

1. Saguna Brahman (Ishvara)-Personal God Assumes a Human Form
2. Possible Indian Views of the Christian Trinity
3. The Virgin Birth
4. Incarnations of Brahman-God's Heavenly Assistants
5. Spirituality and Holiness
6. Religious Experiences of the Divine Incarnation
7. Kenosis and Their Human Nature

III. Avatara-Divine Incarnation: Their Spiritual and Human Nature

1. Saguna Brahman (Ishvara)-Personal 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).¹

Jiva Goswami (c. 1511-96) professed according to a commentator, "Though outwardly finite and relative, an Avatara [Divine Incarnation] 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."²

According to Bengal Vaishnavism, in the blissful Vaikuntha (Kingdom of Heaven) Brahman-Bhagavat (God) cannot suffer, but understands human suffering. Brahman-Bhagavat has knowledge of suffering not in Himself but as occurring in humanity. Out

of love and sympathy, the passible Brahman-Bhagavat feels compassion for human sorrows and sufferings and in this way is affected by them.³ When Brahman-Bhagavat incarnates in a human body, He does feel pain when willingly taking on the bad karma (effects of sin) of others. Due to His love and compassion, He becomes involved in the suffering of creation; His heart touched by the suffering of the people.

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) indicated that the omnipotent and omnipresent Brahman (God) could easily incarnate into a human body. They are the saviors of humanity, who possess extraordinary spiritual strength and are entrusted with a Divine commission.⁴ “Do you know what God with form is like? Like bubbles rising on an expanse of water, various Divine forms are seen to rise out of the Great Akasha [Space] of Consciousness. The Incarnation of God is one of these forms.”⁵ An ocean “is a wide and almost infinite expanse of water, but owing to certain circumstances some parts of this wide sea become solidified into ice. When transformed into ice it can be easily manipulated and applied to special use. An Incarnation is something like that. Like that infinite expanse of water, there is the Infinite Power immanent in matter and mind. But for some special purposes, in special regions, a portion of that Infinite Power assumes, as it were, a tangible shape in history.... He is a local manifestation of the all-pervading Divine Power—in other words, an Incarnation of God. The greatness of great men is essentially the manifestation of Divine Energy.”⁶ “There is no doubt that God exists in all things; but the manifestations of His power are different in different beings. The greatest manifestation of His power is through an Incarnation. Again, in some Incarnations there is a complete manifestation of God’s Power.”⁷ “An Avatara (Divine Incarnation) is a human messenger of God. He is like a viceroy of a mighty monarch. As the king sends the viceroy where there is any disturbance in some far-off province to quell it, so whenever there is a waning of religion in any part of the world, God sends there His Avatara to guard virtue and to foster its growth.”⁸ “It is God alone who incarnates Himself as man to teach people the way of love and knowledge.” “God plays in the world for the sake of His devotees. They can love God only if they see Him in human form; only then can they show their affection for Him as their Brother, Sister, Father, Mother, or Child. It is just for this love of the devotees that God contracts Himself into human form and descends to earth to play His lila.” “It is said in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* that Rama alone is both the Pervading Spirit and everything pervaded.... The pervader in this case is a finite form. It is God incarnating Himself as a human being.” “God incarnating Himself as man, behaves like a man. That is why it is difficult to recognize an Incarnation.

When God becomes man, He is exactly like man. He has the same hunger, thirst, disease, grief and sometimes even fear.”⁹ "It is very difficult to understand that God can be a finite human being and at the same time the all-pervading Soul of the universe. The Absolute and the Relative are His two aspects. How can we say emphatically with our small intelligence that God cannot assume a human form? Can we ever understand all these ideas with our little intellect? Can a one-seer pot hold four seers of milk?”¹⁰

Ramakrishna also tells us, “It is very difficult to understand that God can be a finite human being and at the same time the all-pervading Soul of the universe. The Absolute and the Relative are his two aspects. How can we say emphatically with our small intelligence that God cannot assume a human form? Can we ever understand all these ideas with our little intellect? Can a one-seer pot hold four seers of milk? Therefore one should trust in the words of holy men and great souls, those who have realized God.”¹¹

Not all Incarnations of Divine Beings (lesser than Brahman-God) are born to fulfill an apparent special religious mission. Sri Ramakrishna gave this example. “Ranjit Raya was the landlord of that part of the country. Through the power of tapasya he obtained [Bhagavati] the Divine Mother as his daughter. He was very fond of her, and she too was much attached to him; she hardly left his presence.” Once he got irritated with her and told her, “Get out of here! On this pretext she left home. A peddler of conch-shell articles was going along the road. From him she took a pair of bracelets for her wrists. When he asked for the price, she said that he could get the money from a certain box in her home. Then she disappeared. Nobody saw her again. In the mean time the peddler came to the house and asked for the price of his bracelets. When she was not to be found at home, her relatives began to run about looking for her. Ranjit Raya sent people in all directions to search for her. The money owed to the peddler was found in the box, as she had indicated. Ranjit Raja was weeping bitterly, when people came running to him and said that they had noticed something in the lake. They all ran there and saw an arm, with conch-shell bracelets on the wrists, being waved above the water. A moment afterwards it disappeared. Even now people worship her as the Divine Mother at the time of the annual festival” in honor her.¹²

According to Swami Saradananda (1865-1927) a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, an Avatara is: (1) born free of self-interest, (2) in possession of a perfect memory from the moment of their birth that enables them to know of their previous lives, (3) the discoverer of a new paths to Brahman-God, (4) able to

transmit knowledge to others by a touch or an act of will, (5) able to perceive immediately the samskaras (mental impressions) of human beings so they know how to aid them to attain the superconscious state, and (6) conscious of their mission throughout their lives.¹³

It is possible that the venerated St. Bernadette (1844-79) in the Catholic tradition was a person who descended from a higher world. A poor French peasant, at age fourteen she had eighteen Divine encounters that only she could see. They were with “a small young lady,” Mother Mary who referred to Herself as the Immaculate Conception. At Lourdes, an underground spring appeared at the sight of the encounters and many people who bathed there received miraculous healings of their physical maladies. Bernadette entered the convent at age twenty-two and was a model nun who suffered from tuberculosis of the lung and right knee but never complained.¹⁴

There are cases recorded by Christians and Hindus of temporary bodily Incarnations of Brahman-God. After his crucifixion, Jesus appeared before doubting Thomas and his other disciples in a physical body. He said, “Handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.... They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them” (Lk. 24:40, 42). “He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put your hand, and place it in my side’” (Jn. 20:27). On extremely rare occasions, the Lord temporarily materializes in the presence of a spiritual devotee. It is reported that Jesus came in the flesh, disguised as a leper to Francis of Assisi (c. 1182-1226) the Italian founder of the Franciscan Order. In order to overcome his revulsion to lepers Francis kissed one of them. After the leper had mysteriously vanished, he realized that it was Jesus appearing as a leper.¹⁵ At other times during trying circumstances, there are rare incidents where a pious person has been temporarily aided by a Divine helper (such as a Christian angel) from the Lord.

Concerning the Divine and human nature of Jesus, Gregory of Nazianzen (329-89) the Archbishop of Constantinople emphasized, “We do not separate the humanity from the divinity; in fact, we assert the dogma of the unity and identity of the Person, who aforetime was not just human but God, the only Son before all ages, who in these last days has assumed human nature also for our salvation; in the flesh passible, in his Deity impassible; in the body subject to limitation, yet unlimited in the Spirit; at one and the same time earthly and heavenly, tangible and

intangible, comprehensible and incomprehensible; that by one and the same person, a perfect human being and perfect God.”¹⁶

Ibn al-‘Arabi (1165-1240) born in Muslim Spain conceived of Muhammad (570-632) as having the same status of that of a Christian Divine Incarnation or an Indian Avatara. As expressed by A. E. Affifi, Ibn al-‘Arabi taught, “Muhammad is the only unique and unparalleled being in existence: hence his singularity (fardiyyah). There is nothing above him except the Absolute Essence. Regarding him as identical with the First, Ibn al-'Arabi calls him al barzakh (the intermediary stage) between the Godhead and the Phenomenal World—a link between the Eternal and the temporal, the Necessary and the contingent, the Real and the phenomenal, the Active and the passive and so on. The Reality (or the Spirit) of Mohammed thus explained, as expressing some aspects of the universal Logos, has the following characteristics: (1) It is the indwelling revealer of God—the transmitter of all Divine knowledge to all who possess it ... (2) As a cosmological Principle it is regarded as the ‘cause’ of all creation. It is identified with the Ruh (the Holy Spirit) and the creative activity of God.”¹⁷

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) noted that, “In Christ there is a perfect Divine nature and a perfect human nature, constituted by a rational soul and human flesh; and that these two natures are united in Christ not by indwelling only, nor in an accidental mode, as a man is united to his garments, nor in a personal relation and property only, but in one hypostasis [person] and one supposit [entity or reality].”¹⁸ “The Divine person is sent, and proceeds temporally only according to sanctifying grace.”¹⁹ “Hence [John the] Damascene says that ‘the Word of God is united to flesh through the medium of the intellect; for the intellect is the purest part of the soul, God Himself being an intellect.’”²⁰ “It belongs to the nature of the highest good to communicate Itself in the highest manner to the creature.” God united the human nature with Himself and conversely, a human can be united to the Divine and have a vision of Him. For the restoration of humanity, the omnipotent Lord incarnated to increase faith, hope, love, and righteousness. “It was not necessary that God should become incarnate for the restoration of human nature. For God in His omnipotent power could have restored human nature in many other ways.”²¹ “God had to assume without sin flesh capable of suffering and death, so that by suffering and dying He would satisfy for us and take away sin.”²² “It was fitting for the body assumed by the Son of God to be subject to human infirmities and defects; and especially for three reasons. First, because it was in order to satisfy for the sin of the human race that the Son of God, having taken flesh, came

into the world. Now one satisfies for another's sin by taking on himself the punishment due to the sins of others.... Secondly, in order to cause belief in the Incarnation. For since human nature is known to men only as it is subject to these defects, if the Son of God had assumed human nature without these defects, He would not have seemed to be true man, nor to have true, but imaginary flesh ... Thirdly ... he might become an example of virtue to us.”²³.

