, the self-knowledge of God, producing an image of Himself; and Ananda is the Holy Spirit, the bliss and love proceeding from Self-understanding.<sup>17</sup> Brahmabandhav died with the word “Thakur” on his lips, meaning either Lord or Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>18</sup>

It must be cautioned that unlike the Christian Trinity, the three characteristics of Sat-chit-ananda are not personified. It consists of three successive modes, aspects, manifestations, or activities in which the one Divine Essence expresses Itself. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) referred to Jesus Christ as the second “mode of Being” of God, since God has only one personality not three. According to Barth if Jesus Christ were a separate personality from the Father, he would not be the Father’s Self-revelation. The three members of the Trinity are Divine modes

of being that subsist within God in absolute unity. Barth states, “He can be our God because in all His modes of being He is equal to Himself, one and the same Lord.... And this Lord can be our God, He can meet us and unite Himself to us, because He is God in His three modes of being as Father, Son and Spirit.” Yet, Barth clearly rejects Modalism affirming, “The ultimate reality of the three modes of being in the Essence of God above and behind which there is nothing higher.”<sup>19</sup>

A British monastic living in India, Bede Griffiths (1906-93) sought to explain the Christian Trinity from a Hindu standpoint. “We could then speak of God as Sacchidananda – Being, Knowledge, Bliss – and see in the Father, Sat Being, the absolute eternal ‘I am’, the ground of Being, the source of all. We could then speak of the Son, as the chit, the knowledge of the Father, the Self-consciousness of eternal Being, the presence to itself in pure consciousness of the infinite One; Being reflecting on itself, knowing itself, expressing itself in an eternal Word.... Finally, we could speak of the spirit as the Ananda, the Bliss or Joy of the Godhead, the outpouring of the super-abundant being and consciousness of the eternal, the Love that unites Father and Son in the Nondual Being of the Spirit.”<sup>20</sup>

When applied to Nirguna Brahman the undivided transpersonal and immanent Absolute, Sat-chit-ananda has a different meaning. For the Advaita (Nondualistic) Vedantic seer-philosopher Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) Sat-chit-ananda are Nirguna Brahman’s essential nature (svarupa-laksanas) and not His attributes. They are defining characteristics that refer to the unitary undivided substance (svarupa) of Brahman, and not to creatorship, etc., which are accidental attributes (tatastha-laksanasa).<sup>21</sup> Nirguna Brahman is in fact without attributes but is conceptualized as having three Essential qualities: Sat-chit-ananda. From the standpoint of the human intellect Sat-chit-ananda is a conceptual differentiation of understanding, but it is not a real differentiation within the undifferentiated Nirguna Brahman. For Ishvara the Personal God, Sat-chit-ananda are three real attributes. In addition, the concept of Sat-chit-ananda relates to a state of mystical attainment. When a realized soul has knowledge (Chit) of Brahman-God’s Being (Sat), it also experiences His bliss, love, and goodness (Ananda).

Concerning the third member of the Trinity, as a broad generalization, the *Old Testament* emphasizes God’s goodness (action toward others), the

*New Testament* His love (feeling toward others), and the Indian *Upanishads* His bliss (feeling of Himself).

There have been many religious Trinities in the world but they are of a different nature. First, the Indian Sat-Chit-Ananda and the Christian Trinity represent the ontological intrinsic nature of God independent of the Creation (what God is). For Christians, the “ontological Trinity” (or “immanent Trinity”) of one God in three persons exists independent of the creation of the universe. This is the inner life, the Trinity-in-Itself apart from God’s works of creation and redemption. The ontological structure of the Trinity is a unity of three persons who together are one being. The three members of the Trinity are equal in power, glory, and being. From all eternity the Father begets the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son in a reciprocal relationship. According to Vivekananda, first is existence, second is knowledge, third is bliss, corresponding to the Christian Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Father is the existence out of which everything comes, Son is that knowledge, followed by the Holy Spirit that is bliss.

Second, the Indian Trinity (Trimurti) of Brahma (Creator), Vishnu (Preserver), and Shiva (Destroyer) pertain to the extrinsic operational nature or functions of God (*tatastha-laksanasa*) (what God does). Among other things destroyer means reabsorbing the universe back to its original pre-creation elements. In a changing universe; creation, preservation, and destruction are a continuous ongoing function since they occur all of the time. The Trimurti is composed of an underlying unity as is the Christian Trinity. These three deities are omnipresent and sufficient, encompassing all of the cosmic functions. Only if the internal nature of these three deities is explained could the Trimurti also be of the first type. In Christianity, the “economic Trinity” (*oikonomia*) refers to God’s activity in the world and distinguishes among the three persons of the Godhead in terms of their roles with regard to creation and the economy of redemption. It describes how the Trinity operates within history in terms of the functions performed by each person of the Trinity. It is the Father who sends the Son into the world to redeem people. This Trinity deals more with “what God does” rather than “what God is.” Unlike the ontological Trinity, the Son is voluntarily subordinate to the Father in his incarnate ministry.<sup>22</sup>

At the tertiary level would be a polytheistic Trinity like the Babylonian Sun and Moon deity and the planet Venus. Each deity has specific



functions and exists in a limited area of space. In addition to these three, many other deities are required to fulfill all of the necessary cosmic activities.

## 2. Their Human Nature

### A. Brahman-God Assumes a Human Form

Indian: “When goodness grows weak, when evil increases, I [Sri Krishna] make myself a body” (BG\* 4.7 p. 60). “I assume human form” (BG 9:11).

New Testament: “The Word [Christ] became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). “He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world (Jn. 8:23). “God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4; cf. Phil. 2:5-7). “God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him” (1 Jn. 4:9).

In his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Shankara noted that the Lord incarnates at a particular time in human history. “When, owing to the ascendancy of lust in its votaries, religion was overpowered by irreligion caused by the vanishing faculty of discrimination, and irreligion was advancing. It was then that the original Creator, Vishnu known as Narayana, wishing to maintain order in the universe, incarnated Himself as Krishna, begotten in Devaki by Vasudeva, for the preservation of the ‘earthly Brahman’ of spiritual life on the earth. For it was by the preservation of spiritual life that the Vedic Religion could be preserved.... Without any interest of His own, but with the sole intention of helping His creatures” The translator A. Mahadeva Sastri notes, “The words in the Commentary corresponding to this are ‘amsena samba-bhuva.’ As amsa means a part, it would mean that Krishna was a partial incarnation of God Vishnu. But of the several forms of the incarnation of God, Krishna is on all hands recognized as a full incarnation of Vishnu.” This was done, “Without any interest of His own, but with the sole intention of helping His creatures.”<sup>23</sup>

Is the Avatara (literally descent) qualitatively or quantitatively a part of God? Is the Avatara divided into parts in that one aspect of Brahman-God is creator and sustainer of the world while another aspect lives on earth or in some other non-Divine realm? Does this mean the Avatara is qualitatively a full manifestation of God, but in a sense quantitatively a part? When He incarnates into a human form the transcendent Brahman-God has no loss of power or glory.<sup>25</sup> There are Christians who believe that when the human Jesus Christ was living in Palestine, at the same time the Divine Jesus Christ was in heaven as part of the Trinitarian God running the universe.

Ramanuja writes the Lord through compassion takes a human form. "This essential form of his the most compassionate Lord by his mere will individualizes as a shape human or Divine or other-wise, so as to render it suitable to the apprehension of the devotee and thus satisfy him."<sup>26</sup> "Being a vast ocean of boundless compassion, condescension, affection and generosity ... he assumed bodily forms; overwhelmed by his affection for those seeking refuge in him, the most compassionate Lord thus embodies himself.... But being a vast ocean of mercy ... still without loss of his essential nature, he has assumed embodied forms ... and in these different forms he has descended repeatedly to the various worlds these creatures inhabit, where he has been [accessible to] worship."<sup>27</sup>

In an extremely remarkable spiritual vision, Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) described his eyewitness account of the descent of the soul from the supersensuous realm that became Swami Vivekananda. "One day I found that my mind was soaring high in samadhi along a luminous path. It soon transcended the stellar universe and entered the subtle realm of ideas.... My mind crossed that barrier to enter the transcendental realm, where no corporeal being was visible.... I saw seven venerable rishis seated there in samadhi. It occurred to me that these rishis must have surpassed not only humans but even the gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love.... I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a Divine child. The child came to one of the rishis, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms and, addressing him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of samadhi. That magic touch roused the rishi from the superconscious state, and he fixed his half-opened eyes upon the wonderful child. His beaming countenance showed that the child was the treasure of his heart. In great joy the Divine child

spoke to him: 'I am going down. You must come with me.' The rishi remained mute but his tender look expressed his assent. As he gazed at the child, he again became immersed in samadhi. I was surprised to see a fragment of his body and mind descending to earth in the form of a bright light. No sooner had I see Narendra [later Swami Vivekananda] than I recognized him to be that rishi." Later Sri Ramakrishna acknowledged that it was he who had assumed the form of the child.<sup>28</sup>

It is significant in Sri Ramakrishna's vision that in the process of Incarnating, only a part of the rishi's (who later became Swami Vivekananda) body, mind, and power descended to earth, while the rest remained in the celestial region. Interestingly, the rishi descended to earth in the form of a bright celestial light. Only a small portion of Brahman-God or a heavenly being descends and incarnates, thus enabling them to continue performing their Divine and cosmic functions. Obviously, it was only the earthly Vivekananda who had to suffer and not his Divine archetype. There is no suffering in the Kingdom of God or the Brahmaloaka [world of Brahman].

The idea of seven sages mentioned by Ramakrishna is a universal religious theme as exemplified by the seven: Babylonian Gods and Ancient Elders, Egyptian Heavenly Sages (Nefer-hat), Greek Sages, Judeo-Christian Archangels (1 Enoch, 20:1-8; Rev. 8:2), Indian Sapta-Rishis (Sages) (Atharva Veda, 10:8.9; 11:1.1; 19:17.7; BG 10:6), Indian Mahayana Buddhist Sapta Tathagatas, Japanese Primeval Deities and the Deities of Good Fortune (Schichi Fukujin), Persian Zoroastrian Holy Ones, and the Taoist Sages of the Bamboo Grove.<sup>29</sup>

When asked the question, "How is it possible for God who is infinite to be limited in the form of a man?" Vivekananda responded, "It is true that God is infinite, but not in the sense in which you comprehend it. You have confounded your idea of infinity with the materialistic idea of vastness. When you say that God cannot take the form of a man, you understand that a very, very large substance or form (as if material in nature) cannot be compressed into a very, very small compass. Brahman's (God's) infinitude refers to the unlimitedness of a purely spiritual entity, and as such, does not suffer in the least by expressing Itself in a human form."<sup>30</sup> The Avatara is the highest manifestation and reflection of the omnipresent God working through a human being.

Vivekananda adds more insights about the Avatara, “These are the great souls; they are already free. And though free, they refuse to accept their liberation while the whole world is suffering. They come again and again, take a human embodiment and help mankind. They know from their childhood what they are and what they come for.... They do not come through bondage like we do.... They come out of their own freewill, and cannot help having tremendous spiritual power. We cannot resist it. The vast mass of mankind is dragged into the whirlpool of spirituality.”<sup>31</sup>

“Therefore it is absolutely necessary to worship God as man, and blessed are those races which have such a ‘God-man’ to worship. Christians have such a God-man in Christ; therefore cling close to Christ; never give up Christ. That is the natural way to see God; see God in man.... He was a manifestation of God; so was Buddha; so were some others, and there will be hundreds of others. Do not limit God anywhere. Pay all the reverence that you think is due to God, to Christ; that is the only worship we can have.”<sup>32</sup> Jesus referred to himself as the “Son of God” and Swami Vivekananda calls him a “manifestation of God.” Is there a difference between being Brahman-God and being a manifestation of Brahman-God?

Swami Abhedananda tells us, “All Divine Incarnations like Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Ramakrishna are but the particularized or individualized manifestations of this one universal Whole. The worship of this Whole or Ishvara includes the worship of all Divine Incarnations as well as the worship of the Personal God of the various sects of the dualistic or monotheistic religions. By loving the Whole we love all the parts, however great or small they may be. In fact, to love the whole universe which is the highest ideal of religions is possible only by way of loving Ishvara in whose body dwell all animate and inanimate objects of the universe. Ishvara, again is not only the Father but also the Mother of the universe.”<sup>33</sup>

The modern Vedantic philosopher and mystic Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) makes this important point. “The Gita accepts the human Avatahood; for the Lord speaks of the repeated, the constant manifestation of the Divine in humanity, when He the eternal Unborn assumes by His Maya, by the power of the infinite Consciousness to clothe itself apparently in finite forms, the conditions of becoming which we call birth. But it is not this upon which stress is laid, but on the transcendent, the cosmic and the internal Divine; it is on the Source of all things and the Master of all.... It is this internal divinity that is meant when the Gita

speaks of the ... same Godhead destroying our ignorance by the blazing lamp of knowledge. It is then the eternal Avatara, this God in man, the Divine Consciousness always present in the human being Who manifested in a visible form speaks to the human soul in the Gita, illumines the meaning of life and the secret of Divine action and gives it the light of the Divine knowledge and guidance and the assuring and fortifying word of the Master of existence in the hour when it comes face to face with the painful mystery of the world.”<sup>34</sup>

Most Christians think of Christ, as an Incarnation of a transcendent Divine Being that is external and separate from ourself. The Incarnation descends to earth and then eventually ascends back to heaven. Conversely, Aurobindo expresses the idea of Krishna or Christ as being an Incarnation of the immanent internal Divine Consciousness within ourself, being the Ground of our Being. The first view follows common sense, while the second is more philosophical. Brahman-God is omnipresent and therefore can be understood as being both within and external to ourself.

Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) received a visit from Paul Tillich at the convent in Santa Barbara. Tillich acted in a very gentlemanly manner. He and Swami held a religious discussion on the divinity of Jesus. In an unusual theological debate, Prabhavananda an Indian Swami considered Jesus to be a Divine Incarnation and quoted from the Book of John 10:30, “I and my Father are One.” Tillich would not accept this because John was written after the three synoptic Gospels.<sup>35</sup> Unlike most Christians, Paul Tillich (1886-1965) the German-American theologian believes that the *New Testament* does not teach that God became man, “but that a Divine Being, either the heavenly man, or the pre-existent Christ, or the Divine Logos appears in the shape of a physical man or a man in the flesh.”<sup>36</sup> Tillich wrote, “Even the most consistent [John Duns] Scotists had to admit the only thing God cannot do is cease to be God. But that is just what the assertion that ‘God has become man’ means.... He does not become something that is not God. Therefore, it is preferable to speak of a Divine Being which has become man.” Jesus as a Divine Incarnation is a manifestation of the Logos, not a transmutation or metamorphosis. “When Christianity uses the term ‘Incarnation,’ it tries to express the paradox that He who transcends the universe appears under its conditions.”<sup>37</sup> As Tillich implies it appears to be a paradoxical that God who creates and controls the universe and the laws of nature becomes a

Divine Incarnation who is subject to these same laws, though through God's omnipotence it might be possible. In response to Tillich, we might think of the Avatara as a manifestation, aspect, or part of Brahman-God rather than as Brahman-God Itself. Swami Prabhavananda states that John writes that the Logos became flesh in Jesus Christ. He formulates the new application of the logos doctrine by John as "attributing a real personality to the Logos" and "emphasizing not its creative aspect but its redemptive function."<sup>38</sup>

After reading a paper on "The Ontology of the *Upanishads*" Tillich remarked, "This is very much like the structure of my own thought."<sup>39</sup> In the mid-1920s when they were professors in Marburg, Germany, Tillich and the Indologist Rudolph Otto conversed on religious philosophy while walking in the hills and woods. Many years later as teachers at the University of Chicago, Tillich held discussions with the Indologists Mircea Eliade. In his later years Buddhist thinker D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966) made a strong impression on Tillich and consequently, he visited the Zen monasteries in Japan where he held religious philosophical discussions for weeks near the end of his life. From a Vedantic standpoint, Paul Tillich might have been the greatest Western philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Vedantist Joseph Campbell (1904-87) an American professor noted, "The Three Bodies of the Buddha are: 1) the Dharmakaya (Essence Body), which is identical with the void, suchness, Divine knowledge, and wisdom; 2) Sambhogakaya (Body of Bliss), which is the Essence as made manifest in heaven 'determined by name and form, but omniscient, omnipresent, and within the law of causality, omnipotent; and 3) the Nirmanakaya (Body of Transformation), which is the Essence made manifest on earth as a historical Buddha, emanated or projected from the Sambhogakaya." Both the Vedantic philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) and Campbell equate these three bodies with the Indian transpersonal Brahman, the Personal God Ishvara, and the historical Divine Incarnation.<sup>40</sup>

The first Biblical thinker to combine Greek philosophy with Biblical thought was the great Jewish thinker Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 20 B.C.-45/50 A.D.). He considered the Logos to be the "only begotten son of God," "second god [deuteros theos]," "the God-man," the mediator between the transcendent God and the world. Some believe that the logos

doctrine in the Prologue of John originated with the Jewish Hellenism of Philo of Alexandria. And that “many formulations of it in Justin [Martyr] that are identical with the formulations found in Philo.” Henrik Thyssen also mentions that “all traces of the Logos doctrine [in the Gospel of John] disappear after the Prologue.”<sup>41</sup> The early Christian writers thought that Philo was a Christian and that he met the Apostle Peter in Rome.

Justin Martyr (c. 100-65) who was born in Palestine of Roman origin and passed away in Rome was acquainted with the writings of Philo. He was a Roman philosopher who later converted to Christianity. Noticing that Christianity was growing slowly and not properly understood by the Europeans his great contribution was to interpret Christianity from the standpoint of Greek-Roman philosophy, so that it would be better understood by the educated class. Following this approach, in time Christianity attracted more high-level thinkers such as Irenaeus (135-202), Clement of Alexandria (150-215), and Origen (182-254) who were able to influence the thought current of the time and eventually gain acceptance in the Roman Empire. To quote J. N. D. Kelly, the Logos “‘assumed shape and become a man’ in Jesus Christ; He had become incarnate in His entirety in Him. The Logos is here conceived of as the Father's intelligence or rational thought; but Justin argued that He was not only in name distinct from the Father, as the light is from the sun, but was 'numerically distinct too'.... the special functions of the Logos, according to Justin, are two: to be the Father's agent in creating and ordering the universe, and to reveal truth to men. As regards His nature, while other beings are 'things made' or 'creatures,' the Logos is God's 'offspring', His 'child' and 'unique Son' 'before all creatures God begat, in the beginning, a rational power out of Himself'.... the difference between Christ and ordinary men lies, not in any essential disparity of constitution, but in the fact that, whereas the Logos works in them fragmentarily, or as a seed, He works in Christ as a whole.”<sup>42</sup>

Origen expressed the ideas that a Divine Incarnation is a God-man (theanthropos), who assumes both a body and a soul that are wholly subject to the Logos. The entire majesty of the Logos is not confined to a particular place and thus was not contained within the limits of the body of Jesus (FP, IV, 4.2-4). Sufferings of the mind or body of Jesus were not experience by the Logos (CC, IV, 15). Christ is the tangible image of the invisible God. Through him all people can gain knowledge of the Father and

creator of the universe (CC, VII, 43). He established the Church on earth, which is a unique vehicle of God's grace. It is a spiritual institution through which a believer learns the truth about God and the standards of moral life, which make it possible to have a personal experience of the supersensuous realm. Members of the spiritual elite are the true clergy of the church. The invisible spiritual church is composed of the communion of the saints in heaven and on earth. Outside of the church there is no salvation.

In the statement, "The Word [Christ] became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14), the Logos has become not only a human person with a mind but also with a material body. Similarly if one believes that Christ is substantially present in the Eucharist, that the substance of the bread becomes the Body of Christ and the wine the Blood of Christ. An important distinction was made by Athanasius (297-373) the Bishop of Alexandria that Jesus Christ and the Logos are not separate entities, since, "The Logos has become man, and has not entered into a man" (Jn. 1:14). "In taking flesh He does not become different, but remains the same." While the omnipresent Logos (the Word) assumed the human body of Jesus, He continued to maintain and rule the world through His omnipotence.<sup>43</sup> "The Word was not hedged in by His body, nor did His presence in the body prevent His being present elsewhere as well. When he moved His body, He did not cease also to direct the universe by His Mind and might. No. The marvelous truth is, that being the Word, so far from being Himself contained by anything, He actually contained all things Himself. In creation He is present everywhere, yet is distinct in being from it; ordering, directing, giving life to all, containing all, yet is He Himself the Uncontained, existing solely in His Father. As with the whole, so also is it with the part. Existing in a human body, to which He Himself gives life, He is still Source of life to all the universe, present in every part of it, yet outside the whole."<sup>44</sup>

In regards to Athanasius' belief in the coexistence of the Logos and the Incarnation, we might think of the analogy (not taught by Athanasius) of the Logos being comparable to the sun and the Incarnation to one of its rays. In this case, when the Divine Incarnation identifies with his limited earthly self he has no recollection of directing the universe. When he is in a superconscious state of samadhi and identifies with the Logos, he might possibly experience his higher spiritual self-directing the universe.

The Church Father, Cyril (c. 376-444) the Bishop of Alexandria



explained that, “He became flesh not because he turned into the nature of the flesh according to a transition, or a change, or an alteration ... but because he took flesh animated with a rational soul from a virginal and undefiled body and made it his own.”<sup>45</sup> “He does not say the Word came into flesh; he says that he became flesh.” The soul and body are indivisibly united in an individual person, yet they are distinct in nature. So also, there is a unified conjunction of the Divine and human nature in Jesus Christ, yet they remain distinct in essence. An intimate union of Word and flesh does not eliminate the differences, between the divinity and the humanity of Christ. “The differences of the natures are not destroyed through the union, but rather the divinity and humanity formed for us one Lord Jesus Christ and one Son through the incomprehensible and ineffable combination of unity.” There is no difference between Christ and the Logos, given that He is the Word Himself. Though He incarnated in a physical body, the Logos continued to exist in the eternal immutable form of God, while the human nature of Christ was subject to change. “As far as the nature of the Word was concerned, he did not experience death, for it would be madness to say or think that, but, as I said, his flesh tasted death.” “The Word of God suffered in the flesh, and was crucified in the flesh, and tasted death in the flesh.” The “only begotten God, though being incapable of suffering according to his own nature, suffered in his own flesh for our sake, according to the scriptures.”<sup>46</sup>

The Council of Chalcedon (451) that today is accepted by most Christians taught that the incarnate Christ's was one hypostasis (person), with two natures, one fully human and the other fully Divine. In Jesus Christ there were two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation; retaining the distinctive character of each nature in one person.<sup>47</sup> Predicating of a fully Divine and a fully human nature of one and the same person is termed the communication of idioms. Examples concerning Jesus would be, “The Son of God was born of Mary” or “God suffered and died on the cross.”

According to the perspective of Thomas Aquinas, because the soul of Jesus is a part of human nature, it is impossible for it to be omnipotent or omniscient. For he had to be made like his brethren in every respect. “Because, therefore, the soul of Christ has a lower nature than the Divine, the likenesses of things are not received in it with the same perfection and power that they have in the Divine nature. Hence, the knowledge of

Christ's soul is, in its manner of knowing, inferior to Divine knowledge; God knows things more perfectly than Christ does. It is also inferior in the number of things known.... And in the same way the likenesses infused into the soul of Christ do not measure up to the Divine power of action to the point where he could do everything that God can do ... everything, which is what the notion of omnipotence implies.... But for practical knowledge, the forms of things in the intellect must be productive. It takes more to have a form and imprint it on something else than simply to have it, just as it takes more to be a light and give light than simply to be a light. And it is thus that the soul of Christ has, indeed, speculative knowledge of creating—he knows how God creates— but he does not have practical knowledge of this matter, because he does not have the productive knowledge of creating.”<sup>48</sup>

Concerning Jesus Christ, Stephen Charnock (1628-80) a British Puritan Presbyterian clergyman stated, “He comes from heaven by Incarnation, and remains in heaven by his divinity.... He descended upon earth, but he left not heaven.... He was then in the world as man, while he discoursed with Nicodemus; yet so, that he was also in heaven as God.”<sup>49</sup>

The influential Protestant thinker Karl Barth (1886-1968) explains that we must conform our thinking with the teachings of the Divine Incarnation, not that He conforms to our ideas. “It is in full unity with Himself that He is also – and especially and above all – in Christ, that He becomes a creature, man, flesh, that He enters into our being in contradiction, that He takes upon Himself its consequences. If we think that this is impossible it is because our concept of God is too narrow, too arbitrary, too human – far too human. Who God is and what it is to be Divine is something we have to learn where God has revealed Himself and His nature, the essence of the Divine. And if He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ as the God who does this, it is not for us to be wiser than He and to say that it is in contradiction with the Divine Essence. We have to be ready to be taught by Him that we have been too small and perverted in our thinking about Him within the framework of a false idea about God. It is not for us to speak of a contradiction and rift in the being of God, but to learn to correct our notions of the being of God, to constitute them in the light of the fact that He does this.”<sup>50</sup>

Barth emphasizes the uniqueness of religious ideas in relation to our other beliefs. “God’s revelation in its objective reality is the Incarnation of

His Word.... In other words, it becomes the object of our knowledge, it finds a way of becoming the content of our experience and our thought; it gives itself to be apprehended by our contemplation and our categories. But it does that beyond the range of what we regard as possible for our contemplation and perception, beyond the confines of our experience and our thought. It comes as a *Novum* (something new) which, when it becomes an object for us, we cannot incorporate in the series of our other objects, cannot compare with them, cannot deduce from their context, cannot not regard as analogous with them. It comes to us as a datum with no point of connection with any other previous datum.”<sup>51</sup>

A professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard University, Harry Wolfson (1887-1974) discerned that the Apostle, “Paul identifies the pre-existent Wisdom or Law [resembling the Indian *Vedas*] with the pre-existent Messiah [the Indian *Avatara*]. The pre-existent wisdom or Law is to him the pre-existent Messiah; the revelation of the Law of Moses and the birth of Jesus are to him two successive stages in the earthly revelation of the pre-existent wisdom, the first revelation being in the form of tables of stone and a book; the second revelation being in the form of the body of a human being. And since he identifies the pre-existent wisdom with the pre-existent Messiah, he applies to the latter not only all the terms by which the Messiah was traditionally described but also the terms by which the pre-existent wisdom was traditionally described.... drawing upon the description of wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon as ‘a breath of the power of God,’ and ‘an image of His goodness,’ he describes the pre-existent Christ as ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God,’ as ‘the image of the invisible God,’ and as ‘being in the form of God.’ Then like the pre-existent wisdom, which is described again in the Wisdom of Solomon as ‘the artificer of all things,’ the pre-existent Christ is described by Paul as He by whom ‘all things were created.’ Then, still following the Wisdom of Solomon, where wisdom after the creation of the world is described as that which ‘pervades and penetrates all things’ and ‘administers all things’ and where, also, the Spirit of the Lord which is identified with wisdom is described as that which “holdeth all things together,’ Paul says of the pre-existent Christ that ‘in him all things hold together.’” Also, the pre-existent wisdom and pre-existent Messiah were hidden by God until their revelation.<sup>52</sup>

For the Oxford professor Arthur Peacocke (1924-2006) the Incarnation event is the result of God's self-expression, love, and power. The Incarnation is the embodiment of God's power and purpose reaching out to men with His creative wisdom and revelatory word. It is the evoking in the world of this kind of person, with these values, is the purpose of God in creation. Jesus the Christ was an explicit revelation of the significance of personhood in the Divine. He not only inculcated values in His disciples through His teaching, but He also exemplified them in His life. The sacrificial, self-limiting, self-emptying, and self-giving action on behalf of the good of others are the hallmark of his love. God's intentions and purposes are implemented in the shaping of particular events and patterns of events. From the continuity of the natural processes, we infer that God is continuously creating new forms, entities, structures, and processes with new capabilities, as the immanent Creator, in and through the natural order. As we learn more this requires a distinctive language on our part to distinguish them. It is our job to interpret these events in the light of the concepts of modern physical, social, and behavioral science.<sup>53</sup>

