CHAPTER V
THE SALVATION-VALUE OF AVATARA AND INCARNATION

In the second and third chapters of this part we have tried to have a close view of the nature of avatara and incarnation, and of the avatāra and the word-incarnate. It has been hinted at there that the inquiry into the main purpose of the divine descent can contribute much to the understanding of its nature. In the present chapter our attention will be centred on its salvation-value, salvation understood in the sense in which it has been explained in the second part.

In the previous chapter we have seen how the theanthropos-value is operative in the concrete life situations exemplified and highlighted by the lives of saints. We have seen how it has permeated through and through the intellectual, affective and corporeal aspects of their lives. Indeed, these saints experienced a sort of identity with Kṛṣṇa and Christ. And this experience of identity with the theanthropoi according to both of the religious traditions, prepared them for the ultimate liberation.

In the BG the establishment of Dharma is given as the primary purpose of the avatāra. But dharma is considered not as an end in itself but as intimately connected with or even as in subordination to mokṣa. Hence to assess the salvation-value of avatāra we shall first try to get into the meaning of Dharma in the BG. Then we shall inquire into the way as to how Lord Kṛṣṇa helps man to...
achieve his mukti by the reestablishment of dharma.

With regard to the NT we shall try to find out the reason why Jesus Christ is called savior. For this end we shall first try to get a deeper insight into the meanings of the terms used in the NT like redemption, expiation etc. to express this salvific function of Christ. In order to have a somewhat systematic understanding of this function some of the categories accepted in the Christian tradition, like sacrifice, divinization and satisfaction will be examined. Since there are many authors in the NT, and all of them wrote about the salvation-value of the Christ-event from different historico-geographical situations adapting themselves to the peculiarities of the socio-religious etc. situations of the people, the treatment of this question is bound to be rather complex. Within our limited scope what can be done is to give a rather general idea of this question by way of an outline without going deep into the matter.

Both the BG and the NT seem to speak of salvation through Krsna and Christ respectively in an exclusivistic sense. How to understand this? How to assess the salvation-value of Krsna from the NT standpoint and that of Christ from the BG standpoint? Our limited scope allows only a sketchy treatment also of this issue.

A. THE SALVATION-VALUE OF KRSNA

We are familiar with BG 4:7-8 where the purpose of avatara is clearly and explicitly declared. Since these verses have been
cited already when the nature of avatāra was treated here it would be enough for us to remember some of the key terms contained in them. In these two verses the key concept is *dharma*. In verse 7 the Lord says that his divine descent takes place when there is the decline of dharma (*dharmsya ṣcānaḥ*) and the rise or upheaval of adharma (*adhyutthananam adharmasya*). In the following verse the purpose of his coming is said to be for the establishment of dharma (*dharmaṣaṁsthananarthaḥ*). The protection of the good and the destruction of evil men are part of the work of the "establishment" of dharma. What is dharma then in the BG? Has it any connection with mukti? If so what is the nature of this connection?

1. The Concept of Dharma in the BG

P.V. Kane, perhaps the greatest authority on the Dharmasastra literature, writes on the concept of dharma: "Dharma is one of those Sanskrit words that defy all attempts at an exact rendering in English or any other tongue. That word has passed through several vicissitudes. It has undergone so many evolutions and has so many different meanings that any simplistic translation would be misleading. We shall first make some general considerations on the concept of dharma especially in the light of the Sruti literature and then we shall try to get a fairly definite idea about the Gita-concept of dharma.

a) In General

There is hardly any dispute about the etymology of this concept. It comes from the root *dṛṣṭ*- *dharati* or *dharvati* which means to
bear, hold, preserve, carry, maintain, survive etc. (MW). In
the Rgveda sacrifices are considered as the primeval Dharma
(1:164:50, and also 43) Dharma in the masculine would mean
"supporter" and "upholder" (Rg 1:187:1;10:92:2). 'Svadharma' is
applied to the god Agni (Rg 3:21:2) and 'satyadharma' to the gods
like Savitar (10:34:8;10:139:3) and Agni (1:12:7) and emphasizing
their regularity.

Kane considers rta as a concept very similar to dharma often
with identical meaning. Rta too mean the regular order of the
cosmos (Rg 4:23:8-10). Mitra and Varuna are considered to be
the guardians of rta (Rg. 5:63:7, also 1:7:66:12). Satya and rta
are identified in Rg 9:113:4, having the same source, viz. tapas
(Rg 10:190:1). In 5:63:7 dharma and rta coalesce. In Br. Up
(1:14:14) dharma is identified with satya. Chând Up (2:23:1) speaks
of the three branches (trayo dharma-skandah) of dharma which Kane
interprets as referring to the first three stages of life.3 In
Medhatithi's commentary on Manu speaks of five five branches for
dharma viz. varnadharma, áśramadharma, varnasmañadharma, naimittik-
dharma and gunadharma, as a further evolution of the concept
in Chând. Up 2:23:1. Having analysed various śruti texts Kane says
that the "most obligations of a man, his standard of conduct as a
member of the Árya community, as a member of one of the castes,
as a person in a particular stage of life".