In a remarkable spiritual vision, Sri Ramakrishna described his eyewitness account of the descent of a 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 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.²⁴

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. 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].

Does this mean that only a portion of the Divine Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, and Holy Mother descended to earth for the benefit of humanity? That the rest remained in the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of Heaven carrying on its essential functions. When Ramakrishna lived on earth did the bulk of

the Avatara remained in the highest Divine world in full glory and power performing his Divine and cosmic functions?

On at least five occasions, Ramakrishna said an Incarnation is a manifestation of Brahman-God.²⁵

It should be remembered that Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother are Divine persons with a human nature, not human persons with a Divine nature. Theology from above proceeds from the Divine to the human and theology from below from the human to the Divine. They are perfectly and fully Divine and human, their human nature consisting of a human body and mind.

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.

According to the Council of Chalcedon (now in Turkey, 451), Jesus Christ is truly Divine: "the same perfect in Godhead ... truly God ... consubstantial with the Father in Godhead." Jesus Christ is truly human: "the same in perfect manhood ... truly man, the same of a rational soul and body... consubstantial with us in manhood; like us in all things except sin." He is "fully God and fully human" without sin. They concluded, "One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence (*hypostasis*), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."²⁶ Therefore, Jesus is one person with two natures, Divine and human (theanthropic).

The Avatara (literally descent)-Divine Incarnation has both a Divine and human mind, or one mind with two natures. They share a partial identity, sameness in some but not all respects. Is the Divine Nature of an Avatara omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent? The Avatara-Divine Incarnation has all of the properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being human. It has essential possession of its Divine properties and contingent possession of its human properties. Having two natures, it can have some properties with respect to one nature and lack them with respect to the other nature.²⁷

The Incarnation is a manifestation of the love of Brahman-God. While living on earth, during their embodiment they tend to conceal their Divine nature and manifest their humanness. Devotees of future generations generally worship and admire their human form and activities, not understanding their heavenly nature.

When the believer attains to enlightenment-samadhi, the Incarnation-Avatara will reveal more of their celestial nature and form, which the devotee can then experience and gain some understanding of.

The Avatara is the perfect example of what the Scottish historian, novelist, and essayist Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) referred to as the "Great Man Theory of History." Carlyle summarized his ideas with the overstatement, "The history of the world is but the biography of great men." Following the logic of this theory, highly influential individuals due to their personal charisma, intelligence, self-confidence, and courage, utilized their power in a way that had a decisive impact on historical events. This is particularly evident in the history of religion since without Buddha, Jesus, or Muhammad it is unlikely that anything similar to their respective religions would have come into existence.²⁸ Carlyle gave a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* to the famous American philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, when the latter visited him in Scotland.²⁹

The Avatara-Divine Incarnation descends to earth to teach people how they can ascend to the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of Heaven. They come into this world as fully realized souls, live the words they preach, and are motivated by love and compassion in their transforming work. Avatara is a "descent" of a Brahman-God to the earth plane. A part of It descends to the level of a human being, remains there for a lifetime, and then ascends back to the Divine plane. They come to the human level in self-revelation to take the form of a human being, to teach humanity spiritual and moral truths, and to liberate-save them so that they can ascend to higher level. Avataras-Divine Incarnations reveal Brahman-God's personal love and concern for humanity, and emphasize their loving devotion (bhakti). They are role models that their followers try to emulate.

Divine embodiment and activity are undertaken freely out of love and grace, and compassion for the human condition. They establish a new Dharma that brings about the restoration of righteousness in society. Brahman-God involvement in human society proves the Avatara neither despises the body nor this world since human nature is potentially Divine. An Avatara-Incarnation event combines Incarnational, soteriological, and sacramental factors.

For more ideas on this subject see: SVWT, Ch. X. Avatara-Divine Incarnation, Section 2. Their Human Nature, A. Brahman-God Assumes a Human Form. Web: <http://www.vedantawritings.com/SVPR10.pdf>

2. Possible Indian Views of the Christian Trinity

In answer to the question, "The future, you say, will call Ramakrishna Paramahansa an Incarnation of Kali?" Vivekananda responded, "Yes, I think there's no doubt that She worked up the body of Ramakrishna for Her own ends." His brother monastic Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) mentioned, "Ramakrishna regarded Holy Mother as the living image of Mother Kali. And the Holy Mother addressed the Master as Mother Kali." When he died, she cried out, "Mother, where have you gone?"³⁰ Swami Vivekananda also affirms this idea. Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) explained, "Kali incarnated Herself in the form of Ramakrishna to give her innumerable children knowledge and devotion."³¹ Sri Ramakrishna told his followers, "I and the Mother have become one.... There are two persons in this. One, the Divine Mother ... Yes, one is She. And the other is her devotee.... God became man, an Avatara, and comes to earth with His devotees."³² Ramakrishna said, "The Mother knows everything, I don't know anything. It is the Mother who speaks and does everything through me.... You see Mother keeps me sometimes in the mood of a child, sometimes in the mood of a madman, and sometimes in the mood of a carefree soul."³³ Does this mean that Mother Kali incarnated as both Ramakrishna and Holy Mother while they were living on earth at the same time?

Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of Mother Kali is comparable to Jesus being an Incarnation of the Father (not of the Son), which is rejected by the Christians. They believe the Son is not an Incarnation of the Father, but is eternally generated from the Father by necessity of nature, communicating the Divine Essence of the Godhead without division so that they share the same nature. After the crucifixion, Jesus remained eternally separate from the Father in Heaven. These are difficult matters to analyze since we cannot impose human limitations on the Divine.

The Doctrine of Patripassianism that Jesus was an Incarnation of the Father was originally taught in the 2nd century by Praxeas of Asia Minor and Noetus of Smyrna, and in the 3rd century by Pope Calixtus 1 (Callistus), but it has since left Christianity. They defended their ideas with the *New Testament* passages like, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). "He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you not say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (Jn. 14:9-10), which lend themselves to more than one interpretation.³⁴ In the statements, "the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14, KJ) and "this is the Son of God" (Jn. 1:34).

Jesus spoke to the Father, but there is no Biblical record that he communicated with his Heavenly Self, the Logos, Word, Son. “The Son can do nothing on his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for what ever he does, that the Son does likewise” (Jn. 5:19). The Son must be the intermediary between the Father and the world since, “All things were made through Him [Logos, Word, Son], and without Him was not anything made that was made” (Jn. 1:3).

Muhammad is looked upon as a messenger of God. Could we think of the earthly Sri Ramakrishna as being a messenger of Mother Kali? We might ask, was Sri Ramakrishna a transformation or an emanation of Mother Kali?

As a Christian, Thomas Aquinas following the *New Testament* accepted Jesus as an Incarnation of the Son (Logos). Yet in answer to the question “Whether each of the Divine Persons [Father, Son, Holy Spirit] could have assumed a Divine Nature,” with emphasis on the omnipotence of God he brilliantly wrote, “The Divine power could have united human nature to the Person of the Father or the Holy Ghost, as It united to the Person of the Son. And hence we must say that the Father or the Holy Ghost could have assumed flesh even as the Son.” In answer to the question, “Whether several Divine Persons can assume one and the same individual nature?” Thomas Aquinas indicated, “The three Persons can subsist in one Divine Nature. Therefore they can also subsist in one human nature in such a way that the human nature can be assumed by the three Persons.... it is not impossible that two or three Divine Persons should assume one human nature.”³⁵ It is possible for a Divine Being to be an Incarnation of both the Father and the Son or the entire Trinity. Hence following this logic, Ramakrishna could be an Incarnation of more than one Indian deity as many of his followers believe.

While most authoritative Christians consider the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost) to be masculine, some Indians believe it is feminine, the Divine Mother of the Universe. In this case the Trinity would be Father, Son, and Mother as the famous psychologist Carl Jung thought it should be. Swami Vijnanananda (1868-1938) a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna taught, “Our Mother is the embodiment of law.... This law of God acts silently; it is great and all-powerful. This is what Christians call the Holy Ghost and Hindus call Shakti [Primal Energy, Power].” A pious and meditative Swami Brahmavadin told Swami Vijnanananda, “The Holy Ghost is the Mother, the impersonation of Shakti. Without the Holy Ghost there would be no Jesus Christ.”³⁶ In Hebrew and Aramaic (the language generally considered to have been spoken by Jesus) the word spirit (ruach) is feminine. But grammatical gender is not necessarily correlative to personal gender. Some mystics in a high spiritual state

like Gregory of Nyssa, Hugh of St. Victor, and Evelyn Underhill refer to the soul as “her” or “she.”³⁷

Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi (1923-2011) founder of Sahaja Yoga identifies the Holy Spirit with the Indian Shakti, which is the potency of the Divine Mother, the latent power of God, “The Holy Spirit, rather than being a distinct person, is spoken of in the Bible as being God's Divine power.... Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit as the power of God (Zechariah 4:6; Micah 3:8).... Luke 4:14 records that Jesus began His ministry "in the power of the Spirit." Speaking of the Holy Spirit, which would be given to His followers after His death, Jesus told them, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." (Acts 1:8). Peter relates how "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38). The power or active aspect of God Almighty is the Adi Shakti.... Shakti is the supporter of the vast universe. She is the supreme Power by which the world is upheld. She is the Universal Mother.... There is no difference between God Almighty and His Shakti, just as there is no difference between the sun and its light.”³⁸

Shakti that Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi identifies with the Holy Ghost “is the primordial cosmic energy and represents the dynamic forces that are thought to move through the entire universe in Hinduism. (1) Shakti is the concept, or personification, of Divine feminine creative power, sometimes referred to as 'The Great Divine Mother' in Hinduism.... (2) Not only is the Shakti responsible for creation, it is also the agent of all change.”³⁹ Shakti bears a relationship with the Hebrew Shekhinah as the feminine aspect of the presence of God. “The Shekhinah in the *New Testament* is commonly equated to the presence or indwelling of the Spirit of the Lord (generally referred to as the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of Christ) in the believer.”⁴⁰ For her the Trinity is Father, Mother, and Son.