According to Thomas Morris' of Notre Dame University, "The Two Minds View of Incarnation" implies he possessed both a Divine Mind and a human mind each with a different intellect and will. He did not sacrifice his Divine nature and corresponding qualities when he became human. God the Son with an eternal mind of with its distinctively Divine consciousness is omniscient and omnipotent. Conversely, the human mind with its distinctly earthly range of consciousness that came into existence and grew and developed is not. The Divine mind of the Son of God is shared (distinctly but not separately) with the Father and Holy Spirit, and Jesus' human mind is his own. The Divine mind has perfect access to the contents of the human mind, but not vice versa. Morris adds, "We can view the two ranges of consciousness (and, analogously, the two noetic structures encompassing them) as follows: The Divine Mind of God the Son contained, but was not contained by, his earthly mind, or range of consciousness. That is to say, there was what can be called an asymmetric accessing relation between the two minds. The Divine Mind had full and direct access to the earthly, human experience resulting from the Incarnation, but the earthly consciousness did not have such full and direct access to the content of the overarching omniscience proper to the Logos, but only such access, on occasion, as the Divine Mind allowed it to have. There thus was

a metaphysical and personal depth to the man Jesus lacking in the case of every individual who is merely human.... We have an individual who is fully human, and who shares in the human condition, experiencing the world in a human perspective.... His humbling consisted rather in his rendering himself vulnerable to the pains, sufferings, aggravations, and agonies which became his as a man but which, in his exclusively Divine form of existence, could not have touched him this way. It is not by virtue of what he gave up, but in virtue of what he took on, that he humbled himself.... It is no objection to my suggestions that we cannot in this sense know what it would be like to be a God-man with two related but distinct ranges of consciousness.... Consider the common claim in twentieth-century psychology that there are various strata to the ordinary human mind. The postulated unconscious, or subconscious, mind would stand in an asymmetric accessing relation to the conscious mind somewhat parallel to that postulated between the Divine consciousness and the earthly consciousness of God Incarnate.”<sup>54</sup> We might think of a person living a well-coordinated waking life and dream life with no contradictions between them. Critics might mention Morris’ compositional understanding sharply separates the Avatars Divine and human nature. The former is reduced to the latter in order for Brahman-God to become man. The Avatara lives a full human life with human consciousness and knowledge.

Thomas Morris and other Christians have problems in squaring God’s immutability, etc. with the doctrine of the Incarnation. But being undivided, timeless, and changeless (immutable) are characteristics of the Essence of Brahman-God. The Avatara-Divine Incarnation is not an Incarnation of the Intrinsic Essence of Brahman-God (Nirguna Brahman) but of the Extrinsic Manifestation of Brahman-God (Saguna Brahman) that is spiritually complex, temporal, and mutable possessing all of the omni- attributes. For more details on this subject see Ch. III and Ch. IV.

Critics ask how can a single being a Divine Incarnation be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent (Divine nature) and at the same time lack these three characteristics (Human nature). To do so the Incarnation would have to be divided into two distinct persons with contrary characteristics. Also, how could an Incarnation purposely lose these Divine characteristics?

Tim Bayne prefers the consecutive (rather than the concurrent) model of containment that follows a serial structure. There is no time at which Christ has both an operating human conscious and Divine conscious, rather

there is only single stream of consciousness that can be in the human or Divine mode.<sup>55</sup>

Luke's Gospel (2:52) maintains that the boy Jesus “increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man,” which implies a lack of omniscience. The Divine mind knows many things the human mind does not know for the same person. Is this not a paradox?<sup>56</sup>

The Vedantic solution is that only part of Brahman-God incarnates. That which remains in the Brahmaloaka (Kingdom of Heaven) retains the Divine nature with all of the Omni attributes. That which incarnates has the human nature without these attributes. This is what Paul referred to as kenosis. From the subtle spiritual body (soul) of the Avatara-Divine Incarnation is created a human body and brain. Since Its subtle spiritual body is pure the Avatara-Divine Incarnation is sinless. It does not enter into a pre-existent body. For humans their subtle body uses the semen, egg, food, and water in their mother to create a physical body and brain. In the case of a virgin birth the semen (or its substitute) would have to come from some other source. Jesus had a conscious and a superconscious mind.<sup>57</sup>

In answer to Archbishop William Temple’s question (1925): “What was happening to the rest of the universe during the period of our Lord's earthly life?” Only part of God incarnates while the rest of God continues to run the universe.

In the Incarnational process the Superconscious (Divine) Mind of the Avatara involves down the mental hierarchy to the level of the conscious mind, and then further down to the subconscious and unconscious level. In the rebirth process humans involve from the adult conscious mind down to the embryo state temporarily forgetting what they previously knew in their prior life. During the life process, in time most people evolve back to their previous level and hopefully surpass it. The Superconscious, conscious, subconscious, and unconscious are four aspects of the same mind. The conscious mind and body are a single entity proceeding from the subtle to the gross. Unlike us the conscious mind of the Avatara is in direct contact with His Superconscious Mind. We also have a Superconscious Mind but are most often alienated from It.

The Divine nature is an essential nature since an Avatara-Divine Incarnation cannot cease to be Brahman-God. It ceases to be human after

It departs from earth, yet in the BrahmaloKa-Kingdom of Heaven it retains its earthly form without being composed of physical matter.

They often mention the Avataras-Divine Incarnations humanness. But human religions differ. The Avatara is born in that religion from which he/she can create a new path to Brahman-God. For example, Jesus could have taken birth in any country in Europe or North Africa or Western Asia. He selected to be born in Palestine because they had the superior religion in the Roman Empire from which he could create a new path to God.

The Avatara-Divine Incarnation can be described “from above” as to its Divinity or “from below” in relation to its humanness. Gerald O'Collins, SJ mentions that in assuming full humanity and being one of us, Christ (the Divine Incarnation) can experience and feel love for us. He can communicate very concretely and show us how to live, act, and pray—in short, show us how a human life should be lived. Since He has genuinely shared our experience from the inside rather than from the outside, we know that God personally understands and loves us. We realize that we are uniquely worthwhile and lovable. We can lovingly identify with and follow Christ with faith and hope because we know he shared our human condition.<sup>58</sup>

The life events of the Avatara are not simply something of the past; they are relived as contemporary events having great influence on people. An Avatara-Divine Incarnation is a Personal Being that a devotee can love and be attached to. The Avatara is the supreme person who teaches the ultimate purpose of life and how humans should properly live their life. It is much easier to worship as an object of meditation a being that is concrete, living, with a body, rather than an abstract philosophical conception of Brahman-God.

An omnipotent Brahman-God could have restored the world by merely willing it or in some other way than incarnating into a human body. We do not know exactly why It chose this method though there are some positive features to incarnating as pointed out in this essay. Does Brahman-God incarnate to find out what it is like to be a human being? A yes answer would place limitations on its power of omniscience.

Because of the Avatara Doctrine, Indians accept Jesus Christ as a Divine Incarnation and their religion is closer to *New Testament* Christianity than any other. There are many similarities between an Indian Avatara and Christian Divine Incarnation of Brahman-God who out of love and

compassion for humanity make the self-sacrifice of taking on a human birth. But they differ in at least three ways. One, while there are many Indian Avatars, Jesus Christ is the only Christian Divine Incarnation. Many Indians accept the idea of woman Avatars such as Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother. Also, the Indians have a number of lesser or partial Avatars who are incarnations of Divine Beings but not of Brahman-God. Christians believe Jesus was the first birth on earth of the Divine Incarnation, but is this explicitly stated or just assumed in the *New Testament*?

Avatar-Divine Incarnations are not recognized by most people during their life on earth, since they perceive only their external manifestations and not their inner spiritual nature.

For more on this subject see: SRWT, Ch. III. Avatara-Divine Incarnation: Their Spiritual and Human Nature, Section 1. Saguna Brahman (Ishvara)-Personal God Assumes a Human Form. Web: <http://www.vedantawritings.com/RKW03.pdf>

### B. His Heavenly Assistants

Indian: “Bhimsena was of the deity of wind [Vayu]; that Arjuna was of Indra, the chief of the celestials” (MB I:67).

Old Testament: God said, “Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes” (Mal. 4:5). New Testament: Referring to John the Baptist, Jesus stated, “He is Elijah who is to come” (Mt. 11:14; cf. 16:13-14). “Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased.... The disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist” (Mt. 17:12-13; cf. Mk. 9:12-13). “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John [the Baptist]” (Jn. 1:6).

The unique feature of the Indian Avatara Doctrine is that not only does God (or a manifestation of God) incarnate on earth, but occasionally so do other Divine Beings. The disciples of an Avatara-Divine Incarnation who assist him in his mission, great religious leader like Moses, Muhammad, the Sikh gurus, and others fall into this class.

Shankara affirmed that a small number of liberated (mukti) sages are entrusted with the wellbeing of the world and fulfill specific functions on earth. They are reborn by assuming a human body to carry out Brahman’s



(God's) plan and to help other people to attain to liberation. It is possible for these sages to occupy more than one human body at the same time. Sages "though they are Divine, are entrusted with their respective missions by God; and hence though they are possessed of full vision, leading to liberation, they continue in their bodies so long as their missions demand this and so long as their actions are not completed; and when that is fulfilled they become freed.... For the fulfillment of their missions they move on from one body to another with perfect liberty, as though from one house to another.... while retaining an unobliterated memory (of their identity etc.), they do this by creating new bodies and owning them either simultaneously or successively, for they are the masters of the materials that produce the bodies and senses."<sup>59</sup>

Concerning these Divine helpers Swami Vivekananda disclosed, "From time to time some of them will come back to this earth and take another body to teach human beings the way to God; and the great teachers of the world have been such. They are already free, and were living with God in the highest sphere; but their love and sympathy for suffering humanity was so great that they came and incarnated again to teach mankind the way to heaven."<sup>60</sup> The pre-existent Moses and Muhammad were liberated soul "who incarnated themselves for the fulfillment of some special mission."<sup>61</sup> "Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the perfected Rishis of a previous Kalpa (cycle) take human bodies and come on earth with the Avatars. They are the associates of the Lord. God works through them and propagates His religion. Know this for a truth that they alone are the associates of the Avatara who have renounced all self for the sake of others, who, giving up all sense-enjoyments with repugnance, spend their lives for the good of the world, for the welfare of the Jivas. The disciples of Jesus were all Sannyasins."<sup>62</sup>

It is affirmed by the Sikh religion and supported by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda that the ancient rishi (sage) Janaka, incarnated as each of the ten gurus who established the Sikh religion in India. Beginning with the first Guru Nanak (1469-1539) the Incarnational series terminated with the tenth Guru Govinda (1666-1708). According to one view when Guru Nanak died, his spirit passed into the second guru and this process continued through all ten gurus. Another idea is that Janaka was able to incarnate as more than one person at a time, since some of the Sikh Gurus lived concurrently.<sup>63</sup> We cannot impose human limitations on the Divine.

Consequently, a male and female Divine Incarnation-Avataras could exist simultaneously, and they could both be Incarnations of the same Divine Being. Patanjali (YS 4:5) mentioned the psychic power of a human yogi, “creating for oneself a number of subsidiary minds and bodies, over which the original mind maintains control.”<sup>64</sup>

Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) wrote, “When God comes and lives as we live, only then can we know what God is like. We may imagine many things, but these imaginations must necessarily be imperfect, because they come out of the imperfect brain of an imperfect man. God has to come to show us really what God is like. Only so can we know truly what He is. And because the ordinary man can never make out God, He always comes with someone who will be able to understand His life and make it known to the world.”<sup>65</sup> Only the people whom he has chosen have that ability.

According to Swami Abhedananda, “The religion of Vedanta teaches that such Incarnations of divinity are not limited by distinctions of sex; they may appear in masculine or in feminine form according to the needs of the time and place. To the sexless Supreme Being who is both Father and Mother of the Universe, the masculine and the feminine form are of equal value and importance. It is for this reason that amongst the Hindus in India are to be found many Incarnations of divinity in the form of woman.”<sup>66</sup>

The Sikh idea of simultaneous Incarnations is related to Shankara’s idea that, “Therefore it goes without saying that the gods, dowered with perfection from birth, will have these multiple bodies. And since it is possible to assume many bodies, each god can divide himself into multifarious bodies to be associated simultaneously with many sacrifices.”<sup>67</sup> A Christian parallel is the Lutheran Scholastics concept of ubiquity, whereby in the Lord’s Supper, Christ body and blood is simultaneously present in multiple locations.<sup>68</sup>

The idea of Incarnations of Divine Being is known to members of other religions. For example, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 20 B.C.-45/50 A.D.) taught, “All such as are wise, like Moses, are living abroad from home. For the souls of such formerly chose this expatriation from heaven, and through curiosity and the desire of acquiring knowledge they came to dwell abroad in earthly nature, and while they dwell in the body

they look down on things visible and mortal around them, and urge their way thitherward again whence they came originally: and call that heavenly region ... their citizenship, fatherland, but this earthly region in which they live, foreign.”<sup>69</sup>

The Church Father Clement of Alexandria (c. 150/160-213/220) designated, “It is clear that the barbarians pay exceptional honor to their lawgivers and teachers, and call them gods. Their belief is that certain good souls, having left the super-celestial region of which Plato speaks, submitted to come down to this Tartarus, and, having taken bodies, to share all the evils of the created order in their concern for the race of men. It is they who established laws and declared philosophy.”<sup>70</sup>

An exemplary thinker of Alexandria, the Christian Origen (c. 185-254) specified that there are souls “who have been brought down, even against their will, from those higher invisible conditions [realms] to these lower visible ones, in order to be of service to the whole world.” Angels and great souls not only serve God in heaven, but may also incarnate to fulfill a special Divine function. God sends to this world, “ministers to work for the correction and salvation of those who had fallen.” Great ones like St. Paul are sent to this world for the purpose of serving as a teacher and guide to souls in need.<sup>71</sup> John the Baptist “was sent from a higher region ... that he might bear witness to the light ... for a Divine ministry and in the service of the salvation of mankind.” He “is an angel who assumed a body for the sake of bearing witness to the light”, to prepare people for the coming of Christ.<sup>72</sup>

