Religious *a priori* is a term, which refers to something like an inherent capacity in man for religion that is the presupposition of all particular and concrete religions. All religions represent a peculiar and unique formation of a feeling of absolute dependence. From the time immemorial there has been a keen desire for peace and harmony in human mind. It is true that there have been innumerable wars in the past, but man has always thought in terms of establishing peace and harmony in the society, country and the world at large. Religious harmony as a matter of fact has been a necessary condition for progress. We exist at a time when we are deeply conscious of Pluralism in the world – Pluralism of human situations and needs, of varied religious and secular cultures, with different tradition of metaphysics, ideologies and worldviews in terms of which humanity themselves seek to express their commitment to and
confession of God. This is specially true in Indian society. Ours is not only a religiously pluralistic society but also increasingly becoming secular. The Hindu element is most powerful and pervasive in the Indian pluralistic situation whereas other religions are comparatively weak. This poses a challenge before us - Indians, to consider all faiths seriously, to set involved in religious and ideological conflicts in society and its search for a better world. The approach of adherents of various religions to each other has always been a problem. What is God doing in all religions? A generation or so ago most of the population believed that their own religion is unique and true and that all other religions are false.

Knowledge as opposed to mere ignorance has been the basis for all religious fanaticism. This is what most 'religious' people may feel. But today, when we know so much more about the 'other' religions, the spiritual geniuses who were their founders or interpreters, their scriptures, their mystics and their prayers and the deep impression they have stamped on the character of their
followers, the facile negative answer is no longer acceptable. There were so many barriers in between adherents of various faiths, regarding ‘exclusivism’ and ‘all inclusive’ attitude. If we accept the Gandhian formula of *Sarvadharma samabhāva* (equality of all religions), then there will not be any possibility of religious clash or communal arrogance. The role of religion is very pertinent in this juncture. All religions are valid pathways to salvation and pave the way to God realisation or extinction of darkness.

In Indian situation, we have to accept the relativity of all human perceptions of God. If so no religion can claim superiority over others. Each religion offers a perspective which is unique and indispensable. Each and every religion of the world complements each other because they mediate a saving revelation and offering its insights to reach a fulfilling relation to the divine. Since all religions in some sense are committed to the salvation of humanity, the existence of each religion is essential to the success of others. Since the perspective of the thinker
conditions all human thinking, each person is free to embrace whatever religion he wants. Recognition of such relativity makes for caution, modesty and forbearance towards those whom we disagree.

God's self-disclosure in Christu and Kṛṣṇa is culturally relative and accepting this revelation as relative is not denying the absoluteness of the divine truth, and this relativity is a strict implication of Christian and Hindu theology itself. God's ways of drawing the world to Himself are as various as the individuals and groups who make up God's world.

What is the Doctrine and nature of Divine Grace in Christianity and Hinduism especially in relation to other doctrines? Why is BhP. so important in the Indian religious heritage? Why the doctrine of Grace so important to Bhakti theology? Among all the Purāṇas the Bhāgavata occupies a very important place by virtue of its being the primary scripture of the medieval bhakti Movement and the one which has been studied by various Vedānta Schools. From our investigation made above
regarding the concept of divine grace in Bhāgavata Purāṇa, it is most significant to find that the Bhāgavata Purāṇa starts and ends with God¹ who is the āśraya and the highest reality. The Bhāgavata emphatically states that one cannot attain him or reach the ultimate goal unless and until God shows his loving mercy. The call of his flute attracts not only Gopis of Vrindāvanam but the whole creation also. Hence the divine grace is seen to stand as the only foundation for the whole cosmic process and, as such, the central theme of Bhāgavata.

This concept of divine grace necessarily forces us to affirm once again the gracious nature of a personal God, which is explicit in Bhāgavata Purāṇa as we have discussed earlier. Even though some critics may argue for an advaitic import in Bhāgavata, serious study of the book speaks loudly that the Bhāgavata has expounded the philosophy of personalism. We have to accept the predominance of a personal God who is the supreme reality in Bhāgavata. For the Bhāgavata Purāṇa God is primarily a God of Grace and it says, ‘Poshanam
tadanugrahah \(^2\) – “His grace is our food.” This divine grace expresses the Vaiṣṇava bhaktās all pervading conviction that he is the object of a divine benevolence and the conviction itself leads to manifold theologies of the nature of the relationship between man and God. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa perceives the whole world process as an expression of God’s unending grace. As we have seen in the earlier part of our study the grace of God is seen as a constant reality working not only in the spheres of human life and destiny but in the whole cosmic process also. Thus it is implicit in Bhāgavata Purāṇa that the grace of God comes to humans through various ways, especially, affirms the Bhāgavata, in the spiritual instructions of an adept guru, and the ‘mahat sanga’ there are a divine anugraha. While almost all of the purānās speak of the traditionally accepted ten avatārās of Vishnu, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa speaks of countless avatārās that God has taken, because of his abundant mercy towards humanity and nature. In order to keep the balance steady, he takes the initiative to descend to this earth in
various means and forms, and thus saves the earth. The ultimate philosophy behind the avatāra in Bhāgavata Purāṇa, as in Gita is the loving concern of God, towards his creation. The self-revelation of God through various avatārās is of crucial importance in Bhāgavata Purāṇa and is considered as the Grace of God. Among the various lilāvatārās of Vishnu, Kṛṣṇa is given the highest place, because according to Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the fulness of Vishnu is explicit in Kṛṣṇa avatāra who is the origin (Prabhava) and goal (gati) of the universe and the one to be known (Vedyan Pavitram). In Kṛṣṇa we see the greatest lover; and it is on the basis of this love emphasis that we find one can attain Him through loving devotion.