From the beginning the Christians took a highly intellectual approach to religion. They did not just accept things on faith alone but carefully and rigorously analyzed their ideas. At the Council of Nicaea (in present day Turkey, 325) over 250 Bishops concluded, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”⁴¹ The Son is “the Father’s very own self-illuminative and creative activity, without Whom He neither creates anything nor is known.”⁴² John Hardon explains, “He is of the substance of the Father, which in the original Greek says that he is ‘out of the

being (ousia) of the Father.’ This affirms that, unlike mere creatures, who may be said to be from God, his only-begotten Son comes literally out of the Father's own being.... He is God of God, in the sense that he is as much God as the Father, sharing perfectly in the one and same Divine nature.... ‘He is begotten not made,’ declares the profoundest mystery of our faith: that within the Godhead a generation has been going on from eternity. Unlike all other generations, this one implies no production of a new being, no change in the generator, no cause-and-effect relationship, no dependence of offspring on parent, and no semblance of decision on the part of the Father to bring the Son into existence.”⁴³ Being of one substance with the Father. Orthodox belief requires us to say that Christ has the same substance (homoousios) as the Father, not merely a similar substance to the Father (homoiousios).

How many of the descriptions of Jesus given by the Council of Nicaea, etc., can an Indian accept in describing an Avatara such as Rama, Krishna, Chaitanya, or Sri Ramakrishna? Like the Christians, Indians believe in one God (Saguna Brahman, Ishvara, sometimes given other names), Almighty and Creator of all things. The Avatara (Divine Incarnation) is of the same substance (being) as Saguna Brahman=Ishvara, the Personal God. Could Ramakrishna Vedantists following Christian reasoning presented by the Council of Nicaea (substituting the “Mother” for the “Father”) accept the idea of the heavenly Divine Sri Ramakrishna as being the eternally begotten (not created at a specific time) Son of the Mother, and Holy Mother (the heavenly Sarada Devi) as the eternally begotten Daughter of Mother Kali? They are both consubstantial, of the same substance as Mother Kali, eternally generated out of Her being (sat/ousia). Here we have a Trinity of Mother, Son, and Daughter. “Begotten” implies they are a “Unity in diversity,” i.e., separate yet at a deeper level they are One. It also means that at the Divine level in the Brahmaloaka=Kingdom of God, there is a horizontal relationship between the Father and the Son for Christians, and between the Mother and the Son and Daughter for Ramakrishna Vedantists. “Divine Incarnation” implies a vertical relationship between the heavenly archetypes and their earthly representations. Indians do not hold to the idea of “only begotten” since they accept more than one Avatara. In the Divine Loka (Kingdom of Heaven) the Avatars are separate beings, yet at the highest level they are only one being.

For the progression of the Trinity the word “Begotten” is used instead of “Created.” On the physical plane the chair is first nonexistent, then the carpenter creates it, and eventually it disintegrates. Conversely, in the heavenly realm the

Son is eternally begotten by the Father; there is never a time when He did not exist. The created chair is separate from the carpenter. The begotten Son is in some ways a separate Person from the Father, yet there is a unity being that God is One. Begotten also implies not being ultimate reality (or first cause), but being derived from it.

To say that the Son is “of the substance with the Father,” implies humans are of a different substance. The brain composed of gross matter and energy perishes, but the mind (soul, subtle body) lives on in the realm of subtle matter and energy. For the Christian even the spiritual substance of the person differs from that of God. In India Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva are unanimous that an individual jiva (soul, self) never under any condition has the power to create, preserve, or destroy the universe as Brahman (God) does. From a Qualified Nondualist standpoint this is because a person is a fragment and Brahman (God) is the totality of the universe. Thus, there are important differences.

Judaism and Islam are Unitarian, Christianity is Trinitarian, and Hinduism is Polytheistic. Can we accept the higher Devas (e.g. Mother Kali, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) as aspects of Brahman-God, as coequal and coeternal, and equally Divine with each other, consubstantial (homoousios, of the same substance), but multiple Persons (hypostases) equal in power, knowledge, and goodness?

The Higher Devas act within history, sustaining it as part of the “economic Polytheism,” that is as Divine Persons in their worldly activities, in creation, redemption, and sanctification. They are eternally concurrent modes of being, the same Brahman-God but not the same Person. Being poly-Personal, ontologically necessary, they are not dependent for their existence on anything outside of themselves. The members of the Polytheism are uncreated, and all are eternal without beginning. Each Person is wholly Brahman-God in Itself. Modalism is the view that each Deity is a manifestation or mode played by the one and only Brahman-God.

For the Trinity following the Social Model: first, the Divine Persons share all of the essential characteristics of Divinity: omniscience, omnipotence, moral perfection, and so forth. Second, unlike the deities of polytheistic systems, their wills are necessarily harmonious, so that they can never come into conflict with one another. Third, they stand in a relationship of perfect love and necessary mutual interdependence. Concerning the Psychological Model: a single rational substance is nonetheless “divided” into multiple personalities or centers of consciousness. They are understandable as distinct aspects of a single Being. Each member of the Christian Trinity is simple, timeless, and changeless in Its intrinsic nature, but not in

Its extrinsic nature. This is why Jesus was able to speak to and listen to the Father within time.

The concept of the Trinity strives in an intelligent fashion to enunciate the similarities and differences between the various manifestations of the Godhead. For a Polytarian Hindu, for each of the many aspects of Brahman (God) it is important to differentiate between the unity of the Essence and the diversity of the manifestations (or projections), and to understand the relationship between them. Most Hindus accept the principle of “unity in diversity,” and therefore agree with the Christians that it is incorrect too overemphasize either the unity or the diversity (Tritheism) of the Trinity.⁴⁴

3. The Virgin Birth

The infancy narrative in the Book of Matthew (1:20-21) reads, “An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’” In the Book of Luke (1:31, 35) it states, “And the Angel said to her ... ‘You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.’... the angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.’” Many Muslims affirm the virgin birth of Jesus.

Accounts of the pre-birth spiritual experiences of the parents of great saviors of the world are found in other religious books. Swami Saradananda tells us, “It is recorded in the *Ramayana* that the mothers of Ramachandra [Sri Rama] and his three half-brothers conceived them by eating rice pudding left over from a sacrifice. Moreover, the women realized many times, both before and after the births of their sons, that the children manifested Divine powers and aspects of Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe. The parents of Krishna had a vision of God endowed with six powers at the time of conception as well as immediately after his birth. In addition, it is recorded in the *Bhagavata* and other *Puranas* that Krishna's parents had various wonderful visions after his birth.”

Before he was born, Sri Ramakrishna's mother Chandradevi had a dream of a luminous deity lying on her bed. She added, “Another day, I was standing in front of the Yogi Shiva temple and talking with Dhani. Suddenly I saw a Divine light emanating from the image of Shiva. It filled the temple and rushed towards me like

a wave. Overwhelmed, I was about to tell Dhani about it, but suddenly the light engulfed me and entered my body. Stupefied with fear and wonder, I fell unconscious.... From then on I have had the feeling that the light is still in my womb and that I am pregnant.... since I had the vision of light in front of the Shiva temple, I have been having innumerable visions of different gods and goddesses. I have never seen some of their forms, even in pictures.” “She would see Gods and Goddess daily; sometimes she would smell a Divine fragrance that emanated from their bodies and filled the room. Sometimes she would hear Divine voices.”⁴⁵

At that time while in another city, Kshudiram the father of Sri Ramakrishna had a blissful dream of a Divine Being (Gadadhar the Lord Vishnu) with a luminous celestial body, who told him “in a sweet, melodious voice, ‘Kshudiram, I am very pleased with your sincere devotion. I shall incarnate Myself as your son and accept the loving service you offer Me in your cottage.’”⁴⁶

At the time of Sri Ramakrishna birth his father was over sixty years of age and his mother Chandradevi was forty-five. She previously had children, and it is not explicitly stated this was a virgin birth though it is possible. As a result of bearing a Divine child during Chandradevi’s pregnancy, she was in a high spiritual state “experiencing celestial bliss in her heart.” She attained a beauty and gracefulness that she had never experienced before. The conception of Jesus by Mary without any human father, has been a doctrine of the Christian Church since its beginning. According to Catholic belief this is due to the “glory of Christ and the beginning of a regenerated human race.” They add that she was exempt “from the ordinary pangs of childbirth.” Also, both Mary and Chandradevi were told of the future birth of a Divine child by an angelic being.⁴⁷ Many early Christians believed that original sin passes through the semen and this is why Jesus was born of a virgin.