According to the Talmud (c. 200-500) a collection of Jewish laws and tradition, a limited number of advanced souls reincarnate until the Day of Judgment. More specifically Abel’s soul passed first into the body of Seth and later into Moses. The Samaritan doctrine of taheb tells us, a pre-existing soul was given to Adam and then passed through successive Incarnations in Seth, Noah, Abraham, and finally Moses. Centuries later the Kabbalah proclaimed that Adam’s soul passed into Moses, then King David, and in the future will enter into the Messiah. Members of Isaac Luria’s (1534-72) school of the Kabbalah held that, on rare occasions high ranking souls that have never been to the earth, take on human birth for the purpose of helping to bring about a universal restoration (tikkun) of humanity.<sup>73</sup>

One the founders of Christian mystical theology (whose writings

extended east all the way to Iran), Evagrius of Ponticus (c. 345-99) also accepted the idea that the spiritual process that leads humans to union with the Lord, “takes place under the benevolent influence of God’s grace and through the good services of exceptionally pure spirits. Angels who are very pure and most favorable to man’s salvation may even assume a lower position on the world scale so as to be able to enlighten and otherwise assist men on their upward path.”<sup>74</sup>

For more on this subject see: SRWT, Ch. III. Avatara-Divine Incarnation: Their Spiritual and Human Nature, Section 4. Incarnations of Brahman-God’s Heavenly Assistants. Web: <http://www.vedantawritings.com/RKW03.pdf>

### C. Avataras-Divine Incarnations

The Bengal Vaishnava follower of Sri Chaitanya, Jiva Goswami’s (1511-66) conception as presented by Sudhindra Chakravarti is, “Though outwardly finite and relative, an Avatara is inwardly Infinite and absolute. Apparently He is born and brought up as a finite being. He devises ways and means and executes plans and contrivances like an intelligent human being for fulfilling His purposes, but inwardly He is conscious of Himself as the infinite and eternal spirit; He is aware of His omnipotence and omniscience; He knows that He is above all births and deaths, above all purposes and actions, above all needs and limitations. While playing a special role through a finite body, He knows Himself to be the innermost soul of all bodies. He is not confined to the special body through which He works, but immanent in the whole universe; He knows Himself also as eternally transcending the world. His life is the meeting point of the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the relative and the absolute, the material and the spiritual.”<sup>75</sup>

Concerning Avataras-Divine Incarnations Vivekananda stressed, “They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and most degraded characters become in one second saints at their command. They are the Teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestations of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship. No man can really see God except through these human manifestations. If we try to see God otherwise, we make for ourselves a hideous caricature of Him and believe the caricature

to be no worse than the original.... Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God except as a man.”<sup>76</sup> “I try to get an idea of God in my mind, and I find what a false little thing I conceive; it would be a sin to worship that God. I open my eyes and look at the actual life of these great ones of the earth. They are higher than any conception of God that I could ever form.... What idea of Divine love can you form except what you actually live? What we have never experienced we can form no idea of.”<sup>77</sup> “We have to worship Jesus Christ, the human manifestation, as God. You cannot worship anything higher than the manifestation of God. The sooner you give up the worship of God separate from Christ, the better for you.... Any time you attempt to make a God beyond Christ, you murder the whole thing. God alone can worship God. It is not given to man, and any attempt to worship Him beyond His ordinary manifestations will be dangerous to mankind. Keep close to Christ if you want salvation; He is higher than any God you can imagine.”<sup>78</sup> “We have in this world, living and walking in our midst, living Gods, now and then. These are more worthy of worship than any imaginary God, any creation of our imagination, that is to say, any idea of God which we can form. Sri Krishna is much greater than an idea of God you or I can have. Buddha is a much higher idea, a more living and idolized idea, than the ideal you or I can conceive of in our minds; and therefore it is that they always command the worship of mankind even to the exclusion of all imaginary deities.”<sup>79</sup> The time will come when we shall transcend our human nature and see Him as He is.

On the subject of God’s concealment in His earthly revelation the German Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546), pointed out, “If he came to us in his majesty, we would not be able to comprehend him and to bear so bright a light.”<sup>80</sup> “Now we cannot bear to see and look at His brilliant Majesty. Therefore, He must cover and veil Himself, so to speak, behind a heavy cloud.”<sup>81</sup> For our benefit, the Supreme Being conceals His true nature and brilliant majesty, and we perceive only the mask of God (1 Cor. 13:12). Through His grace and for our welfare, God presents Himself to us in accordance with our limited capacity to fathom and receive Him. He covers, clothes and disguises Himself with a mask, enabling humans to comprehend Him. This is why God has given us Jesus who is human, and full of love and mercy. Jesus passed through all of the stage of life without sin, thereby sanctifying them and removing the curse from life and death.<sup>82</sup>

It is only the human nature that suffers, not the Divine nature. An Avatara-Divine Incarnation as Divine is Brahman-God, but as human It is a manifestation of Brahman-God. Manifesting on the material plane through a human body Its powers are somewhat limited (kenosis). They show that human flesh is a suitable temple for the manifestation of Brahman-God.

The love that the Avatars profess is known in India as bhakti (devotional faith) is at the heart of Hindu theistic religion. The feeling that bhakti elicits is a mixture of love, awe, fascination, and dependence. Bhakti implies the taking of refuge in Brahman-God for protection, for assistance, with confidence that Brahman-God is approachable and that he/she will reciprocate with at least as much love as the devotee has for It. Bhakti is a type of love that is based upon devotion to a beloved deity and in which there is a separation between the devotee and their Brahman-God. There is in bhakti an emphasis on the relationship between lover and beloved, and the various aspects of bhakti are viewed as stages of spiritual progress. The intimacy of love between the two never erases the distinction even though they may become united through their love. Both are personal; one is the finite bhakta (lover), the other is the infinite Bhagavan (Loved One). Christian love corresponds more appropriately to the Hindu concepts of prasada (grace), karuna (mercy), or vatsalya (protecting and forgiving love). Hindus and Christians both believe in a Personal God, the manifestation of the Divine in human form, the importance of selfless action, and the focus on loving devotion to Brahman-God as means of liberation-salvation. The relationship between Brahman-God and released souls involves worship of the former by the latter. The released soul enjoys this type of existence eternally and does not suffer or cease to exist at the dissolution of the universe. The liberated state and the saved soul, have an eternal spiritual bodily existence in the afterlife.

There is also a difference: for Christians this Incarnation is unique, while Hindus recognize a succession of Avatars. For Ramakrishna himself, Avatars are waves in Brahman's ocean, aspects of the one Reality who appear individualized in human history in order to bring people to Brahman-God. Vivekananda like his Master, believed that Jesus was one of the Avatars, each coming to reveal or awaken the divinity within as many people as possible.<sup>83</sup>

### 3. Their Mission

#### A. The Avatara and History

From Swami Shivananda a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna we learn, “He exists eternally and from age to age and embodies Himself as a man for the good of the world. That is because of His pure compassion.... When the world becomes burdened and there is prevalence of irreligion, the all-merciful Lord by His own free will incarnates Himself as man too save the fallen and ameliorate the lot of the world.” “When God comes to the world as a man, then flows a current of spirituality. Many are blessed by getting the light of knowledge; many attain emancipation.”<sup>85</sup>

Vivekananda affirmed that an Avatara (Divine Incarnations such as Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Chaitanya, and Ramakrishna) comes at a critical time in history when there is a great fall in the spiritual life of the nation. “In the efflux of time the light of Vedanta now and then seems as if about to be extinguished, and when that happens, the Lord has to incarnate Himself in the human body; He then infuses such life and strength into religion that it goes on again for some time with irresistible vigor.”<sup>86</sup> “The great soul, the Messenger [Jesus] we are to study this afternoon, came at a period of the history of his race which we may well designate as a great fall.”<sup>87</sup> “When Christ was born, the Jews were in that state which I call a state of fall between two waves; a state of conservatism ... We have no right to criticize it—because had it not been for this fall, the next rise, which was embodied in Jesus of Nazareth would have been impossible.”<sup>88</sup> “Every Prophet is a creation of his own times, the creation of the past of his race; he himself is the creator of the future. The cause of today is the effect of the past and the cause for the future. In this position stands the Messenger. In him is embodied all that is the best and greatest in his own race, the meaning, the life, for which that race has struggled for ages; and he himself is the impetus for the future, not only to his own race but to unnumbered other races of the world.”<sup>89</sup> “And the three years of his ministry were like one compressed, concentrated age, which it has taken nineteen hundred years to unfold, and who knows how much longer it will yet take!... But mark this giant that came; centuries and ages pass, yet the energy that he left upon the world is not yet stretched,

nor yet expended to its full. It goes on adding new vigor as the ages roll on.”<sup>90</sup>

The idea being that the great souls like Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and their disciples not only bring new knowledge, but also create a tremendous hidden spiritual power that cannot fail to manifest in future centuries. Their creative energy is on the causal and subtle planes, unseen by us, but eventually it must come forth on the gross plane. It first manifests on the spiritual plane, then at subtle levels of matter-energy, and finally in empirical physical historical existence. There is no way to prevent it. In the correct environment, the living seeds they left will grow and flourish. It originates as spiritual energy, then becomes thought, and lastly manifests on the physical plane in a grosser form as action. You might call it a social physics, i.e. social events are caused by subtler forms of matter and energy. Sociologists think of a religion as composed of an organization, a body of ideas and practices, and physical objects such as books and buildings. But there is also some kind of hidden energy and power present there. The physicists of today realize the universe is reducible to energy and matter. Their creative energy is on the causal and subtle planes, unseen by us, but eventually it must come forth on the gross plane.

A brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Saradananda concluded that when religion is in an impoverished state, the Avatara assumes a physical body for the good of humanity. They appear when the forces of atheism, agnosticism, and materialism are predominant. “The eternal, universal religion declines with the passage of time. Infatuated by the inscrutable power of maya, people lead their lives in the belief that this world and its mundane enjoyments are their all in all; they consider the Atman, God, liberation, and other eternal transcendental realities to be a poet’s fancy—an illusory dream.... Out of compassion for human weakness, He takes a human form and again puts humanity on the spiritual path. As there cannot be an effect without a cause, so God in His lila [Divine play] never assumes a human body without the purpose of removing the sufferings of humanity. When such suffering affects every part of society, God’s infinite mercy crystallizes and induces Him to appear as a world teacher.”<sup>91</sup>

The Avatara-Divine Incarnation is born not only at the proper time in history, but also at the most suitable location. Sri Ramakrishna selected



Bengal and Jesus Palestine. The Hindu-Vedanta religion and Judaism provided them with the foundation they needed upon which to construct their religion. The Hebrew monotheistic religion was far more suitable for this purpose than the Greek, Roman, Babylonian, Egyptian, Slavic, Teutonic, Nordic, or Anglo-Saxon religion. Next from the Divine world (loka) they brought with them souls who would aid them in their mission on earth. Europe learned of Christianity originally from the Jewish people and in turn many Jewish people became acquainted with Western secular thought (to some extent becoming Europeanized) when they migrated to those countries, both groups gaining from the exchange.

As a historian, Paul Tillich (1886-1965) the Christian theologian emphasized that Jesus' advent occurred, "in one special moment in history when everything was ready for it to happen.... Chronos is clock time, time which is measured, as we have it in words like 'chronology' and 'chronometer.' Kairos is not the quantitative time of the clock, but the qualitative time of the occasion, the right time. There are things that happen when the right time, the kairos, has not yet come.... kairos means that the eternal can break into the temporal and that a new beginning can take place."<sup>92</sup> "We spoke of the moment at which history, in terms of a concrete situation, had matured to the point of being able to receive the breakthrough of the central manifestation of the Kingdom of God.... Paul uses kairos when he speaks in a world-historical view of the moment of time in which God could send his Son, the moment which was selected to become the center of history. In order to recognize this 'great kairos,' one must be able to see the 'signs of the times,' as Jesus says when he accuses his enemies of not seeing them." In addition to the one kairos, there are many kairoi occurring in all preparatory and receiving movements in the church.<sup>93</sup> Tillich is expressing the "Historical View of Understanding." The development of ideas follows a logical process. In order to arise and for their meanings to be properly understood at a particular time in history, they must be compatible and interact with the prevailing thought structure of the socio-cultural system. There is also "qualitative space" in that the new beginning takes place in suitable locations.

For a social-cultural event to come into existence the historical time must be right. Meaning it must coordinate with other important events in the social-cultural system. Vivekananda brought a wonderful religion to the

West but it could not be received until the people are ready for it. So today they are being prepared to be capable of accepting it.

A French-Swiss Protestant theologian Oscar Cullmann (1902-99) ideas have been interpreted by S. C. Guthrie in the following quote.

“‘History’ here means of course a special history: ‘biblical’ or ‘revelatory’ or ‘redemptive’ history (Heilsgeschichte). It is the history of God’s Self-revealing, saving action in the events which lead up to and follow from the self-revealing, saving event of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This particular history, though unique in general world history, is nevertheless of the same character. It is different from history in general in that the events which compose it are the direct intervention of God in the world.... This concept of time means that for Biblical thought, time has meaning. It is ‘going somewhere’ (in contrast to the ‘circular’ time of the Greeks, which is meaningless because it is only the constant repetition of events and periods without direction or goal).... all history is at its deepest level the history of salvation.”<sup>94</sup>

The philosopher Immanuel Kant pondered, what is the hidden plan of nature? According to the traditional Christian view, history has meaning because it is the progressive fulfillment of a Divine plan toward a final goal the redemption of humanity. “Salvation history (Heilsgeschichte)” began with Adam and Eve and the fall of humanity, the *Old Testament* period serving as a preparation for the advent of Christ (the midpoint of history), progressing linearly to the second coming and a new creation. Following the traditional Hindu view there is a cyclical pattern moving in a wave like fashion, with the Avatars taking human birth when there is a decline in religion.

Hindus also accept the idea of a “Sacred History” with Divine intervention, but it is more extensive than Cullman’s idea. Divine Incarnations (Avatars) and other Divine Beings are occasionally born on earth to fulfill a special religious mission. This not only includes Avatars like Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Sri Chaitanya, and Sri Ramakrishna, but also founders of lasting large scale religions like Moses and Muhammad. They have the power to infuse spiritual power into the new religion that is perpetuated through the efforts of the clerics and lay devotees. They are accompanied by other Divine Beings who become their disciples in their earthly mission, such as Paul and Jesus’ twelve disciples (As stated in the above section B. His Heavenly Assistants). Divine Beings may appear on

earth apart from Avatars like Shankara an Incarnation of Shiva, Madhva who was of the same lineage as Hanuman, King Janaka who incarnated as the original ten Sikh gurus, and many more. To give other examples, it is possible that Plato and Thomas Aquinas were Incarnations of heavenly sages who came to earth to enlighten many people.

