PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to study the concept of Divine Grace in Christianity and Hinduism with special reference to Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

The specific sense of the word 'Grace' both in Hinduism and Christianity is God’s unmerited free, spontaneous love for the whole humanity revealed and made effective through the avatāra of Krṣṇa and Christu respectively. It is an indubitable fact that Bhāgavata Purāṇa is one of the most popular and influential among the Hindu Sacred Scriptures because its primary concern is man’s ultimate goal and the bhakti path by which he reaches that goal. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which gives the essence of all Śrutis, shows the path of pure devotion. ‘I pervade all through in and out of the universe’ God himself says emphasizing the core of the message of this holy book.
The compiler of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa takes Sri Kṛṣṇa's life and teachings as the gist of all scriptures. Though the book deals five topics, which characterize Purāṇas, its main and central theme is God. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is a gospel of Divine Life. Its philosophy is based upon actual and direct experience of the Absolute Reality by a host of disciples. The Lord Himself during His incarnation as Kṛṣṇa has declared that all people can get closer to him by hearing or reading the Bhāgavatam. When the Lord was about to leave this world after fulfilling the objectives of His incarnation, the saint Uddhava and others lamented as to who will be there to guide them. The Lord said one could see Him in the form of Srimad Bhāgavatam. That is why this scripture has been considered as great by one and all.

From the Christian perspective also the question of whether there is a doctrine of Grace in the Hindu traditions and what is the specific nature of that doctrine is of great importance. Theologically, therefore, the study
of the role of Divine Grace in the general frame work of Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Bible is worthwhile.

Methodology followed in this research is primarily exegesis of the scriptures and doctrinal analysis. Apart from that, different methods have been employed to collect the required data pertaining to this study. The researcher visited a number of places and institutions such as United Theological College Bangalore, Dharmaram College Bangalore, Ecumenical Christian Centre Bangalore, St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary Vadavathoor, Kottayam, Narasimha Swamy Temple Manganam Kottayam, Parasakthi Temple Kollad Kottayam, Thirunakkara Mahadeva Temple Kottayam, Marthoma Seminary Library Kottayam, C.S.I. Library and Archives Centre Kottayam, Orthodox Theological Seminary Kottayam, Bishop Mani Theological Institute Kottayam, T.M.A.M. Orientation and Research Centre Manganam Kottayam, Christian Education Department of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, Hyderabad etc., to gather materials for this study. Also participated in a number of religious discourses both
in Hindu Temples and Christian Churches. The Researcher had the opportunity of effective participation in the 'Parliament of all Religions' conducted by the School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies on Martyr's Day this year. Involvement in the U.G.C. Sponsored International Seminar on 'The New Socio-Economic Order and World Peace – A Gandhian Critique (23 – 26th November 2000) conducted by the Mahatma Gandhi University provided deeper insights into various doctrinal and sociological concepts.

There remains for me a pleasant duty of acknowledgements. My sincere thanks are due to my Supervisor and Guide Dr. M. Maharajan, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., LL.B., Reader, School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, whose advice and guidance in writing this thesis for Ph.D. Degree has been invaluable. I desire to express my profound gratitude to Dr. M. Maharajan who kindly read the entire manuscripts of my thesis and corrected it wherever necessary at the time of my submission for the Degree.
My thanks are due to Dr. A.K. Chirappanath, Professor and Director, School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, who allowed me to do research and also provided all facilities to complete my research.

I thank Smt. Geethakumari and Meera, Librarians, School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University for the help rendered by them.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not express my thanks and gratitude to the staff and non-teaching staff of the School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam for their sincere co-operation in my endeavour.

I extend my special thanks to Most Rev. Dr. K.J. Samuel, Moderator, Church of South India, Madras for providing paternal suggestions and advice.

I am grateful to Rt. Rev. Dr. Sam Mathew, Bishop Madhya Kerala Diocese who granted me permission to do
this research. My heartfelt thanks are also due to Bishop Dr. M.C. Mani of the C.S.I. for his constant encouragement for my higher studies.

I also acknowledge the help given to me by Mrs. Kuttiyamma Maharajan for the completion of my Ph.D. Thesis.

Thanks are also due to my friends Prof. Dr. C.I. Issac, Prof. Dr. Y. Mathew and Prof. George Philip (Department of History, C.M.S College, Kottayam) for their support and encouragement.

The work would not have been completed without the commitment and labour of Mr. P.V. Mathew of the Vikas Computer Centre, Kumaranalloor, Kottayam, Kerala. My thanks are due to him and his colleagues.

I am much indebted to my wife, Elsamma, Daughters Blessy, Ressy and Tessy for their timely help and co-operation in completing my thesis.

MATHEW VARKEY