In the *Purana’s* there is the Hindu Trinity (Trimurti) of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer. According to traditional Hinduism it is Lord Vishnu the second member of the Trinity who like the Christian Son incarnates on earth. In the above narratives, we have the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit (Jesus) and of Lord Shiva (Ramakrishna), each the third members of their respective Trinity. From another standpoint, the Hindu Trinity bears some relation to Bonaventure’s (1221-74) idea that, “In the Father is the efficient principle, in the Son the exemplary principle, and in the Holy Spirit the final principles.” In other words, possibly we might think of Brahma as the efficient cause or creator, Vishnu the formal cause, and Shiva the final cause or end.⁴⁸

In a virgin birth the Divine Incarnation would certainly not receive the DNA

from the father and possibly not from the mother either. This would enable the Avatara to receive these hereditary characteristics from a Divine source.

4. Incarnations of Brahman-God's Heavenly Assistants

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

New Testament: God said, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Mal. 4:5). 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).

In the *Ramayana* an ancient Indian historical and devotional text it is mentioned that Sri Rama was a full Incarnation of Lord Vishnu (Brahman-God), and each of his three half-brothers were partial Incarnations (amsa-Avataras) of the Lord Vishnu. His wife Sita was regarded as an Incarnation of the Goddess Lakshmi, and Hanuman a great servant of Sri Rama was considered to be an Incarnation of Vayu the wind Deity. Sri Krishna spoke the teachings that became the *Bhagavad Gita* to the warrior Arjuna, one of the five Pandava brothers who were of Divine origin according to the *Mahabharata*. Madhva (1199/1238-1278/1317) the religious founder of Dvaita (Dualistic and Theistic) Vedanta stated that he himself, Hanuman, and Bhima (Bhimsena) one of the Pandava brothers, were each Incarnations of the deity Vayu.⁴⁹

The founder of the Bengal Vaishnava religious movement, Sri Chaitanya (1485/86-1533) is recognized as an Avatara (Divine Incarnation). He brought some liberated souls who were born on earth with Him, to help Him in carrying out his mission. His disciples are considered to be partial manifestations of the power of Bhagavat (God), differing from Sri Chaitanya in degree, but not in kind. In an Amsa (Partial) Avatara only a portion of Divine power is expressed, while for a Purna (Full) Avatara all powers are manifested. Bengal Vaishnavism teaches that eternally liberated souls (nitya-mukta) serve the Lord "as His eternal associates enjoying the bliss of loving service." As His comrades in the highest spiritual world, they incarnate with Him when he descends to the earth to help humanity.⁵⁰

It was revealed by Sri Ramakrishna, “When God assumes a human body for the sake of His devotees, many of His devotees accompany Him to earth. Some of them belong to the inner circle, some to the outer circle, and some become the suppliers of His physical needs.”⁵¹ These great male and female disciples from a higher world are members of the Lords spiritual family, who help him fulfill his mission on earth and spread his message. The most advanced companions of the Avatara are eternally free souls (nityasiddhas, ishvarakotis) who were never bound (unliberated, unsaved) by maya. Occasionally, they may descend to earth independent of the Lord becoming great sages or prophets. They “cannot commit sin.” “Their spiritual consciousness has been awake since their very birth. They assume human bodies only to impart spiritual illumination to others.”⁵²

Sri Ramakrishna mentioned that some of His disciples in their prior lives had been followers of Rama in the *Ramayana* and Krishna in the *Mahabharata*. Some of the sages and heroes of these two epics were reborn and came with Ramakrishna to aid in his mission and revive the Indian spiritual civilization. In this Incarnation their assignment is possibly bigger in the sense that the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* involved only India, but now they must impact the world. He also had disciples who were followers of Buddha, Christ, and Sri Chaitanya in a prior life.

It was necessary for Ramakrishna to bring with him Vivekananda who was involved in missionary work and synthesized modern thought with Vedanta, and Brahmananda a powerful and exemplary guru who was in charge of the Ramakrishna Order monastic training center at the Belur Math

Pravrajika Anandaprana (1922-2014) a Southern California nun wrote, “Swami Prabhavananda [1893-1976] said that Maharaj came with Sri Krishna. Swamiji [Vivekananda] was one of the seven rishis; Swami Prabhavananda thought of Swamiji as an Incarnation of Shiva. Swamis Niranjanananda and Vijnanananda were with Rama (Swami Vijnanananda was Jambavan; he was brother with everybody). Balaram and M. came with Sri Chaitanya; Swami Shivananda was with Buddha; Swamis Ramakrishnananda and Saradananda with Christ. Swami Premananda is regarded as a gopi of Krishna and also as an attendant of the Divine Mother. Swami Yogananda was Arjuna. Swami Abhedananda was with Krishna. Swami Akhandananda himself told Swami Prabhavananda that he was Yasoda, the [foster] mother of Krishna. Swami Prabhavananda said that Swami Akhandananda had the relationship of uncle with everyone. Girish Ghosh was a Bhairav.”⁵³

When Ramakrishna met the young Vijnanananda he asked him to wrestle and in that way transmitted spiritual power to him. Vijnanananda related, “I felt a sort of

electric current coming out of his hands and entering into me. That touch made me completely helpless. I lost all my physical strength. I went into ecstasy, and the hair of my body stood on end.” Ramakrishna said, “He wrestled with Krishna in his previous Incarnation, he is not an ordinary person.” In the *Bhagavatam Purana*, it is mentioned that Jambavan wrestled with Krishna. Formerly, the *Ramayana* tells us Jambavan was a king and wise counselor who aided Rama.⁵⁴

Geoffrey Parrinder (1910-2005) quoted Sarada Devi the Holy Mother (1853-1920) who indicated that the female Incarnations of the Divine Mother (Shakti) of the universe always accompany the male Incarnation (Shiva). “This repeated journey to earth!... Wherever is Shiva there is Shakti, They always go together. It is the same Shiva again and again, and the same Shakti too.” He mentioned that according to traditional Indian thought the Goddess Lakshmi incarnated as Sita the wife of the Avatara Sri Rama, and again as Radha the gopi companion of Sri Krishna.⁵⁵

A monastic disciple who lived with Sri Ramakrishna and wrote his definitive biography, Swami Saradananda disclosed, “extraordinary individuals are born, when needed, for a special purpose for the good of humanity.... The authors of Vedanta observed greater and lesser degrees of power in these adhikarikas and noticed that some of these beings performed actions that were of permanent benefit to all people of the world, while others affected the people of one country or a part of it only. So the Vedantins recognized some of these adhikarikas as Avataras, Incarnations of God, and others as ever-free ishvarakotis, godlike souls endowed with lesser authority.”⁵⁶

From what Ramakrishna stated, we might infer that the apostle Paul and the disciples of Jesus were perfected souls who voluntarily descended from heaven to aid him in fulfilling his Divine mission. Some of them could have also been reborn at other times for spiritual purposes. They are members of God’s family, the companions and servants of the Lord. Peter and John only appeared to be “uneducated, common men” (Acts 4:13). Only the twelve disciples were “given the secret of the kingdom of God” not the outsiders (Mk: 4:10-12). From this perspective, it is also possible that great religious philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Thomas Aquinas were Incarnations of heavenly sages who descended to earth to teach new sublime truths. They created vast systems of thought that are highly original that have lasted for millenniums. The spiritual conception of history deals with God’s purpose and plan, communication and revelation to and for humanity. This is all part of what is called salvation or liberation-history

(*Heilsgeschichte*), in distinction to the many secular economic, technological, political, and social theories of history. Sacred history the unfolding and intervention of Divinity in human events is determined by the conditions of and tailored to the needs of humanity.

An elevated liberated soul who takes on human birth for the benefit of humanity, may never publish a book or an essay, deliver a lecture, hold an important position in a religious organization, or be recognized as a saint by most people. These great souls are born for a hidden spiritual purpose and generate a high volume of spiritual energy. For example, Purna Chandra Ghosh (1871-1913) a married disciple of Sri Ramakrishna belongs to that class. He is a *nityasiddha-ishvarakoti* meaning an eternally liberated (saved) soul, who never had to undergo the process of being liberated or saved.⁵⁷ Larger in number are great souls who at one time were unliberated and unsaved. In a prior life they became illumined souls and saints and have since returned to earth for a Divine purpose to serve the Lord.

Most Christians do not teach the doctrine that Mother Mary pre-existed in heaven before her life on earth (as some Indian Vedantists do), yet Catholics consider her to be second in dignity only to Jesus. Consequently, Catholics bestow adoration (*hyperdulia*) on Mary, which exceeds the veneration (*dulia*) offered to the saints. She said, “For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Lk. 1:48). Strong evidence for the divinity of Mother Mary comes from her post-Biblical revelations. Mother Mary made eight widely acknowledged apparitional appearance on earth to innocent and uneducated people. The first in 1531 at Guadalupe and later during the 1830-1933 period in Western Europe. All were, “Accompanied by brilliant light—light of an unearthly intensity ... the Lady was always young and beautiful ... clothed in white gowns of dazzling and irresistible purity.” At Guadalupe, she referred to herself unequivocally as, “I am the ever-virgin Mary, mother of the true God.” Four children at Beauraing, Belgium where she appeared thirty-three times during 1932-33 experienced a vision of Mother Mary, and she spoke of herself as, “I am the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven.”⁵⁸ During these visions Mother Mary asked people to pray, to perform penance, and to make reparations for their sins. She correctly prophesied the coming of the Second World War, the spread of Communism, and “If my requests are heard Russia will be converted and there will be peace.”⁵⁹ She taught no new dogmas accept the fostering of Mother worship.

For more on this subject see: SVWT, Ch. X. Avatara-Divine Incarnation, Section 2. Their Human Nature, B. Heavenly Assistants. Web:

<http://www.vedantawritings.com/SVPR10.pdf>

5. Spirituality and Holiness

Indian: “You [Sri Krishna] are Brahman, the highest abode, the utterly holy” (BG 10:12).