Heinz Zahrnt (1915-2003) a German Evangelical theologian adds that when the Kingdom of God was revealed in temporal existence through Jesus Christ, it became the “formative principle” a turning point, which gives meaning to the whole of history. This event occurred during a crisis period, when the ancient structure of a society had become sterile and had lost its vitality and meaning.<sup>95</sup>

The Avatara is the Self-communication, Self-disclosure, and Self-revelation of Brahman (God) in human history. In the course of sacred history, Brahman-God discloses Himself/Herself more in one religion than in another depending on the Divine plan. From a functional standpoint, the Lord works through the religion that is best suited for His/Her purpose at that particular time in history. For example, of the many religions in the world, the Lord selected the *Old Testament* Hebrew religion for the birth and mission of Jesus. Under rare occasions through the grace of Brahman-God, great souls take human birth as members of a religion in order to revitalize them and give them new life and strength. Since Divine reasoning differs from human reasoning, we have only a rough idea of what the Divine plan is.

Consequently, the Avatara is the central figure in sacred history, intervening in human history while having a major impact on its religious and cultural development. This idea is quite compatible with the “Great Man or Woman Theory of History,” since these people on occasion are responsible for important historical events and movements to occur. Sri Krishna emphasized that the Incarnation comes during periods of unrighteousness to restore virtue. Divine Beings also are born on earth when the time is right and they can best manifest their ideas and ideals. Sacred history is overlooked by many philosophers of history who consider only secular matters in the determination of events.

The Avatara-Incarnation is a descent of Brahman-God to the human level, so that humans can ascend to Brahman-God. Based on his reading of the Indian religious writers Francis X. Clooney, S.J. of Harvard University

makes the essential points that the Avatara (Divine Incarnation) is totally free and not under the control of the law of karma. Its embodiment and activity are undertaken freely out of compassion for the human condition. They come to restore righteousness (dharma) during times of crisis, so that humans can raise themselves to a higher grade of life. Their purpose is to uplift rather than belittle humanity. They lay the foundation for the future necessary institutions in which their work will be sustained. The essential teaching is strengthened when taught by the authority of an Avatara rather than a lesser soul.<sup>96</sup>

Can an all-blissful Brahman-God have a complete understanding of human misery, can an omniscient Brahman-God comprehend human ignorance, can an all-loving Brahman-God experience hate, or can a fearless Brahman-God know what fear is? To answer these questions affirmatively would require for Brahman-God to have a level of understanding far more complex than we could conceive of. If Brahman-God has the telepathic ability to read all of our thoughts that would provide a much better understanding of human beings. But It would not experience our feelings on the matter, would lack the insight into what it is like to live a life from a limited, fallible, imperfect mortal perspective.

Similarly, though our intelligence far exceeds that of a bat, Thomas Nagel (1979) pointed out we do not know what it's like to be a bat. Even if we had the telepathic power to read the mind of a bat, this would not reveal to us the subjective character of a bats experience.

According to Professor Knight of the University of Iowa because of these logical limitations, God incarnates into a worldly existence to gain a better understanding of human nature. This way It deepens the understanding and the bond, between humans and the Divine. It must incarnate and become a limited human in order to know the human predicament (Kenosis). Living in the world, the Incarnation comes to understand the nature of finite existence, its hardships and limitations. Because of Its love and compassion for humanity, Brahman-God is willing to make the sacrifice of leaving a blissful existence and taking on human suffering. To understand our pain, then Brahman-God must have to feel our pain.<sup>97</sup>

Since the time of Swami Vivekananda, several laudable attempts have been made to interpret Jesus Christ from a Vedanta standpoint. Indian

Swamis living in America have written on their interpretation of the *New Testament* including Swami Paramananda's *Christ and Oriental Ideas* (1912, 1923), Swami Akhilananda's *Hindu View of Christ* (1949), Swami Prabhavananda's *The Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta* (1963), and Swami Satprakashananda's *Hinduism and Christianity* (1975). "This Sermon, which is the essence of Christian spiritual ethics, was regarded by Prabhavananda as embodying universal truths applicable to all religions. His Vedantic interpretation of the Sermon is based on the religious teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Vivekananda, some Christian mystics, and others. The central theme of his book is that Christ came to teach people how to be reborn, and to attain God consciousness (the Kingdom of Heaven). He teaches the Sermon on the Mount is the "eternal gospel," which a spiritual seeker can realize within themselves."<sup>98</sup>

Reviewers of Prabhavananda's book tell us, "Few books in the field of comparative religions have been able to capture with vitality and lucidity the common spiritual essence underlying Christianity and the great religions of the East.... At times the Swami's message reaches high inspirational levels. Even when touching on controversial theological issues, the handling is never superficial in spite of the simple and direct style which makes the reading more a pleasure than a study" He "acquired a deep understanding of both the *Bible* and the western approach to religion. He had the highest respect for Jesus as a spiritual teacher and often used his words to elaborate and exemplify the themes he was explaining." "The Hindu Swami Prabhavananda interprets *The Sermon on the Mount* with unusual clarity and beauty. In contrast to a far-off, scarcely attainable ideal, the teaching of Jesus is for him a practical program for daily living which enables the Divine to unfold and manifest itself as the only real goal of human life.... Henceforth to this day Christ, the embodiment of love, "who poured out his heart's blood for the redemption of mankind," is worshiped "as a manifest expression of divinity" and revered "as one of the greatest of illumined teachers" in all monasteries of the Ramakrishna Order." "For Prabhavananda, there can be no doubt that it can be said that the Word of God became incarnate in Jesus Christ."<sup>99</sup>

## B. Giver of Knowledge

Indian: “The same ancient yoga I [Sri Krishna] have told you today; for you are My devotee and friend” (BG 4:3). “I shall teach you in full both knowledge and experience, which being known, nothing more remains here for you to know” (BG 7:2).

New Testament: “If you continue in my word ... you will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (Jn. 8:31-32; cf. 18:37; Eph. 1:17; 1 Jn. 5:20). “I [Jesus] have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn. 15:15; cf. Mt. 11:27).

Secret knowledge of God. Indian: “Since you accept me and do not question, now I shall tell you that innermost secret: knowledge of God” (BG\* 9:1, p. 100). New Testament: “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God ... Privately to his own disciples he explained everything” (Mk. 4:11, 34; cf. Mt. 13:11; Lk. 8:10).

Light that dispels darkness. Indian: “I dwelling in their hearts, dispel with the shining lamp of wisdom the darkness born of ignorance” (BG 10:11). “This is my Infinite Being; shall the sun lend it any light-or the moon, or fire? For it shines self-luminous always” (BG\* 15:6, p. 147). New Testament: “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness” (Jn. 8:12; 1:5, 9). “I have come as light into the world, that whosoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (Jn. 12:46).<sup>100</sup>

Awaken. Indian: “Arise! Awake! Approach the feet of the Master and know That [Brahman]” (Kat. Up.\* 3:14, p. 30). New Testament: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light” (Eph. 5:14).

Vivekananda expressed the idea that, “The highest of gifts is the giving of spiritual knowledge, the next is the giving of secular knowledge, and the next is the saving of life, the last is giving food and drink. He who gives spiritual knowledge, saves the soul from many and many a birth. He who gives secular knowledge opens the eyes of human beings towards spiritual knowledge.”<sup>101</sup> Spiritual pleasures are the most blissful and sublime, followed by the intellectual and cultural, and the lowest are those of the physical senses.

In addition, Vivekananda makes the point that God-men often teach spiritual truths without employing complicated reasoning or offering any logical proofs for their ideas. “Did you ever hear or read of these great

Teachers, or Prophets, reasoning out what they taught? No, not one of them did so. They speak direct. Why should they reason? They see the Truth. And not only do they see it, but they show it!... it is a direct perception, and not at all the ratiocination of reason. There is no groping in the dark, but there is the strength of direct vision.” Avataras are the supreme gurus of humanity, the teacher of all teachers, who experience Brahman (God) and truth by direct perception and not through logical inference.<sup>102</sup>

Thomas Aquinas discerned, “It is a greater thing to help another in spiritual matters than in temporal affairs, as much greater as spiritual things are more important than temporal ones, and more necessary for the attainment of the end which is beatitude.”<sup>103</sup>

The Dutch Jewish philosopher Benedict Spinoza (1632-77) stressed that one should seek the necessary, universal, essential, and eternal aspects of religion; not the contingent, particular, accidental, and temporal features of religion. In a letter written by Spinoza to Oldenburg in 1675 he stated, “I will tell you that I do not think it necessary, for salvation to know Christ according to the flesh: but with regard to the Eternal Son of God, that is the Eternal Wisdom of God, which has manifested itself in all things and especially in the human mind, and above all in Christ Jesus, the case is far otherwise. For without this no one can come to a state of blessedness, inasmuch as it alone teaches, what is true or false, good or evil. And, inasmuch as this wisdom was made especially manifest through Jesus Christ, as I have said, His disciples preached it, in so far as it was revealed to them through Him, and thus showed that they could rejoice in that spirit of Christ more than the rest of mankind.”<sup>104</sup>

Each Avatara-Divine Incarnation is unique in that they reveal new truths based on their own spiritual experiences, which were not previously known. They are exceedingly creative and present unexpected teachings, which could not be forecasted in advance and bring about major changes in society. This spiritual knowledge is of great practical importance for attaining liberation and salvation. They explain the highest meaning of life that brings about greatest conceivable development for humanity. At the same time, they respect and keep intact the religious wisdom of the past.

By keeping their minds in the Divine realm, the Incarnations and their inner circle of disciples bring heavenly consciousness down to earth.

An Avatara teaches different people differently, depending on their capacity. He expects total renunciation and self-denial from his apostles, but less from his householder disciples. The Avatara seeks to have people realize their own spiritual nature.

For more on this subject see: SRWT, Ch. IV. Avatara-Divine Incarnation: Their Mission and Legacy, Section 5. Giver of Knowledge. Web: <http://www.vedantawritings.com/RKW04.pdf>

### C. Establishes Righteousness and a New Religion

Indian: “In every age I [Sri Krishna] come back to deliver the holy, to destroy the sin of the sinner, to establish righteousness” (BG\* 4:8, p. 60).

New Testament: “It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15). “Think not that I [Jesus] have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt. 5:17). “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Mt. 16:18). “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19; cf. Mt. 24:14; 26:13; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47).

Vivekananda suggested that powerful thought waves produced by the Divine Incarnation-Avatara and his disciples can make contact with and affect other minds even centuries later. “When I am doing a good action, my mind is in another state of vibration; and all minds similarly strung have the possibility of being affected by my mind; and this power of mind upon mind is more or less according as the force of the tension is greater or less. Following this simile further, it is quite possible that, just as light waves may travel for millions of years before they reach any object, so thought waves may also travel hundreds of years before they meet an object with which they vibrate in unison.” “These great ones, they manifest themselves in our souls, and they make us like unto them. Our whole nature changes, and we become like them.”<sup>105</sup>

Swami Saradananda expounded, “The omniscient Avatara, who is a world teacher and discoverer of the new religious path, appears in order to fulfill the need of the age.”<sup>106</sup> “Those great teachers who have modeled extraordinary and entirely new ways of living are worshiped by people as



Avataras, Incarnations of God. Avataras discover new doctrines and new paths in the religious world.”<sup>107</sup> They realize their life mission as a spiritual instructor, by establishing a new religion (path to the Divine world). Avataras generate a tremendous interest in religion and the Divine world, being the spiritual guide for a large portion of humanity (mahaguru). Yet each Avatara-Divine Incarnation is unique in that they reveal new truths based on their own spiritual experiences, which were not previously known. They are exceedingly creative and present unexpected teachings, which could not be forecasted in advance and bring about major changes in society. This spiritual knowledge is of great practical importance for attaining liberation and salvation. At the same time, they respect and keep intact the religious wisdom of the past. By keeping their minds in the Divine realm, the Incarnations and their inner circle of disciples bring heavenly consciousness down to earth.<sup>108</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda observed that moral life and the inner spirit (not the outer forms) of religion enter a period of decline, and consequently people do not find peace. At that time, the Avatara initiates “a tidal wave of spirituality in the world—whose power continues to grow with the passing of years.... Great spiritual leaders come to infuse new life into the inner spirit of religion at the time it is needed most. After these great ones pass away, we find a renaissance of cultural development. There was such development in the wake of Jesus Christ, Buddha, and Muhammad. Because they work at the root of life, man’s architect, art, music, literature, and politics all develop as a result of the spiritual tidal wave set in motion by the great saviors.” For thousands of years after their death, the religion they established continues to guide pious devotees in their spiritual life. Great yogis and mystics continue to communicate with the Avatara and feel their subtle sanctifying and blissful presence.<sup>109</sup>

John Calvin (1509-64) taught, “If we heard God speaking to us in His majesty, it would be useless to us, for we would understand nothing. Therefore, since we are carnal, He has to stutter or otherwise, He would not be understood by us.” Swami Vivekananda concurs stating, “Even if a book were given by God which contained all the truth about religion, it would not serve the purpose because nobody could understand the book.”<sup>110</sup> We might think of the logic of a child or of an adult’s night

dream, where events are connected in a sequence following a logic we are not familiar with. Therefore, it is necessary that the Avatara select out for their birthplace the best possible religious society for developing their religion. Using the concepts of that religious culture they create a new path to Brahman-God that is understandable to people.