Again, the Grace of God is clearly brought out in the creative process. The Bhāgavata says that only because of the Grace of God, Brahma could create the universe. The very initiative taken by Lord Vishnu in the emergence of Brahma out of his naval lotus itself is an act of love. The proper functioning of the earth, which is the material cause of the universe and all other things, depends upon
the grace of God and they would cease to exist if He became indifferent to them. The creation, sustenance and dissolution of the whole cosmos also is considered as the divine activity of Grace.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa extols bhakti as the most excellent mārga for attaining the ultimate goal, a goal which is open to all in spite of their caste or creed. The whole tone of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is its spiritual concern, which is explained within the framework of bhakti. The other margās such as jñāna, karma and yoga are considered as preparators to the superior one that is bhakti yoga. Bhakti itself is seen as a gift of God and the aspirant is required to strive for the highest form of bhakti, i.e., nirguna bhakti – which supercedes all the human instincts and natural inclination. Divine providence has been at work here. Loving God for His own sake is the highest response one can make towards God. Bhakti is nothing but the fullest faith in a loving and gracious God. We have noted in the forgoing chapters that Bhakti is the highest fulfilment of man and as such
in the means and the end in itself. In other words bhakti is looked at as both sādhana and sādhya in Bhāgavata. Our response to God's graciousness is to be complete surrender towards His will and thus have a union of love (bhakti-lakṣana-yoga) with Him. Therefore, the object of the bhaktās devotion is the Supreme God who is conceived as the embodiment of Grace.

Although faith in the grace of God appears somewhat vitiated by the problem of the nature and function of the law of Karma, the Bhāgavatās view is that the law of Karma is not inexorable, and it is subordinate to the supremacy of the Lord. Apart from the Lord, there is no functioning of Karma, i.e., it is too dependent on the Lord. The Lord is completely independent and He acts according to His will, which is His Grace (Kripa). What the devotee ought to do is to accept His great gift of love.

The question of the relevance of the doctrine of divine grace and its specific nature in Hindu religious tradition is very pertinent from a Christian perspective also. The intervention of God in Human history out of his
mercy and steadfast fast love is the gist of Biblical message. The sending of His only begotten Son – Jesus Christ – by God the Father (Pita) to this wretched cosmos is depicted in Bible as the manifestation of God’s abundant mercy towards mankind. The salvific act made possible by Jesus Christ by his manger birth, humiliation, death on the cross and resurrection is the climax of God’s sheer mercy. The avatāra Kṛṣṇa in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the avatāra Christu in the New Testament are somewhat similar in many aspects.

‘Sola gracia’ (Grace alone) is the only way to attain moksha according to Christianity. Ardent faith in the Grace of God is the corner stone of Biblical revelation. Salvation is the gift of Divine Grace and God bestows it to whom he wants. This whole world is the household of God where he acts openly or hidden. All human history must be viewed as Heilgeschichte. To be a Christian or Hindu or Muslim or Budhist, to be religious, is a creative act of participation in a community in motion. Christian or Hindu must not employ a monolithic concept of what
God realized in Christu or Kṛṣṇa. There are similarities and dissimilarities between the Christian and Hindu concepts of Grace. No attempt is made here to compare and contrast this doctrine in its distinctive forms because it is beyond the scope of this thesis. From our study of the concept of Divine Grace in Bhāgavata Purāṇa, it is clear that nobody can ignore the reality of the concept of Divine Grace in Hinduism in all its distinctness. Faithful reliance upon God's grace and the clinging to it through utmost bhakti have led many souls to God in Hinduism and this doctrine of Divine Grace is still of immense significance in the religious experience of the Hindus of the Bhāgavata traditions. In summing up we can affirm that 'Divine Grace' is the central pivot around which rotates the whole story of Bhāgavata and the Bible. The centrality and cruciality of the message of 'Divine Grace' is to be understood in striving together (Vasudaiva kudumbakam) for a better humanity.
Notes and References

1. ........... Satyam param dhimahi 1.1.1.b & 12.13.19b

2. 2.10.4

3. *Heilgeschichte:* Comes from the combination of two German words, that taken together mean 'Salvation history.' In the context of theology this refers to the revelatory and saving acts of God whereby he has sought to save the world.