New Testament: “You [Jesus] are the Holy One of God” (Jn. 6:69; cf. Mk. 1:24; Lk. 1:35; 4:34). Jesus is “holy, blameless, unstained, separate from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

Concerning an Avatara (Divine Incarnation) Sri Ramakrishna explained that part of their mind is always absorbed in Brahman-God consciousness (equivalent to the beatific vision). They have to force their mind down to the human plane of consciousness, in order to speak on religious matters and to remain in a human body. “But the Saviors of humanity are those who see God, and being at the same time anxious to share their happiness of Divine vision with others, refuse the opportunity of passing into Nirvana, and willingly undergo the troubles of rebirth in the world in order to teach and lead struggling humanity to the goal.”⁶⁰ “Do not think that the Avatara is ever under the control of maya [which includes sin]. He is, by nature, the master of maya and is established in his own Self. He is never bound.”⁶¹ Divine Incarnations are free from sin because unlike other people, they view the world from both the human and Divine planes of consciousness.⁶²

Swami Satprakashananda (1888-1979) a monk of the Ramakrishna Order in St. Louis, Missouri described a Divine Incarnation this way. “Though appearing to be a bound human being the Incarnation of God is beyond all bondages, ever possessing Divine power, Divine wisdom, and ever established in Spirit Consciousness.... These great spiritual teachers come with a Divine mission to fulfill, and they are conscious of that. With special authority they establish a new religious order which comes with a brilliance of spiritual light. Having no concern for their own welfare, their activities are all directed to the good of humanity.... These great teachers or saviors at the same time demonstrate the highest spiritual ideals. They are the greatest exemplars of their own teachings. If you want to see the supreme demonstration of love for human beings, love for God; or the highest example of spiritual wisdom, self-sacrifice, truthfulness, or moral virtue; you must see it in their lives. They are the greatest manifestations of God’s love, God’s wisdom, freedom and joy. They demonstrate what they teach, for the person is greater than the

message.... By living example even more than precept, saviors teach human beings what they should do. These great teachers come with such power that they can transform the lives of sinners into saints and sages.”⁶³

To quote Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) a monk of the Ramakrishna Order in Southern California, “When a being is born with the full knowledge of the Self [Atman], and with the Divine consciousness not veiled by ignorance, that being is a full embodiment of the Godhead. Such a man is known as an Avatara.” Their validity “is revealed by their unique power to transmit spirituality and transform men’s lives by touch, look, or wish ... the validity of the Avataras is shown by the revelation of their divinity in transfiguration.... From time to time, then, a Divine Incarnation is needed to re-establish the eternal spirit of religion. By his living example, the Incarnation shows mankind how to be perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect. The Avatara thus really becomes the way, the truth, and the life.... To suit the particular needs of successive ages, with each coming, God reveals a new and characteristic presentation of the eternal truth of religion.”⁶⁴

Swami Akhilananda (1894-1962) a monk of the Ramakrishna Order in Boston adds, “An Incarnation has the power to remove at will this imposition of human nature on Himself. He is always aware of his Divine nature; consequently, he is not bound by any limitations whatsoever.... they are fully aware of their divinity from the time of their birth. They know that they have a definite purpose to accomplish and that regardless of world conditions it will be fulfilled, no matter what the people do to them or their message.... He comes to show the people that their methods of obtaining joy and satisfaction are wrong and he reveals ways to get them to become aware of God.”⁶⁵

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) stressed that holiness as exemplified by Jesus requires that an individual’s will be in perfect harmony with the moral law. A holy will acts from an internal disposition, and not from external obligations or the impositions of a moral law. “According to its own subjective constitution, it can be determined to act only through the conception of the good. Thus no imperatives hold for the Divine Will or, more generally, for a holy will,” because the volition of the holy will is always in harmony with the moral law. “The moral law is, in fact, for the will of a perfect being a law of holiness. For the will of any finite rational being, however, it is a law of duty, of moral constraint ... To love God means in this sense to like to do His commandments, and to love one’s neighbor means to like to practice all duties toward him.” People may act in an

ethical way out of respect for the moral law, not always having a spontaneous inclination to follow its precepts. Consequently, the moral imperative “though as an ideal of holiness it is unattainable by any creature, it is yet an archetype which we should strive to approach.... [One] can never be wholly free from desires and inclinations which, because they rest on physical causes, do not of themselves agree with the moral law.”⁶⁶ Jesus is a model for the idea of moral perfection.

The Catholic view as presented in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* by Earl Weis, S.J. a professor of Theology at Loyola University Chicago is that, “Jesus Christ was in his humanity not merely sinless but impeccable; that is, He could not sin; He did not have the power of sin.... Thomists hold that the impeccability is brought about by the beatific vision possessed by Christ from the first moment of His life. According to them, the beatific vision by itself always renders sin absolutely impossible.”⁶⁷ The humanity of Christ is formally worshiped, because it is a tangible and a holy manifestation of the Word of God, the second Person of the Trinity. J. J. Walsh adds, “Since all actions are attributable to the person, and since, in the case of Christ, the Person is Divine, it is inconceivable that there could be any sin. If there neither was nor could be any sin in Christ, then it follows that He must have been free from the inclination to sin that is called concupiscence.”⁶⁸

In agreement with the doctrine of impeccability, Divine Incarnations-Avataras are sinless because: of their perfect internal nature and essence, part of their consciousness is always in the supersensuous realm (beatific vision), they perceive and interpret the world from a Divine state of consciousness, their human will is one with the Divine Will, and unlike other people they are not estranged from Brahman-God. The bulk of their mind dwells in the heavenly realm, and a lesser portion in the human sphere. Whom ever an Incarnation reveals their true spiritual self to, will be transformed and liberated (saved). For example, the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus was permanently transformed when he witnessed the spiritual nonphysical presence of Jesus (Acts 9:3-9). Incarnations retain their Divine consciousness and realize they are pure spirit. They identify with their physical body only for the purpose of preserving their life as a human, so that they can carry out their mission. From Ramana Maharshi’s standpoint Christ was pure spirit, and the body of Jesus that was crucified was an outer garment analogous to a coat that we wear.

Though the Avatara-Divine Incarnation is primarily motivated by love and compassion, still there must be some form of a sublime sattvic sense of duty. Their motives and intentions are determined to some extent by a feeling of duty. This

action-based ethic requires an intellect to determine what their duty is and a will to carry it out. Their intellect applies a universal moral norm to a specific instance combined with acts of supererogation.

6. Religious Experiences of the Divine Incarnation

Indian: “The great Lord of Yoga [Sri Krishna], revealed to Arjuna His supreme form as Ishvara ... Armed with many Divine uplifted weapons; wearing celestial garlands and vestments ... If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendor of the Mighty One.... Arjuna bowed his head to the Lord ... glowing like a mass of radiance ... blazing everywhere like burning fire and the burning sun ... I behold Thee as one without beginning, middle, or end ... with the sun and moon as Thine eyes; with Thy face shining like a blazing fire; and burning with Thy radiance ... Thy great eyes glowing bright” (BG 11:9-12, 14, 17, 19, 24).

New Testament: “He [Jesus] was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light” (Mt. 17:2; cf. Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36). “And all night he continued in prayer to God” (Lk. 6:12). “Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father” (Jn. 6:46). “I speak of what I have seen with my Father” (Jn. 8:38). “Like a son of man, clothed with a long robe ... his eyes were like a flame of fire ... in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.... I fell at his feet ... He laid his hand on me saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last’” (Rev. 1:13-14, 16-17).

They remove their disciple’s fears and return to their usual human form. Indian: “Now you need fear no more, nor be bewildered, seeing me so terrible. Be glad, take courage. Look hear am I, transformed, as first you knew me.... Krishna appeared in his own shape” (BG* 11:49-50, p. 126). New Testament: “When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ And when they lifted their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only” (Mt. 17:6-8).

Sri Ramakrishna explained that the Avataras and Ishvarakotis (eternally-free souls) have bodies composed of the purest and most refined sattvic materials,

which can withstand the powerful surge of spiritual experiences. While involved in their daily routine activities, they have exalted spiritual experiences living in “an uninterrupted vision of God.” For several days at a time they can attain mahabhava, a state of heavenly bliss where they are totally free of body consciousness and are united with Brahman-God. “Though established in samadhi, they can again descend to the worldly plane.”⁶⁹

Interestingly Indian theologians unlike their western counterparts, judged Sri Ramakrishna to be a Divine Incarnation, because of the exaltedness of his spiritual experiences. If Jesus were to return to the earth, what criteria would a Christian use to decide if the person was really Jesus or not, or would he select his own methods to make his Divinity known?

J. J. Walsh in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* remarks, “A third font of knowledge (the other two being acquired and infused knowledge) for Christ’s human intellect is the beatific vision—the non-conceptual, face-to-face vision of God. That Christ had such knowledge is perhaps implied in such texts from the scriptures ... ‘For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God, when he began to enjoy the beatific vision.’ What does the beatific vision consists in? It is the vision of the Second Person of the Trinity to which Jesus’ human nature belongs; and, hence, it is the vision of the Divine nature of the Trinity. If Jesus’ humanity receives its subsistence from the Divine Logos, then it is held to be inconceivable that it would not know the very root of its subsistence, its own Person.... Jesus’ beatific vision has distinct limitations. First of all, it was limited by the very fact that His human intellect is a created thing and therefore finite. It could not possibly comprehend God to the extent that God comprehends Himself. Jesus, in his human intellect, does not grasp God totally and at once in a single act. This is a limitation common to all created intellects enjoying the beatific vision.”⁷⁰ Some of Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual experiences are described in Chapter I, Sections 5-6.