In more recent times Augustus Strong signified, “The church of Christ, in its largest signification, is the whole company of regenerate persons in all times and ages, in heaven and on earth. In this sense, the church is identical with the spiritual kingdom of God; both signify the redeemed humanity in which God in Christ exercises actual spiritual dominion.” “The church, in this large sense, is nothing less than the body of Christ—the organism to which he gives spiritual life, and through which he manifests the fullness of his power and grace. The church therefore cannot be defined in merely human terms, as an aggregate of individuals associated for social, benevolent, or even spiritual purposes. There is a transcendent element in the church. It is the great company of persons whom Christ has saved, in whom he dwells, to whom and through whom he reveals God.... The Scriptures, however, distinguish between this invisible or universal church and the individual church, in which the universal church takes local and temporal form, and in which the idea of the church as a whole is concretely exhibited.”<sup>111</sup>

Their teachings are unanticipated, totally unexpected, unique, spontaneous, and lead to the establishment of a new Religious Order. Divine Incarnation-Avatara and their intimate disciples, through their intense spiritual natures and practices, create vibrations that operate at the level of subtle mental matter and causal matter. This way they make alterations in the subtle and causal plane of existence, which is imperceptible to us. Over a period of time that could involve centuries, these seeds manifest first on the mental plane of existence and then on the physical. Consequently, a religion that began as a few devotees eventually encompasses millions of adherents. It is possible that modern physics has to some degree tapped into the subtle plane of existence, the world of mental matter, which it calls the quantum realm.

The Avatar-Divine Incarnations, Buddhas, and Prophets are not only human but also a member of a particular human religion. Working through that religion they create a new path to Brahman-God that involves new

teachings. In one sense they are limited to the ideas of the religion they are brought up in. Consequently, there are differences in their ideas and approaches to religion. Similarly, the new ideas of a genius in the area of secular knowledge are based on a recombination of the ideas they learned. Without first studying the prevailing ideas they would have never discovered the new ones.

According to the Indian idea, there are different lokas (worlds, regions, realms, planes of existence) within Heaven. For example, the Christian loka is different from the Islamic loka. When creating a path to Brahman-God the goals are not identical in the sense that the Divine Heaven (Loka) of a Rama, Krishna, Ramakrishna, and Jesus differ to some extent from each other. Consequently, it is possible that a Divine Being who is born on earth descending from one loka, teaches religious doctrines that vary to some extent from those descending from other lokas. Though there is much common agreement, they also differ on some ideas and practices.

The grace of the Lord is most manifested through the Avatars-Divine Incarnations and their helpers who voluntary descend to earth and leave us with spiritual power, a new religious organization, and religious scriptures. The revelation and new religion that the Avatara establishes has two aspects. One is the book, the body of teachings and biography that compose the religious scriptures left by the charismatic leader and his followers. The second is the Religious Order, the organization that he and his followers create. These are the two main aspects of salvation-liberation history, Brahman-God acting through historical events.

Christians (with the exception of the Mormons) believe there are no post-Biblical scriptures. When Mother Mary presented herself at Guadalupe and other locations, she brought no new scriptural revelations. Similarly when the great Christian mystics made spiritual contact with Jesus they received new insights, but no new scripture appeared. Only a Divine Incarnation or a great prophet from another realm has that power.

#### 4. Their Legacy

After the Avatars-Divine Incarnations ascend to the higher world, they and some of their associates continue to inspire and communicate with earthly people on a spiritual level. This occurs during religious

experiences; through religious images, rituals, and ceremonies; and through the Church itself.

In a profound religious experience, an Avatara-Divine Incarnation (the mystical body of the Avatara) can manifest Himself in a subtle spiritual body to the mystic to varying degrees. These visions, visitations, and dreams are more intense and life transforming than seeing an Avatara-Divine Incarnation in a physical body. In a sense they represent a second coming since the event occurs after the Avatara-Divine Incarnation has lived in a physical body on earth.

The Indian Vaishnavists teach the concept of the ArcAvatara, which is an objective spiritual body manifestation of Brahman's present in and through a sacred image (arca).<sup>112</sup> That is, a descent of Brahman-God into a consecrated image for the purpose of worship. In Indian pujas and homa fires, and in the in sacred food offerings such as the Christian Eucharist-Communion the subtle presence of an Avatara-Divine Incarnation can be manifested. The Vaishnavas also mentions the Antaryamin (Inner Controller) Avatara who is Brahman-God inspiring us from within, possibly resembling the Holy Spirit.

Brahman-God manifests personally through the Avatara and somewhat impersonally through the scriptures, religious organization, Holy relics of religious ritual, sacred space, and sacred times. It is free act motivated by Brahman-God's concern and merciful love towards all men and women. The descent reveals respect for the physical environment, other bodily human beings, and regard for ones own bodily nature. It relates to the sacramental system of the Church that uses physical objects like water, food, and candles to relate to the Divine.

#### A. Apostolic Succession

Indian: "This eternal yoga I [Lord Krishna] taught to Vivasvat ... Thus handed down from one to another, it became known to the royal sages" (BG 4:1-2).

New Testament: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church ... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 16:18-19). You are "members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19-20).

Vivekananda brought out these points, “There is no way to the attainment of knowledge unless it is transmitted through an apostolic succession from disciple to disciple.”<sup>114</sup> Laying on of hands is a continuation of the transmission of that spiritual current which was initiated and set in motion by Christ and handed down to future generations. “Prophets preach, but the Incarnations like Jesus, Buddha, Ramakrishna, can give religion; one glance, one touch is enough. That is the power of the Holy Ghost, the ‘laying on of hands’; the power was actually transmitted to the disciples by the Master—the ‘chain of Guru-power.’ That, the real baptism, has been handed down for untold ages.”<sup>115</sup> “A real Guru [like Jesus] is one who is born from time to time as a repository of spiritual force which he transmits to future generations through successive links of Guru and Sishya (disciple). The current of this spirit-force changes its course from time to time, just as a mighty stream of water opens up a new channel and leaves the old one for good. Thus, it is seen that old sects of religion grow lifeless in the course of time, and new sects arise with the fire of life in them. Men who are truly wise commit themselves to the mercy of that particular sect through which the current of life flows.”<sup>116</sup> Guruparampara is the name of the unbroken chain of gurus and disciples. “These sacred mysterious words we all recognize and know, and yet if we merely read them in books, they have no effect on us. To be effective, they must be charged with spirit, touched and used by one who has himself been touched by the Spirit of God and who now lives.... The ‘laying on of hands’ is the continuation of that current which was set in motion by Christ.... With great teachers the use of words is not necessary—as with Jesus. But the ‘small fry’ transmit this current through words.”<sup>117</sup> The Protestant religion is an example of a “new channel” of apostolic succession through which this power flows that Swamiji mentions, though of course the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox channels remain. One might ask is there an imperceptible transmission of vital energy-power in a nonreligious group such as a country, university or any organization that helps maintain them?

Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) formulated that the power of an Avatara or of a great soul is transmitted from one generation to the next, without a break by a succession of gurus. “This chain of guru-power continues. Jesus, Buddha, or Ramakrishna are not to be found as gurus at

all times. But their power as transmitted to the disciples remains and is handed down from generation to generation. It is transmitted, as it were, in a seed-form to the disciple through the sacred name of God as the Chosen ideal [who is a specific Divine Incarnation like Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, or Sri Ramakrishna; or a deity like the Divine Mother or Shiva].”<sup>118</sup>

Apostolic succession is a doctrine originally taught by the Church Father including Irenaeus (c. 130-202) the Bishop of Lyons in Gaul (now France).<sup>119</sup> For Cyprian (c. 200-58) the Bishop of Carthage in North Africa, Church bishops are the bearers of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit passed from Christ to his apostles, and then by ordination to the bishops, in an unbroken line of succession. This gives efficacy to all religious exercises. Consequently, he taught the powerful and interesting doctrine, “There is no salvation outside of the Church.” One implication being that a devotee should stay close to their religion their entire life. The ceremony of ordination involved the “laying on of hands” by other members of the clergy.<sup>120</sup>

Max Weber in 1920 ascertained, “The concept that charisma [authority] may be transmitted by ritualistic means from one bearer to another ... It involves a dissociation of charisma from a particular individual, making it an objective, transferable entity. In particular, it may become the charisma of office. In this case, the belief in legitimacy is no longer directed to the individual, but to the acquired qualities and to the effectiveness of the ritual acts. The most important example is the transmission of priestly charisma by anointing, consecration, or the laying on of hands; and of royal authority, by anointing and by coronation.” There are three fundamental types of authority: charismatic, traditional, and rational-legal.<sup>121</sup>

Following the *Catholic Almanac's* explanation of the doctrine of Apostolic Succession, “Bishops of the Church, who form a collective body or college, are successors to the Apostles by ordination and Divine right; as such they carry on the mission entrusted by Christ to the Apostles as guardians and teachers of the deposit of faith, principal pastors and spiritual authorities of the faithful.... Its basic requisite is ordination by the laying on of hands in apostolic succession.... Christ promised the keys [of the Kingdom] to St. Peter, as head-to-be of the Church (Mt. 16:19), and commissioned him with full pastoral responsibility to feed his lambs and

sheep (Jn. 21:15-17).”<sup>122</sup> By an unbroken line of succession, the spiritual power of authority was passed on from Jesus to Peter and then to the bishops of the Church. As the successor of Peter at Rome, the Pope as head of the College of bishops has the authority that Peter had as leader of the Church. This includes carrying on the mission as guardians and teachers of the deposit of faith, principal pastors, and spiritual authorities of the faithful. This process occurs through the sacraments of ordination and holy orders. Bishops and priests also share in the power of teaching and absolving the sins of the laity. A bishop is consecrated by the “laying on of hands” of other bishops. Through the rites of baptism and confirmation, every Church member can belong to the lay priesthood.<sup>123</sup>

Can we limit this concept only to the Roman Church, since Christ’s apostles and their most intimate disciples also founded Churches in Alexandria (Mark), Antioch (Paul and Peter), Cyprus (Barnabas), Jerusalem (James), South India (Thomas), and other locations? We can think of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, South Indian faiths, etc. as branches of the Christian tree. Some branches of Christianity as in Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Palestine, etc. eventually became Muslim. The spiritual power manifested through the entire congregations and the leaders like the bishops, patriarchs, and Luther, Calvin, etc.

Little is known of the historical connections between the disciples of Jesus and the post-Biblical Christian leaders. There is a possibility of a line of spiritual transmission between instructor and pupil from Jesus to his apostle John (fl. 70-100), to Polycarp (69-155) the Bishop of Smyrna (an ancient Greek city now in Turkey), to Irenaeus (c. 130-200) the Bishop of Lyons (France), to Bishop Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170-236). Papias (c. 70-160) the Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia (modern day Greece) was said to be a disciple of John. Also, Valentinus (c. 100-60) the founder of the Valentinian Gnostic sect claimed that he learned of the secret teachings of the apostle Paul (5/10- 62/67), from one of the latter’s disciples named Theudas.<sup>124</sup>

Divine Incarnations-Avataras and prophets are preceded by a religious tradition and spiritual energy that they draw from and enhance. Jesus was baptized with water by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. He immediately had a profound spiritual experience (Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11). It is possible that there was an unbroken chain of spiritual preceptors of the Nazarenes, Essenes, or other sects, which preceded Jesus by

centuries. John the Baptist could have been initiated into the Essenes spiritual tradition and through the ritual of baptism (a form of initiation), he might have initiated Jesus into that lineage. If this was the case, Jesus not only established a new line of apostolic succession, but he himself was also an initiated member of one or more of the older spiritual traditions. If he belonged to more than one religious tradition, they converged in him. They may not have been mainline groups, which is a possible reason why he was not accepted by the traditional Jewish religion.

The apostle Paul sat at the feet of his master Gamaliel (d. c. 52 A.D.) (Acts 22:3), an honored leader of the Pharisees who was the grandson of the revered Rabbi Hillel (d. c. 9 A.D.). Paul might have received some spiritual power from his encounter with this ancient Jewish lineage.

There is also the notion that spiritual greatness is transmitted biologically through a hereditary succession process. In the Bible long genealogies trace Jesus' ancestors back to Abraham and Noah (Mt. 1:2-16; Lk. 3:23-36). According to Irenaeus, "Luke points out that the pedigree which traces the generation of our Lord back to Adam contains seventy-two generations, connecting the end with the beginning." Following Luke 3:36-38 we subtract nine generations from Adam to Noah, leaving sixty-three generations from Noah to Jesus. In the Indian literature there is a list of a genealogy also of sixty-three generations, from and including the flood hero Manu (the Indian Noah) down to the Divine Incarnation Sri Rama (VP, IV:1-4).<sup>125</sup>

Many Indian religious orders trace their lineage back many centuries though an unbroken sequence of gurus. For example, the Ramakrishna Order owes its existence to Sri Ramakrishna, who received initiation from Tota Puri a monk of the Puri Order. This group that dates back more than a thousand years, is one of the ten denominations of the Shankara Order. In turn, Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) was initiated into a spiritual tradition that dates back even farther into the past. An Avatara (Mahaguru) or a great prophet or sage, rejuvenates the lineage by infusing new life into the sequence of apostolic succession. Ramakrishna having gurus is an example of apostolic succession.

Some Indian orders lay particular stress on the fifth generation religious leader in the unbroken line of apostolic succession. They often greatly expanded the organization of which they are a member. Distinguished fifth generation religious leaders include: Ramanuja (c. 1017-



1137) an Acarya of South Indian Vaishnavism, Vedanta Deshika (aka Venkatanatha, c. 1268-1368) and Ramanada (c. 1299-1410) each in charge of a different sect of the Vishistadvaita School, Jayatirtha (fl. 1370) of the Madhva Order, and Guru Arjan (1563-1606) a leader of the Sikh religion.

The concept of an unbroken spiritual line of descent was also held by the Chinese Buddhist Chih-i (538-97) the founder of the Tien-tai school. He maintained he was the inheritor of a doctrine that began with the Buddha (c. 566-486 B.C.) and then was transmitted over time to the Indian Nagarjuna (c. 150-250) and finally to himself. The Chinese Chan (Japanese Zen) sect taught that their doctrines came from the Indian Bodhidharma (440/82-520/39) the twenty-eighth patriarch of a line that extended back to the Buddha. Islamic Sufis uphold the idea of a continuous chain of spiritual descent (silsila). The present head of the group (shaykh or pir) is linked with the founder of the order and then back to the prophet Muhammad (570-632) or possibly back to early Sufi mystics like Abu Yazid al-Bistami (c. 804-74).<sup>126</sup>

The good karma and spiritual merit generated by a Divine Incarnation-Avatar and their disciples are passed down to subsequent generations through the process of apostolic succession. Since the spiritual power is centered in the religious group, the idea that there is no liberation-salvation outside of the Church (Origen, Cyprian) is often but not always correct. A Church broadly defined would include the Holy City of Benares where many Indians die and are liberated. There are exceptions to this rule. Some great souls receive their salvation directly from God, like the apostle Paul, who on the road to Damascus had a life transforming spiritual visitation of Jesus. Even rarer is someone like Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) who did not receive liberation from a guru or directly from a Personal Brahman-God. He was liberated at the age of sixteen as a result of a profound religious event, where he experienced an eruption of spirituality within himself. Through this state of deliverance he immediately became a sage. Of course, it is always possible that he received some assistance from a hidden Divine Being.<sup>127</sup> To maintain this spiritual power is certainly one of the highest priorities of any religious organization. Without it and the good group karma it produces, the religious order is certain to come to an end.