Profound mystical experiences cited in the case of Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and others are important factors in establishing their authority as religious founders and teachers. They objectively exhibit a Divine consciousness that all human beings have the potential to achieve to a lesser degree.

7. Kenosis and Their Human Nature

Indian: “I [Sri Krishna] make myself a body” (BG* 4:7, p. 60). “Veiled by My [Sri Krishna] maya [power of delusion] born of the gunas [primal forces of nature], I am not revealed to all. This deluded world knows Me not as the unborn and eternal” (BG 7:25). “Fools disregard Me when I assume a human form; they are unaware of My higher nature as the Supreme Lord of all beings” (BG 9:11; cf. 7:13; 15:11).

New Testament: “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk. 2:52). “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14; cf. Rom. 1:3; 1 Jn. 4:2; Gal. 4:4). “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (Jn. 1:5, KJ). “He [Jesus] was in the world ... yet the world knew him not” (Jn. 1:10). “The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him” (Jn. 14:17). “Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God ... emptied himself [Kenosis], taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2: 5-7; cf. 2 Cor. 8:9). “He had to be made like his brethren in every respect ... to make expiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

As indicated by Sri Ramakrishna, “Ordinary people do not recognize the advent of an Incarnation of God. He comes in secret. Only a few of His intimate disciples can recognize Him. That Rama was both Brahman Absolute and a perfect Incarnation of God in human form was known only to twelve rishis [sages].”⁷¹ “The Incarnation is the play of the Absolute as man. Do you know how the Absolute plays as man? It is like the rushing down of water from a big roof through a pipe; the power of Satchidananda—nay, Satchidananda Itself—descends through the conduit of human form as water descends through the pipe.”⁷² “They are never imprisoned in the world, never entangled by it. Their ego is not the ‘thick ego’ of worldly people.... The ego of the Incarnations and other Ishvarakotis is a ‘thin ego’: through it they have an uninterrupted vision of God.” “The Incarnation of God puts a bandage over His eyes by His own will, like children playing blind man’s bluff.”⁷³ To many people Ramakrishna appeared to be an ordinary person with nothing remarkable about him, who wore common clothes and spoke the simplest language.

Sri Ramakrishna attended a religious celebration where a visible Divine light emanated out from him. This attraction caused a crowd to follow him around. Afterwards he asked the Divine Mother to hide this Divine light so that others could not see it. This is an example of kenosis. People were attracted to him for superficial and not spiritual reasons.

Sarada Devi the Holy Mother (1853-1920) is recognized as a female Divine Incarnation. The bulk of her mind was centered on Brahman (God), and a lesser portion was involved in worldly matters. She could enter into the heavenly realm of consciousness at will. When asked by a devotee, “Do you ever remember your real nature?” she replied, “Yes, I recall it now and then. At that time I say to myself, ‘What is this that I am doing? What is this all about?’ Then I remember the house, buildings and children (pointing with the palm of her hand to the houses) and forget my real self.”⁷⁴ She also said she and Ramakrishna did not come here to eat ragulla (deserts), meaning they lived an austere life.

A monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Shivananda (1854-1934) ascertained, “The doings of a Divine Incarnation are beyond the reach of the average intellect. How would you or a nation understand the way of Divine action?... They themselves have the fullest consciousness of their Godhood. It is only for the spiritual good of the world that their power is manifested. All that they do is out of mercy, for an Avatara is not born as the result of karma. And how can he have any ignorance? It is the eternal Brahman in his fullness, the Lord of Maya, who descends with the help of Maya; and He returns to His own real state after the need of the age is fulfilled. All the spiritual practices that the Avatara undertakes, all the hard austerities he undergoes, are merely to set an example to others, to hold an ideal before men. For he is God, he is infinity itself. Where can he have any finitude?... As long as the Avatara remain in their human bodies in this world, all their behaviour appears to conform to human norms; they are happy at things that make others happy, and unhappy at those that make men unhappy. So much so, one comes to think that they do not retain their Divine consciousness fully. Really, however, this is not so. Especially in the case of the Master [Sri Ramakrishna], one comes across very little of the manifestation of Divine glory; his life expressed itself mostly on the human plane.”⁷⁵

Another monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Saradananda affirmed that a Divine Incarnation’s, “extraordinary renunciation, austerities, love, and purity surpass what the limited minds of ordinary people conceive of as God.”⁷⁶ Undertaking intense spiritual practices, they inspire others to do so, serving as an example that other people emulate. “The Avatars’ displays of splendor, vigor, and supernatural power are recorded in the scriptures, but these were so hidden in the Master [Sri Ramakrishna] that no one could discern a hint of them by seeing him superficially a few times. Only true spiritual seekers who received his grace and had a close relationship with him understood him.”⁷⁷ “Although it [memory of his

divinity] is always latent within the Avatara, it does not always manifest itself in childhood. However, as the Avataras body-mind organism becomes mature, his memory awakens with little or no effort. This is to be understood regarding every one of the Avataras actions. Since the Avatara assumes a human body, he behaves in all respects like a human being.”⁷⁸ “Assuming human bodies and living like human beings, Avataras to a great extent experience our shortsightedness and limited knowledge. Like us, they must struggle to discover a path to liberation from all those limitations. Until that path is discovered, the awareness of their Divine nature sometimes manifests itself within, but only momentarily—a veil then covers it up. Thus, for the good of many they accept the veil of maya.”⁷⁹ Nevertheless, their life and character differ greatly from that of an ordinary bound soul. “As soon as the body and mind are completely developed, an Avatara becomes fully aware of the goal of his present life. The Avatara then realizes that the purpose of his birth is to reestablish religion.”⁸⁰ “Avataras do not have even the slightest trace of selfish desire. They have no wish to enjoy sensual pleasures here or hereafter, nor any intention of enjoying infinite bliss by liberating themselves while disregarding the fate of others in the world.... This is because Avataras see the world from both the human and Divine planes of consciousness.... Their compassionate minds are therefore solely absorbed in the question of how they can gain full control over that Divine power, ascend to higher and higher planes of consciousness at will and stay there as long as they want, and then teach that technique to all people so that they too can attain peace.”⁸¹

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) stressed the fact that, “The object of the Avataras descent ... is precisely to show that the human birth with all of its limitations can be made such a means and instrument of the Divine birth and Divine works.... If the Avatara were to act in an entirely supernormal fashion, this object would not be fulfilled. A merely supernormal or miraculous Avatara would be a meaningless absurdity.... The Avatara did not come as a thaumaturgic magician, but as the Divine leader of humanity and the exemplar of a Divine humanity. Even human sorrow and physical suffering he must assume and use so to show, first, how that suffering may be a means of redemption—as did Christ—secondly, to show how, having been assumed by the Divine soul in the human nature, it can also be overcome in the same nature.”⁸²

Though the realized soul Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) was not an Avatara, he realized that he was pure spirit and not the physical body, which for him was only an outer garment that he was wearing. While his physical body was dying from

a long painful illness, he did not feel the pain, because he did not identify with the body. He was one with the Atman in eternal bliss. When his followers lamented over his long illness he replied, “What a pity that they confuse Bhagavan [the spirit] with this body and attribute suffering to him!” Certainly the Avatars have this capability.⁸³

Swami Prabhavananda brought out the point that the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna disagreed as to, whether he ever forgot that he was Divine. “Swami Saradananda believed that the Avatara forgets his divinity and that the struggle for the vision of God is real. Swamis Premananda and Turiyananda believed that the Avatara is always conscious that he is God and that he has a mission; his behavior as a human being is merely play acting.”⁸⁴ Likewise, Vedanta Deshika (aka Venkatanatha, c. 1268-1368) of the Ramanuja school presented the concept of “abhinaya” implying an Avatara is acting and only apparently suffers and experiences grief.

The Church Father and Bishop of Lyons in Gaul (now France) Irenaeus (c. 130-202) specified that it was necessary for the Logos to assume a human soul and to be born as an infant, to redeem mankind by recapitulating the history of the human race. “The Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God.... How could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are.”⁸⁵ “When the Son of God was incarnated and became man, He recapitulated in Himself the long history of men, bringing us salvation in a universal way in such a way that what we lost in Adam, existence in the image and likeness of God, we regained in Jesus Christ.”⁸⁶ “He sanctified each stage of life by making likeness to Himself. He came to save all through His own person, all, that is, who through Him are reborn to God: infants, children, boys, young men and old. Therefore He passed through every stage of life. He was made an infant for infants, sanctifying infancy; a child among children, sanctifying childhood.” This way he reconciled humanity through himself to God (2 Cor. 5:19) by sanctifying every stage of life, uniting all things in himself (Eph. 1:10).⁸⁷

In the words of Thomas Aquinas, “The mystery of the Incarnation was not effected through God being changed in any way from the unchanging state in which He had been from eternity, but through His having united Himself to the creatures in a new way, or rather through having united it to Himself.”⁸⁸ God retains His

transcendence even during the life period of the Incarnation. Jesus said, “You are from below; I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world” (Jn. 8:23). In this sense he was not bound by the limitation of this world. The Divine Incarnation establishes faith, increases hope, shows His love for us, sets an example of righteousness, and bestows full participation in Divinity on mankind. “The fact that God was willing to unite human nature to Himself” shows “that man can be united to God by intellect, and see Him immediately.”⁸⁹ Nevertheless, “The soul of Christ is a part of human nature, it cannot possibly have omnipotence.... since the soul of Christ is of an inferior nature to the Divine Nature, the likeness of things are not received in the soul of Christ in the perfection and strength they had in the Divine Nature. And hence it is that the knowledge of Christ’s soul is inferior to Divine knowledge as regards manner of knowing, for God knows things more perfectly than the soul of Christ; and also as regards the number of things known, since the soul of Christ does not know all that God can do.”⁹⁰

The French-Swiss leader of the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin (1509-64) discerned that the *Old Testament* prophets experienced God, “not in all His reality and greatness, but in accordance with the dispensation which He thought best, and which He accommodated to the capacity of man.”⁹¹ Calvin’s doctrine of accommodation indicates that God adapts His revelations, “according to our capacity for understanding them, not according to what they are.”⁹² Jesus makes his teachings understandable to the most astute people and to ordinary people. If God “wished to speak in his own language, would mortal creatures have been able to bear it?”⁹³ “If we heard God speaking to us in His majesty, it would be useless to us, for due to our limited capacity we would understand nothing. Therefore, since we are carnal, He has to stutter or otherwise, He would not be understood by us.”⁹⁴

A hypothesis that has been rejected by most Christian theologians is Isaac A. Dorner (1809-84) a German Lutheran’s, “theory of a gradual or progressive Incarnation.” Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) the former President of Calvin Theological Seminary writes, “According to him [Dorner] the Incarnation was not an act consummated at the moment of the conception of Jesus, but a gradual process by which the Logos joined Himself in an ever-increasing measure to the unique and representative Man (virtually a new creation), Christ Jesus, until the full union was consummated at the time of the resurrection.” The *Bible* states, “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk. 2:52; cf. 1:80; 2:40). A union between the Divine and human natures is accomplished by a gradual communication of the Logos to Jesus, mediated through his human consciousness.