By their spiritual deeds, the Avatara-Divine Incarnation and their disciples establish a storehouse or “treasury of spiritual merit” (auspicious spiritual karma), which the future members of their religious organization can draw from. This supply of merits is increased by the exemplary lives of future saints and dedicated pious workers and devotees. Everyone who is working for the good of the Church is infusing some substantial subtle energy into it, adding to the treasury of spiritual merit and the power of apostolic succession. In the Indian religion spiritual power is transmitted through a religious ceremony, to initiated members of a religious order, from guru to devotee through initiation, and into Divine relics through proper ritualistic practices and devotion. Roman Catholics call this the “spiritual treasury” or “treasury of merit” brought about by “works of supererogation.” In this way the act of atonement sets in action, a new chain of spiritual karma that greatly aids future generations in transforming themselves. As Aquinas stated, “The reason why they [indulgences] so avail is the oneness of the mystical body in which many have performed works of satisfaction exceeding the requirements of their debts ... Now one man can satisfy another, as we have explained above. And the saints in whom this superabundance of satisfactions is found, did not perform their good works for this or that particular person, who needs the remission of his punishment (else he would have received this remission without any indulgences at all), but they performed them for the whole Church in general ... These merits, then, are the common property of the whole Church.”<sup>128</sup> The reserve fund of merit can be drawn on by prayer to benefit sinners. To preserve a religion, spiritual development and commitment are more important than intellectual progress.

The act of an Avatara-Divine Incarnation is the result of Brahman-God’s supererogation. Though Jesus and his disciples put supererogation into practice, surprisingly this fertile idea did not enter into the field of ethics until James O. Urmson (1915-2012) the son of a Methodist Minister who taught philosophy at Oxford University published an article on “Saints and Heroes” (without using the word supererogation) in 1958. Urmson provided examples acts such as a soldier throwing himself on a grenade in order to save his comrades or a doctor choosing to enter a plague-ridden town in order to save lives. Those who perform supererogatory acts often see them as something that they should do, while other people do not think of them as required acts. While performing heroic action they do not

experience themselves as the source of their actions. Focusing on other people, diminishes ones sense of self-interest and self-reference. Heroic activity seems to flow not from the agent but through the person. There is a deontic (duty, obligation) ranking of moral acts, working up from the forbidden, to the permissible, then to the required and finally to the supererogatory at the top of the scale. The Avatara is motivated primarily by a selfless love and compassion for humanity and secondarily by a sense of duty or obligation.<sup>129</sup> In future generations the saints of the Church perform acts of supererogation.

We might think of three levels of morality. First, are legal duties and more extensive and demanding are moral obligations that require additional effort. At the highest level are “Acts of Supererogation” that are morally good beyond that which is required of most people. They go “beyond the call of duty” by surpassing the necessary requirements of morality. Supererogation is a source of spiritual power within the religious organization. For an individual it is the best way of achieving liberation-salvation and is intrinsically good, aimed at even higher ends than the fulfillment of one’s duties. Moral obligations are universal in scope required for anyone, whereas supererogatory acts are for the dedicated few who have the capacity and inclination to pursue a “life of perfection.” These meritorious acts are morally praiseworthy, spontaneous, with altruistic intention, based on individual autonomy, personal concern, the expression of virtue, strength of character, and a pure good will, and result in good consequences. They originate in personal initiative, rather than in any external or universal demands (e.g., civil and criminal law, social pressure). These acts are neither required or commanded, nor imposed or demanded by others. Since their omission is not blameworthy, they are not obligatory. Being open-ended, they have no upper limit. At times supererogatory response is expressed in omission rather than commission. Supererogatory acts have a unique character since they can be used both for that individual's own liberation-salvation and are transferable for the liberation-salvation of others. Deontic (duty and obligation) ethical concepts concern what ought to be done, apply to all members of society, are fixed, and universally expected. Conversely, axiological (value) ethical ideals of goodness and virtue are not obligatory and cannot be similarly expected of everyone.<sup>130</sup> Many faults can be removed with reasonable effort. There are some that are so deep-seated that it requires

supererogatory effort to overcome them.

Augustine considered the Church to be the “City of God” and the Political State as the “City of the World.” The early Christians looked upon the Church as an external visible organization (the physical body) composed of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It encompasses institutional forms and functions. Protestant Reformers placed the emphasis on the invisible aspect of the Church (the soul), which is not visible to the naked eye. It is spiritual in nature being the medium of regeneration, salvation (liberation), and eternal blessings. Christians sometimes describe the Church as the mystical body of Jesus Christ. This is the invisible or hidden aspect of the Church (the soul), which is not visible to the naked eye. The Church-body is spiritual in nature, being the medium of regeneration, liberation-salvation, and eternal blessings. Being the Spirit of Brahman-God it is blissful, pure, and sinless.<sup>132</sup>

## B. Future Revelations

Vivekananda made this statement, “Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvelous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded.”<sup>133</sup> The idea being that in the future Avatars and exemplary prophets will bring new revelations that do not contradict the old ones.

Thomas Aquinas realized that the Second Person of the Trinity could incarnate again if He wished to, or could incarnate in two different people at the same time. “In nothing is the power of the Father or the Son lessened by the Incarnation of the Son. Therefore, it seems that after the Incarnation the Son can assume another human nature distinct from the one He has now assumed. I answer that, what has power for one thing, and no more, has a power limited to one. Now the power of a Divine Person is infinite, nor can it be limited by any created thing. Hence it may not be said that a Divine Person so assumed one human nature as to be unable to assume another.... for the Uncreated cannot be contained by any creature.... A man who has on two garments is not said to be two persons clothed, but one clothed with two garments.”<sup>134</sup>

For more on this subject see: SRWT, Ch. IV. Avatara-Divine Incarnation: Their Mission and Legacy, Section 6. The Second Coming and Multiple Incarnations. Web: <http://www.vedantawritings.com/RKW04.pdf>

### C. Avatara and Human Evolution

In his *Complete Works*, Swami Vivekananda designated that humanity will attain to a virtuous state after a very long period of evolutionary development. Birth of an Avatara and other great souls greatly accelerate the process of human evolution. “Just as a race advances, so individuals have to advance. The steps which the human race has taken to reach to the highest pinnacles of religious thought, every individual will have to take. Only, while the human race took millions of years to reach from one step to another, individuals may live the whole life of the human race in a much shorter duration. But each one of us will have to go through these steps.”<sup>135</sup> “Each man in his childhood runs through the stages through which his race has come up; only the race took thousands of years to do it, while the child takes a few years.... There is an end towards which the whole is moving. Let us call it perfection. Some men and women are born who anticipate the whole progress of mankind. Instead of waiting and being reborn over and over again for ages until the whole human race has attained perfection, they, as it were, rush through them in a few short years of their life. And we know that we can hasten these processes, if we be true to ourselves.... That a perfect man, that is to say, the type that is to come of this race, perhaps millions of years hence, that man can come today. And this is what the Yogis say, that all the great Incarnations and prophets are such men; that they reached perfection in this one life.”<sup>136</sup> The Avatars and greatest prophets serve as examples of this phenomenon. In one lifetime, they transverse the entire evolutionary history of humanity, from a protoplasm to a perfect human. In the distant future, the time will come when righteousness will predominate and “the whole of mankind will become Jivanmuktas--free whilst living.” Saints will be as numerous as bunches of grapes on a vine.<sup>137</sup> “The time for reaching perfection, instead of slowly advancing from point to point and waiting until the whole human race has become perfect.... All the great prophets, saints, and seers of the world--what did they do? In one span of life they

lived the whole life of humanity, traversed the whole length of time that it takes ordinary humanity to come to perfection.”<sup>138</sup>

Along these lines, Sri Aurobindo Gosh (1872-1950) the Vedantic philosopher and mystic who was influenced by Vivekananda, was of the opinion that a universal restoration and the sanctification of humanity will eventually come about, whereby the entire world will attain to the Divine level. “If there is to be an entire transformation it can only be by the full emergence of the law of the spirit, its power of supermind or gnosis must have entered into matter and it must evolve in matter. It must change the mental into the supramental being, make the inconscient in us conscious, spiritualize our material substance, erect its law of gnostic consciousness in our whole evolutionary being and nature.”<sup>139</sup> World salvation will involve a gradual transformation of human consciousness accomplished by a spiritualization of humanity. Physical matter will be increasingly spiritualized, when the indwelling Divine principle concretizes in lower entities. Eventually, cosmic evolution will reach the point when the Divine will be all-existent and the world will be populated by many gnostic beings. These men of knowledge will abide in a Divine life of spiritual power and joy, attempting to bring down the higher consciousness into the evolutionary process. As a citizen of two worlds, they will be embodied in the phenomenal world, yet mentally and spiritually they live in the transcendental plane of existence. Theirs will be a life of perfection on earth, expressing itself in a new consciousness of integral unity and harmony.<sup>140</sup>

Going back in history, Origen of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 185-254) supported the theory of the universal restoration (apocatastasis) of the world. Origen was a Christian Middle Platonist, a disciple of Ammonius Saccas who was later the teacher of Plotinus the founder of Neo-Platonism. When the end of the world cycle comes, all things shall be perfectly restored back to their original state of spirituality, and the entire creation will be subject to God’s commands. “When ‘God shall be in all,’ they also, since they are part of all, may have God even in themselves, as he is in all things.”<sup>141</sup> “The same body, having cast off the weakness of its present existence, will be transformed into a thing of glory and made spiritual.” All people will be free from vice, and “the mind will no longer be conscious of anything besides or other than God, but will think God, and see God and

hold God.” Universal restoration will occur “gradually and by degrees, during the lapse of infinite and immeasurable ages” actualizing at a different rate in each individual.<sup>142</sup> “Some people will take the lead and hasten with swifter speed to the highest goal, others will follow them at a close interval, while others will be left far behind.”<sup>143</sup> But at the end of terrestrial time after a long succession of worlds or aeons, the consummation of all things will occur and evil will be gradually purged away. Similar ideas were also held by Bishop Gregory of Nyssa (modern-day Turkey, c. 330-95), Maximus the Confessor (580-622) a theologian from Constantinople, and the Irish monk Johannes Scotus Erigena (c. 810-77).

For the philosopher Samuel Alexander (1859-1938) of Manchester University in England, “Space and time are the fundamental entities of the universe, and from spacetime emerges all other existents: matter emerges from spacetime, life emerges from matter, mind emerges from life, and deity emerges from mind.... it is the very nature of spacetime to give rise to material objects. This is because spacetime is identified with ‘Motion’, and it is Motion which produces material objects.... Alexander conceives of space and time not as independent substances but rather as interdependent ones.... time is the source of movement, and hence the source of motion. As time moves through space, it produces matter – variegated, continuous complexes of spacetime – in its process.... there is a ‘nisis’ in spacetime – a striving force – which carries its creatures upwards through the various levels [or layers] of existence to the highest level of deity. Both spacetime and the nisis are creative: time introduces a restlessness into space that culminates in motion, and the nisis drives spacetime to produce ever newer forms of existence.... On the first reading, the nisis is the motion of spacetime. On the second reading, the nisis is an extra ingredient added to spacetime, which acts as a kind of organisational principle on the complexes of motion that emerge from spacetime.... it is the very nature of spacetime to produce the motions that are all other existents, and as such there is no need to even consider postulating another substance (such as matter, or mind) distinct from spacetime to explain their existence.... Emergence is the notion that novel properties ‘emerge’ out of more fundamental properties or entities.... Alexander offers us a metaphysical definition of God, whereby God is that which possesses ‘deity or the Divine quality.’ He then sets out to show us that, whilst mind or consciousness is the highest quality that we know of in

the universe, deity is even higher. The nîsus in spacetime will not cease with mind, it will bring its creatures forward to some higher level of existence. Deity has not yet emerged in the universe.”<sup>144</sup>

Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) a French Catholic Priest and scientist pointed out that evolution is an inwardly directed organic growth, which ascends to higher levels of consciousness. As the efficient and final cause it is Christ who governs the evolutionary process by organizing, forming, directing, and guiding it to the Omega Point, the terminal point of evolution. According to the interpretation of Frederick Copleston, S.J., “As a Christian he [Teilhard] believed that God had become incarnate in Christ, and he thought of the risen Christ as the centre and consummation of the movement towards Omega Point. He saw Christ as progressively uniting all men in love, and in the light of his Christian belief he interpreted Omega Point as the point at which, in St. Paul's words, God becomes 'all in all.' For Teilhard, ‘evolution has come to infuse new blood, so to speak, into the perspectives and aspirations of Christianity. In return, is not the Christian faith predestined, is it not preparing, to save and even to take the place of evolution?’ Evolution in the widest sense of the term becomes a process not simply of 'hominization' but also of divinization in and through the risen Christ.” In a higher form of existence, all beings will attain their consummation in a perfect supersensuous union with the cosmic Christ beyond space and time.<sup>145</sup>

In this way human history becomes Divinely oriented working toward a spiritual goal. The cosmic evolutionary principles that Teilhard applied to society are also applicable, to the progress of an individual soul. Biologists and philosophers should realize that throughout history a small number of people have evolved from the level of a human being to a Divine Being, and subsequently became members of the heavenly world. If a saintly individual imbibes an increasing magnitude of spiritual energy, they will reach a critical point and then spontaneously evolve from the human to the Divine level and be liberated-saved. Divine grace comes to those people who are liberated-saved long before the Omega Point of the universe is reached, which take aeons.

## Endnotes



<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> CW, I:15.

<sup>3</sup> Abhedananda, pp. 60, 67.

<sup>4</sup> Prabhavananda<sup>3</sup>, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Prabhavananda<sup>3</sup>, pp. 127, 92, 192.

<sup>6</sup> FP, I, I:5-6, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Kochumuttom (1985), p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> C. M Vadakkekara, ed., *Divine Grace and Human Response* (Bangalore: Asirvanam Benedictine Monastery, 1981), pp. 56-57; Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960, 1987), p. 373.

<sup>9</sup> Robin Boyd, *An Introduction To Indian Christian Theology* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), pp. 34-35; Mathew Vekathanam, *Christology in the Indian Anthropological Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 247.

<sup>10</sup> CW, VIII:191.

<sup>11</sup> CW, VIII:11-12.

<sup>12</sup> ST, I, 65.3.

<sup>13</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, tr. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), I, 3:8.

<sup>14</sup> ST, I, 16.4.

<sup>15</sup> CG, IV, 12

<sup>16</sup> K. P. Aleaz, "The Theological Writings of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya", *Indian Journal of Theology* 28 (1979), pp. 61, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Aleaz (1979), 60-66, 73-75; Mathew Vekathanam, *Christology in the Indian Anthropological Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 252-55, 652.

<sup>18</sup> *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism*, ed. Harold Coward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 310.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), p. 383; Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology*, Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity, 1992), pp. 73, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West* (London: Collins, 1982), p. 190; Wayne Teasdale, *Toward a Christian Vedanta* (Bangalore: Asian Trading, 1987), pp. 109-11, 126-27.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, *Comparative Theology* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1985), p. 36; Radhakrishnan, II, p. 539; BRU, III:9.28.7.

<sup>22</sup> Web: [www.ligonier.org/blog/whats-difference-between-ontological-and-economic-trinity](http://www.ligonier.org/blog/whats-difference-between-ontological-and-economic-trinity); [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity)

<sup>23</sup> Introduction to Shankara's Commentary on A. Mahadeva Sastri, *The Bhagavad-Gita With the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya* (Madras: V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu & Sons, 1961.), pp. 2-4.

<sup>25</sup> BGC, Introduction; K. Satchidananda Murty, *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedanta* (New York: Columbia University 1959), pp. 7-9.

<sup>26</sup> VS, I.1.21; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatars and Incarnations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> Eric J. Lott, *Vedantic Approaches to God* (New York: Barnes & Nobel, 1980), p. 161.

<sup>28</sup> Saradananda, V:4.9, p. 774.

<sup>29</sup> Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology Folklore and Symbols* (3 vols.; New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962), II, pp. 1422-26.

<sup>30</sup> CW, V:318.

<sup>31</sup> CW, I:444.

<sup>32</sup> CW, IV:31.

<sup>33</sup> Swami Abhedananda, *Path of Realization* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1946), pp. 37-38.

<sup>34</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1959), p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> Swami Prabhavananda lecture.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Kegley, ed., *The Theology of Paul Tillich* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), p. 274.

<sup>37</sup> Tillich, II, pp. 94-95, 109, 149.

<sup>38</sup> Prabhavananda2, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> S. J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* (Bangalore: Christian Institute, 1974), p. 172.

<sup>40</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, ed. Joseph Campbell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951, 1969), p. 530; Radhakrishnan (1992), I, pp. 598-99.

<sup>41</sup> Henrik Thyssen, "Philosophical Christology in the *New Testament*," *Numen* (53-2) (2006), pp. 133-76. Swami Prabhavananda 1, pp. 262-63 also taught this idea in the Fourth Gospel originated with Philo. The best source on Philo is the 2 volume Harry Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1948, 1962).

<sup>42</sup> Kelly, pp. 96-98, 146-47.

<sup>43</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 284-86.

<sup>44</sup> Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), #17, p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *St. Cyril of Alexandria Letters*, tr. John McEnerney (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), II, LV:22, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Cyril of Alexandria (1987), IV:3, 5; XVII:11, pp. 39-40, 85; Kelly (1978), pp. 319-21, 325; CTR, p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas V. Morris, "The Metaphysics of God Incarnate," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, eds. R. Feenstra and C. Plantinga (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 112.

<sup>48</sup> ST, III, 13.1-4.

<sup>49</sup> Charnock, p. 392.

<sup>50</sup> Web: <http://abetterpossession.wordpress.com/2012/07/11/quote-barth-on-the-incarnation-and-knowledge-of-god>; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 186.

<sup>51</sup> Barth (1975), I:2; Bromiley, p. 333

<sup>52</sup> Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 159-62; pre-existent (Prov. 8:22; Sirach 1:4; 24:9; Col. 1:17), image of God (Wisd. 7:26; Col. 1:15), power of God (Wisd. 7:25; 1 Cor. 1:24), world creator (Wisd. 7:22; Col. 1:16; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2), hold all things together (Wisd. 1:6-7; Col. 1:17; cf. Heb. 1:3), and were hidden or kept secret (Job 28:21; Wisd. 6:22; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9).

<sup>53</sup> Peacocke, A., "The Incarnation of the Informing Self-Expressive Word of God," in *Religion and Science*, W. M. Richardson and W. Wildman, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 321-39.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas V. Morris, "The Two Minds View of Incarnation" in *Philosophy of Religion A Reader and Guide*, William L. Craig, ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 572-76.

<sup>55</sup> Tim Bayne, "The Inclusion Model of the Incarnation: Problems and Prospects," *Religious Studies* (Jun. 2001), pp. 125-41.

<sup>56</sup> Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation," in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, eds. S. Davis, D. Kendall SJ, and G. O'Collins SJ (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> For a good resume of the Christian belief on the subject see: Richard Swinburne, "Could God Become Man?" in *The Philosophy in Christianity*, ed. Godfrey Vesey (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 53-70.

<sup>58</sup> Gerald O'Collins, SJ, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus Christ* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 230-31.

<sup>59</sup> BSB, III.3.32. Mahayana Buddhist Bodhisattvas vow not to accept final liberation and salvation, and to continue to incarnate into human bodies until all living creatures attain Nirvana. I. C. Sharma, *Ethical Philosophies of India* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 168.

<sup>60</sup> CW, II:349-50.

<sup>61</sup> CW, IV:431.

<sup>62</sup> CW, VII:261.

<sup>63</sup> Saradananda, II:21.6, p. 359; David Shea and Anthony Troyer, *The Dabistan* (London: M. Walter Dunne, Publisher, 1901), p. 287.

<sup>64</sup> Prabhavananda, p. 206.

<sup>65</sup> Swami Ramakrishnananda, *God and Divine Incarnations* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1947), p. 152.

<sup>66</sup> Swami Abhedananda, *Divine Heritage of Man* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1903, 1947), pp. 159-60.

<sup>67</sup> BSB, I.3.27.

<sup>68</sup> Muller, pp. 312-13.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph Head, and S. L. Cranston, ed., *Reincarnation An East-West Anthology* (New York: Julian Press, 1961), p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> Jean Danielou *Gospel Message and the Hellenistic Culture*, tr. John Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 60.

<sup>71</sup> FP, III, 5:4.

<sup>72</sup> ANF, X, pp. 339-41, 344-45.

<sup>73</sup> David Christie-Murray, *ReIncarnation* (David and Charles: London, 1981), pp. 38-39; Roth (1972), X, p. 616; James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909, 1930), XII, p. 437.

<sup>74</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer* (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970), pp. LXXVIII-IX.

<sup>75</sup> Sudhindra Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaishnavism* (Calcutta: Academic Publishers, 1969), pp. 167-68.

<sup>76</sup> CW, III:53-54.

<sup>77</sup> CW, IV:124

<sup>78</sup> CW, VIII:190.

<sup>79</sup> CW, III:251.

<sup>80</sup> Althaus, p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XXIV, p. 67.

<sup>82</sup> Althaus, pp. 20-22, 217; HCT, p. 251.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Bassuk, *Incarnation in Hinduism and Christianity* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1987); Sandy Martin, "Hindu Perspectives on Jesus: The Ramakrishna Mission and Self-Realization Fellowship," *Dialogue & Alliance* (Fall/Winter 1998), pp. 93-107; Jan Peter Schouten, "Jesus in Hindu Garb," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 11 (2001), pp. 37-63; Noel Sheth, SJ, "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison," *Philosophy East and West* (Jan. 2002), pp. 98-125; Steven Tsoukalas, *Kṛṣṇa and Christ: Body-Divine Relation in the Thought of Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja and Classical Christian Orthodoxy* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 223-63.

<sup>85</sup> Shivananda, pp. 59-60, 77; Tipple, p. 132.

<sup>86</sup> CW, V:368.

<sup>87</sup> CW, IV:138.

<sup>88</sup> CW, IV:140-41

<sup>89</sup> CW, IV:141-42.

<sup>90</sup> CW, IV:138-39.

<sup>91</sup> Saradananda, p. 73, Introduction:l.12.

<sup>92</sup> HCT, pp. 1, 534.

<sup>93</sup> Tillich, III, pp. 369-70.

<sup>94</sup> Dean Peerman and Martin Marty, ed., *A Handbook of Christian Theologians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965, 1984), pp. 341-45.

<sup>95</sup> Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), pp. 354-55.

<sup>96</sup> Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 94-128.

<sup>97</sup> Gordon Knight, "The Necessity of God Incarnate," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (Feb. 1998), pp. 1-16. In the Middle Ages if a person raised these objections he might be jailed or killed. Today we are fortunate enough to live at a time where the ideas of classical theology can be challenged. Even if they are not altered their defenders must offer a better rationale for their veracity.

<sup>98</sup> Web: <http://www.vedantawritings.com/HVS6.pdf>

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> The discovery of a possible diffusion between the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *New Testament* was first made in 1869 by Franz Lorinser (1821-93) a German Catholic theologian. He supplied a number of parallel passages (F. Lorinser, *Die Bhagavad-Gita* (Breslau: G. Porsch, 1869)). If diffusion exists it is very difficult to prove which text was the original source.

<sup>101</sup> CW, III:133.

<sup>102</sup> CW, IV:122.

<sup>103</sup> CG, III, 134.

<sup>104</sup> "Christianity and Spinoza." Web: [www.yesselman.com/ChriSpin.html](http://www.yesselman.com/ChriSpin.html); M. J., Charlesworth, *Philosophy of Religion: The Historical Approaches* (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 33-34.

<sup>105</sup> CW, I:81; IV:32.

<sup>106</sup> Saradananda, Introduction:1.12, p. 73.

<sup>107</sup> Saradananda, IV:Appendix.4, p. 706.

<sup>108</sup> Saradananda, Introduction:1.12, p. 73; II:16.5; p. 317; IV:Appendix.4, p. 706.

<sup>109</sup> Swami Satprakashananda, *Hinduism and Christianity* (St. Louis, MO 63105: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1975), pp. 38, 42-43.

<sup>110</sup> Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982), p. 3; CW, II:363.

<sup>111</sup> Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1907-09, 1976), pp. 886, 888-89.

<sup>112</sup> S. S. Raghavachar, "The Philosophy of Bhakti and the Significance of Hindu Image-Worship," *BRMIC* 30 (1979), pp. 156-57.

<sup>114</sup> CW, IV:431.

<sup>115</sup> CW, VII:8.

<sup>116</sup> CW, V:257.

<sup>117</sup> CW, VI:141.

<sup>118</sup> Prabhavananda (1971), p. 5; lecture notes.

<sup>119</sup> ANF (Irenaeus) III, 3:2, I, pp. 415-16.

<sup>120</sup> Schaff (1980), II, pp. 150-51.

<sup>121</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1920, 1964), p. 366.

<sup>122</sup> Felician Foy, and Rose Avato, ed., 1985 *Catholic Almanac* (Huntington IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1984). pp. 310, 329.

<sup>123</sup> Foy and Avato (1984), p. 329; John Lawson, *Introduction to Christian*

*Doctrine* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury, 1980), pp. 146-47, 151-52.

<sup>124</sup> Schaff (1980), II, pp. 51-52, 758-59; Pike (1964), p. 290; Pagels (1981), p. 18.

<sup>125</sup> Irenaeus (1962), p. 455; Dowson (1968), p. 313; Maurier (1958), p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> Eliade (1987), II, p. 485; Bosworth (1997), IX, p. 611.

<sup>127</sup> Who (1961), pp. 4-8.

<sup>128</sup> ST, III, 25.1; Web: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treasury\\_of\\_merit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treasury_of_merit)

<sup>129</sup> David Heyd, *Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1982); Urmson, J. O. "Saints and Heroes" in A. I. Melden, ed., *Essays in Moral philosophy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), pp. 60-73; Young, Elizabeth "God's Moral Goodness and Supererogation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (April 2013), pp. 83-95. Web: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supererogation>; [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supererogation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supererogation)

<sup>130</sup> Web: [plato.stanford.edu/entries/supererogation](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supererogation); [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supererogation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supererogation)

<sup>132</sup> Berkhof (1984), pp. 562, 565-67, 569; NCE, X, pp. 99-105.

<sup>133</sup> CW, II:374.

<sup>134</sup> ST, III, 3.7.

<sup>135</sup> CW, I:404.

<sup>136</sup> CW, II:18-19.

<sup>137</sup> CW, I:444-445; II:188; VI:10, 138; VII:89, 97-98.

<sup>138</sup> CW, I:157.

<sup>139</sup> Rama S. Srivastava, "The Integralist Theory of Evolution", in Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederic Spiegelberg, ed., *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 139.

<sup>140</sup> Lal, pp. 209-18; Srivastava (1960), pp. 133-42.

<sup>141</sup> FP, I, 7:5; p. 65.

<sup>142</sup> FP, III, 6:3, 6; pp. 248, 251-52.

<sup>143</sup> FP, III, 6:6; II, 3:5 pp. 251, 88-89; G. Stavig, "Origen and Indian Thought," BRMIC (March 2003), pp.133-40.

<sup>144</sup> Web: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/alex-sam/>

<sup>145</sup> Copleston, IX, pp. 321-25; Beatrice Bruteau, *Evolution Toward Divinity* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1974), pp. 18-21, 84, 119-20, 126, 136-37, 165, 205-06, 221-25, 246.