His nature was at first incomplete and gradually he became the God-man over his lifetime. This view has been rejected due to the fact that Biblical scripture does not support it. Jesus became a God-man when he incarnated in a human body (Phil. 2:7) and he was born as the “Son of God” (Lk. 1:35). This hypothesis assumes the Nestorian belief that Jesus was composed of two separate natures (Divine and human). Augustus Strong points out this idea mistakenly assumes, “When God becomes man he ceases to be God” and mistakes “an incomplete consciousness of the union for an incomplete union” of God-man.⁹⁵

For the American theologian Augustus Strong (1836-1921), “The human Christ even on earth had the power to be, to know, and to do, as God. That this power was latent, or was rarely manifested, was the result of the self-chosen state of humiliation upon which the God-man had entered.”⁹⁶ “The humiliation, as the scriptures seem to show, consisted: In that act of the pre-existent Logos by which he gave up his Divine glory with the Father, in order to take a servant-form. In this act, he resigned not the possession, nor yet entirely the use, but rather the independent exercise, of the Divine attributes.... In the continuous surrender, on the part of the God-man, so far as his human nature was concerned, of the exercise of those Divine powers with which it was endowed by virtue of its union with the Divine, and in the voluntary acceptance, which followed upon this, of temptation, suffering and death.”⁹⁷

Christian theologians like Louis Berkhof clarify, “The humanized Son, self-emptied of His Divine attributes, could no longer be a Divine subsistence in the Trinitarian life.... As to His essential being the Logos was exactly the same before and after the Incarnation. The verb *egeneto* in John 1:14 (the Word *became* flesh) certainly does not mean that the Logos changed into flesh, and thus altered His essential nature, but simply that He took on that particular character, that He acquired an additional form, without in anyway changing His original nature. He remained the infinite and unchangeable Son of God.”⁹⁸

For Jurgen Moltmann (b. 1926) the German theologian the Divine Incarnation “is the self-communication of the good. It is the power of good to go out of itself, to enter into other being, to participate in other being, and to give itself for other beings.” God communicates Himself disclosing His own being. Because of His holy love He subjects himself to human suffering. Through suffering, His love, liberates, delivers, and redeems. “God did not merely want to communicate Himself to Himself,” but to humanity also. He limits Himself by withdrawing His omnipotence in order to set men and women free. “God enters into the limited, finite situation. Not

only does He enter into this state of being man; He accepts and adopts it Himself, making it part of His own, eternal life. He becomes the human God.... God does not merely enter into the finitude of men and women; He enters into the situation of their sin and God-forsakenness as well. He does not merely enter into this situation; He also accepts and adopts it Himself, making it part of His own eternal life.” “God limits and empties Himself.... With respect to God's omnipotence this means a limitation. But with respect to God's goodness it is a de-limitation. His strength is made perfect in weakness.... God is nowhere greater than in his humiliation. God is nowhere more glorious than in his impotence. God is nowhere more Divine than when he becomes man.”⁹⁹

According to the Apostle Paul's Doctrine of Kenosis (Phil. 2:5-7), Jesus Christ “emptied” himself of some of his Divine qualities in order to become a human. As an act of grace, he temporally renounced his omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, etc. But he did not renounce his personal traits of truthfulness, holiness, and love. After Jesus ascended back to Heaven he fully retained all of these attributes.¹⁰⁰

This is necessary because without some of our limitations, they cannot serve as an example in struggling to realize Brahman-God. This process expresses itself in many ways. Only a part or aspect of the eternally perfect Logos or heavenly Divine Person takes on the self-imposed limitations of human birth. The act of kenosis is the supreme sacrifice of the Avatara-Divine Incarnation. Motivated by compassion alone for suffering humanity, they temporarily renounce much of their power and the bliss of heavenly existence to face the hardships of this life. They adopt an earthly consciousness in order to fully experience our human conditions while on earth.

Due to humility and for other reasons, the Divine Incarnations-Avataras conceal much of his/her divinity during their sojourn on earth. Some people believe that the Incarnation possesses the omni- characteristics, but chooses not to use them. We think of power manifesting through a visible potency. Yet, a person with great spiritual force may show a lack of wealth, scholarship, physical strength, social status, prestige, or a large following.

According to many Westerners the most widespread objection to kenotic (self-emptying) account is that the omni- properties (like omnipotence and omniscience) are Essential attributes of God, so a Divine Incarnations cannot give them up, whether it wants to or not. Can God cease being God? Also, how can the Divine Incarnation be truly God if it lacks these Essential properties? The Incarnation must

renounce these traits to be fully human and take on the limitations of a human body and mind. How does it temporarily abandon these Essential Divine attributes and later regain them? Does the Incarnation retain his self-identity through this radical changing process?¹⁰¹ It seems like a contradiction to think of omnipotence as a power to limit ones own omnipotence. It does retain the Divine attributes of truthfulness, holiness, and moral purity.

These concerns are fully explainable within the context of reincarnation. In the rebirth process we and the Avatara (Divine Incarnation) temporarily lose our former mental abilities, which for us are the essential properties of being an adult. A person might have been an outstanding intellectual, leader or athlete in a prior life. In this life, these talents are involved in seed form in the baby, child, and adolescent.

As we process through the life process we regain our former virtues. Humans from conception undergo a developmental character and intellectual process reaching maturity in their twenties or later. A continuous self-identity is retained between the mature adult who is reborn as an embryo and a baby, because the same subtle body pervades both of them. This self-identity does not require memory at the conscious level though it might exist at the unconscious level. Certainly most people have no conscious memory of their prior existence.

Similarly with the Avatara-Divine Incarnation his/her former spiritual perfection and enlightenment are involved when they are born, existing in a potential state (existential kenosis). In their childhood, they have some awareness of their Divinity. As they recapitulate the evolutionary process over the life cycle, their former illumination is gradually actualized. Likewise, for a genius the potential is there at birth, but is not manifested. Jesus had a spiritual experience when he was baptized by John the Baptist (Mk. 1:9-11). On the conscious level, Jesus (his human nature) gradually regained his former glory, the awakening of the perfected pre-existent Christ (his Divine nature) that had been involved within him. Irenaeus theory of recapitulation stated above attempts to explain why Jesus the Divine Incarnation went through the birth process instead of coming to the earth as an adult.

Another Western objection is that immutability is an Essential attribute of God, so an Incarnation cannot change and lose any Divine attributes. We answer that Brahman-God's intrinsic nature is immutable, while Its extrinsic nature includes the omni- attributes involve change.

We might think of an Avatara as having a single mind with a perfect superconscious Divine aspect and a conscious earthly human aspect. The human

expression is imperfect and is subject to growth. The Avatara concurrently focuses part of its mind in the Divine realm and a portion at the human level.

Nagasena (c. fl. 100 B.C.) an Indian Buddhist believed that the Gautama the Buddha was potentially omniscient. According to this concept, Buddha's knowledge was limited but he possessed the capacity to know whatever he wanted to comprehend.¹⁰² Jesus performed many miracles and expressed the idea that with perfect faith one could move a mountain (Mk. 11:22-23). These factors suggest that a Divine Incarnation may possess the faculties of potential omniscience and potential omnipotence, meaning in spite of their limited finite nature they can know or do anything they want to. Ramakrishna mentioned, "I can understand everything that is in the scriptures ... the One who is within this body of mine teaches me everything."¹⁰³ Brahman (God) "revealed to me what is in the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Tantras*, and other scriptures."¹⁰⁴ Since the Avatara is interested in only spiritual things, it might not want to be fully omniscient since that would include full knowledge of all secular and nonspiritual matters.

The process of kenosis also occurs in a mystical vision, when Brahman-God sets aside Its majesty, to reveal Itself to the worshiper. In a religious experience Sri Chaitanya an Incarnation of Bhagavat (God) revealed to Rupa Goswami (1489-1564) the stages of Divine love (bhakti), which correspond to the various expressions of human love. They include establishing a friendship with Lord Krishna, worshipping him with a parental feeling as one's child with deep affection, or as a lover and the beloved. In these loving relationships, a sense of equality with the deity is established, without a feeling of superiority or inferiority. Pranaya is a stage of Divine love where the worshiper is without fear or awe, and experiences a feeling of equality with the Lord.¹⁰⁵

After his passing the human Ramakrishna entered the Brahmaloaka becoming the Divine Ramakrishna.

Endnotes

¹ Most Biblical quotations cited are from *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version* (hereafter HB) (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1952). To create a list of parallel Indian-Christian scriptural passages used in this book the most used sources were: F. Lorinser, *Die Bhagavad-Gita* (Breslau: G. Porsch, 1869), pp. 273-85; Adolf Kaegi, *The Rigveda* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1886), pp. 197-98; E. Washburn Hopkins, *India Old and New* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901),

pp. 149-57; George Haas, "Recurrent and Parallel Passages in the Principal *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 42 (1922), pp. 1-43; Wade Hatcher, ed., *The Bhagavad Gita and the Bible* (Seattle: Peanut Butter Publishing, 1992); Andrew Wilson, ed., *World Scripture* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1995).

² Sudhindra Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaishnavism* (Calcutta: Academic Publishers, 1969), pp. 69, 167-68.

³ Dasgupta, IV, pp. 410-11.

⁴ SSR, pp. 215-22.

⁵ GSR, p. 180e.

⁶ RAWSH, p. 395.

⁷ GSR, p. 726d.

⁸ SSR, p. 215.

⁹ GSR, pp. 359b, 382s, 789oq, 361c.

¹⁰ GSR, p. 864d.

¹¹ GSR, p. 864.

¹² GSR, p. 797d.

¹³ Swami Prabhavananda, *Spiritual Heritage of India*, pp. 122-23.

¹⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernadette_Soubirous

¹⁵ Theodore Maynard, *Saints for Our Times* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1962), p. 4.

¹⁶ CTR, p. 141.

¹⁷ A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul Arabi* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1979), pp. 74-75.

¹⁸ CG, IV, 39.

¹⁹ ST, I, 43.3.

²⁰ ST, III, 6.2.

²¹ ST, III, 1.1-2; 5.4; 6.1.

²² CG, IV, 55.14.

²³ ST, III, 14.1; 15.1.

²⁴ Saradananda, V:4.9, p. 774.

²⁵ GSR, pp. 243f, 355f, 432n, 715bg, 726d.

²⁶ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Chalcedon; <https://www.iep.utm.edu/incarnat/>

²⁷ Web: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/incarnat/>

²⁸ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Man_theory

²⁹ Web: <https://dryogeshsharma.wordpress.com/2017/03/08/bhagavad-gita-and-impact-on-western-mind/>

³⁰ CW, VIII:264; RAWSH, p. 226; BRMIC (Feb. 2011), p. 105.

³¹ RAWSH, p. 144; BRMIC (Feb. 2011), pp. 104-05.

³² GSR, pp. 942q-43.

³³ RAWSH, pp. 54, 45.

³⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1910, 1980), pp. 576-79.

³⁵ ST, III, 3.5-6; Noel Sheth, S.J., "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison," *Philosophy East and West* 52 (2002), p. 107.

³⁶ Tipple, pp. 229, 259; Swami Apurvananda, *Swami Vijnanananda* (Allahabad: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984), pp. 41, 117. Emma Curtis Hopkins (1849-1925) the founder of the New Thought movement also believed in a Christian Trinity of Father, Son, and Mother. She considered the Holy Spirit to be a feminine principle identical with the Shekinah of the Hebrew Scriptures. Gail Harley, *Emma Curtis Hopkins* (Syracuse University Press, 2002), pp. 63, 82. She passed this idea onto her student Charles Fillmore the co-founder of the Unity Church. Cf. Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_of_the_Holy_Spirit

³⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1911, 1960), pp. 245-342; A. H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), pp. 453-56; Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_of_the_Holy_Spirit

³⁸ Web: www.adi-shakti.org; Web: www.adishakti.org/text_files/holy_spirit.htm

³⁹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakti

⁴⁰ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shekhinah

⁴¹ *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chad Meister And Paul Copan (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 557.

⁴² Kelly, p. 247.

⁴³ Hardon, pp. 128-29.

⁴⁴ Web: www.iep.utm.edu/trinity/; plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/;
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity

⁴⁵ Saradananda, I:4.1, 7-8, 10, pp. 102, 105, 107.

⁴⁶ Saradananda, I:3.21, pp. 100-01; IV:3.25, pp. 615-16; Satprakashananda, pp. 48-50.

⁴⁷ NCE, XIV, pp. 532-39; Saradananda, I:4.9-10, pp. 105-07: 1:5.1, p. 108.

⁴⁸ Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure: II. The Breviloquium, V. Collations on the Six Days*, tr. Jose de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guide Press, 1963, 1970), II, p. 53.

⁴⁹ James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909, 1930), VII, pp. 194, 197; Klaus Klostermaier, *Mythologies and Philosophies of Salvation in the Theistic Tradition of India* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), p. 109; MB, I, 67.

⁵⁰ Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961), pp. 245, 315-16; CHI, III, p. 375; Shishir Ghose, *Lord Gauranga* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1961), p. 58. Sri Chaitanya (1485/86-1533) was a contemporary of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546). It is of comparative historical interest that they both rebelled against the elitist and somewhat dry scholastic intellectualism of the Middle Ages, and sought to create a personally oriented religion for a large number of people. Their methods and solution to the religious problems of their times varied considerably.

⁵¹ GSR, p. 933m.

⁵² GSR, p. 182.

-
- ⁵³ Pravrajika Anandaprana, *A Historical Record: From Conversations with Swami Prabhavananda* (Hollywood, CA: Unpublished Manuscript, 1987).
- ⁵⁴ Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1997), pp. 589-91.
- ⁵⁵ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 108.
- ⁵⁶ Saradananda, IV:3.29, p. 618.
- ⁵⁷ Advaita Ashrama, *The Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1955), pp. 295-308; Brahmacharini Usha, *A Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1971), pp. 37, 53, 58-59.
- ⁵⁸ John Delaney, ed., *A Woman Clothed With the Sun* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 215, 226-27; Vergilius Ferm, ed., *An Encyclopedia of Religion* (Paterson, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, 1959), p. 473.
- ⁵⁹ Delaney (1961), pp. 7, 18, 23-33.
- ⁶⁰ SSR, p. 221.
- ⁶¹ RAWSH, p. 169.
- ⁶² Saradananda, II:2.3-4, p. 161; Swami Akhilananda, *Hindu View of Christ* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 203.
- ⁶³ Satprakashananda, pp. 36-38, 41.
- ⁶⁴ Prabhavananda1, p. 120; Prabhavananda2, pp. 41-43.
- ⁶⁵ Akhilananda (1949), pp. 24-26.
- ⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings In Moral Philosophy*, ed. Lewis Beck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1788, 1949), pp. 73, 189-91.
- ⁶⁷ NCE, VII, p. 395.
- ⁶⁸ NCE, VII, p. 924.
- ⁶⁹ Saradananda, II:7.9, p. 219; GSR, pp. 18-19, 760; SSR, pp. 237-38.
- ⁷⁰ NCE, VII, p. 926.
- ⁷¹ GSR, p. 189c.
- ⁷² GSR, p. 359a.
- ⁷³ GSR, pp. 760b, 243f.
- ⁷⁴ Sri Sarada Devi, *The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, tr. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986), p. 74; Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957), pp. 62-63.
- ⁷⁵ Shivananda, pp. 9, 221.
- ⁷⁶ Saradananda, V:4.11, p. 775.
- ⁷⁷ Saradananda, III:5.13, p. 480.
- ⁷⁸ Saradananda, Introduction:1.10, p. 72.
- ⁷⁹ Saradananda, Introduction:2.9, p. 151.
- ⁸⁰ Saradananda, Introduction:1.11, p. 72.
- ⁸¹ Saradananda, II:2.3-4, p. 161.
- ⁸² Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1959), pp. 221-

22.

- ⁸³ Arthur Osborne, *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism* (London: Rider, 1959), p. 142.
- ⁸⁴ Swam Prabhavananda, *A Historical Record From Conversations with Swami Prabhavananda*, ed. Pravrajika Anandaprana (Santa Barbara, CA: VSSC, Unpublished Manuscript, 1987). pp. 137-38.
- ⁸⁵ ANF, III, 19:1, p. 448.
- ⁸⁶ ANF, III, 22:4, p. 391.
- ⁸⁷ ANF, III, 22:3 in Vadakkekara (1981), pp. 341-42.
- ⁸⁸ ST, Sup. III, 1:1.
- ⁸⁹ CG, IV, 54.
- ⁹⁰ ST, III, 13.1.
- ⁹¹ Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982), pp. 3-4.
- ⁹² William Bouwsma, *John Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 124.
- ⁹³ Bouwsma (1988), p. 125.
- ⁹⁴ Wallace (1982), pp. 3-4, 7; Bouwsma (1988), pp. 124-25.
- ⁹⁵ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959, 1984), pp. 329-30; Strong, pp. 688-89.
- ⁹⁶ Strong (1976), p. 696.
- ⁹⁷ Strong (1976), p. 703.
- ⁹⁸ Berkhof (1959, 1984), pp. 329, 334.
- ⁹⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco; Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 57-60, 108, 118-19.
- ¹⁰⁰ Web: newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Kenosis
- ¹⁰¹ Peter Forrest, "The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis," *Religious Studies*, (36) (June, 2000), pp. 127-40.
- ¹⁰² Sinha, I, pp. 499-500.
- ¹⁰³ Saradananda, II:8.14, p. 232.
- ¹⁰⁴ GSR, p. 830m.
- ¹⁰⁵ Sambidananda Das, *Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* (Madras: Sree Gaudiya Math, 1961), pp. 169-72; Prabhavananda¹, pp. 387-88; Swami Swahananda, *Meditation and Other Spiritual Disciplines* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1997), p. 156.