Manu gives the following definition of dharma: "Learn that
sacred law which is followed by men learned (in the Veda) and
assented to in their hearts by the virtuous, who are ever exempt
from hatred and inordinate affection" (Manu 2:1).6 The following
translation by Kane is preferable to this: "Know Dharma to be that which is practised by the learned that lead a moral life, that are free from hatred and partiality, and that is accepted by their hearts (i.e. conscience)"? Manu's concept of dharma will become more clear in the context of his statement about the sources of dharma: "The whole Veda is the (first) source of the sacred law, next the tradition and the virtuous conduct of those who know the (Veda further), also the customs of holy men, and (finally) self-satisfaction "(2:6). By the expression self-satisfaction and acceptance by the heart Manu seems to mean the moral conscience of Western philosophy, as Kane interprets. In *Hitopadeśa* dharma is distinguished as something specifically human contrasting it to other activities of man like eating, sleeping, sexual intercourse etc. which are common to man and to animals. Here, dharma could be translated as 'value'. *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* defines dharma as "that from which results happiness and final beatitude".

In brief what are the elements of the concept of dharma? This concept, especially in its close connection or even identification with the concepts of *ṛta* and *satya* has the meaning of orderliness in opposition to chaos, both in the cosmic level as a whole and in the specifically human level in particular. Then it begins to include man's relationship with the transcendent being who is responsible for this order. And since this relationship was expressed chiefly through the sacrifices, and similar rituals, these in a special way began to be known as dharma. Man's ethical behaviour at the service of social harmony and orderliness are also known as
dharma. In this sense, dharma could be translated into English as value in its axionoetic sense. In its various stages of evolution the underlying and unifying factor was the meaning of order or orderliness in man's relationship with God, with his fellow-men and with the cosmos as a whole. And it always stood in intimate connection with man's self-realisation chiefly in terms of 'mukti' understood, of course, differently in the different stages of the evolution of man's religious consciousness.

In the light of the above study we can understand the following description of dharma given by RadhaKrishnan:

Dharma literally means mode of being. It is the essential nature of a being that determines its mode of behaviour. So long as our conduct is in conformity with our essential nature, we are acting in the right way. Adharma is nonconformity to our nature. If the harmony of the world is derived from the conformity of all beings their respective natures, the disharmony of the world is due to their nonconformity.¹⁰

In the light of the teleological argument (not as misinterpreted by Kant) and of the findings of modern ecological research we can say that there is an inner order or finality in every creature from the subatoms to man, and also an exterior finality or order in the interrelationships of all the finite beings. Man by abusing his freedom is capable of causing chaos, and consequently adharma. Aurobindo's interpretation of dharma can provide us with a clearer perspective and greater depth in understanding this concept:
Dharma in the Indian conception is not merely the good, the right, morality and justice, ethics; it is the whole government of all the relations of man with other beings, with Nature, with God, considered from the point of view of a divine principle working itself out in forms and laws of action, form of the inner and the outer life, orderings of relations of every kind in the world. In its primary sense it means a fundamental law of our nature which secretly conditions all our activities, and in this sense each being, type, species, individual, group has its own dharma. Secondly, there is the divine nature which has to develop and manifest in us, and in this sense dharma is the law of the inner working by which that grows in our being. Thirdly, there is the law by which we govern our outgoing thought and action and our relations with each other so as to help both our own growth and that of the human race towards the divine ideal.

b) 'Dharma' in the BG

The BG concept of dharma has to be interpreted in the light of the meanings given to it in the Indian tradition. We shall first recall some of the texts where this concept occurs and then try to understand its content. The very first verse of our sacred book begins with the term "dharmaksetre", and this shows the importance this concept has in the BG. Mention has been made already of 4:7 and 8 where the Lord says that he takes birth to reestablish dharma at its decline. In 11:18 the Lord says that he is the guardian of the eternal dharma which, according to him, is established (pratistha) on him (14:27). In 18:31 and 32 'dharma' is interpreted
in terms of 'ought' and 'ought not' and in 2:31-38 in terms of ksatriya-dharma, as the BG context is the question of the svadharma of a particular individual, namely Arjuna.

The Content of this Concept in the BG.

The Lord speaks of his births with a definite message. His present avatāra is to bring to the consciousness of humanity a "rahasyam uttamaṁ" (sublime mystery, 4:3) which had been first declared by him to Vivasvata (4:1). This "yogam avyayam" had got lost in the course of time (4:3). The Lord declares that the purpose of his avatāra is to establish dharma in its decline or total eclipse. How does he reestablish dharma? The communication of this mysterious, sublime and eternal yoga is intimately connected with the reestablishment of dharma. It was so at the time of Vivasvata and it is so now as he declares the same yoga to Arjuna. Thus it is a sublime message which is not independent of dharma but intimately connected if not identical with it.

Now what is this mysterious, sublime, imperishable yoga which the Lord has declared to his "sakha" in chapter three? It is the message of niskamakarmayoga. This has to be understood in the light of our treatment on the three ways of salvation as complementary in the second part. There we have pointed out how niskamakarmayoga is marga-traya-semanvaya. The Lord insisted the importance of being faithful to one's svadharma (3:35), in Arjuna's case, fighting a righteous war. The Kuruksetra is for him dharmaksetra (1:1). But the imperative to fight (yudhyasva) is enjoined as something done
with total dedication (mayi sarvāni karmani sahyasya, 3:30). If the Lord does not work constantly the world will turn into chaos (utsideyur ime loka, 3:24) which is the same as the destruction of dharma which alone keeps the world in order, as a cosmos rather than a chaos. Man by doing his svadharma contributes to the world order and to total welfare (lokasaṅgraha, 3:25). In short this mysterious yoga is the sublime doctrine of work as worship, as yajña (3:8-16) concentrating all of one's powers and energies on the Lord in bhakti and with the enlightenment with the jñāna.

The Lord begins the ninth chapter too by speaking of a mysterious knowledge (guhyatamam, 9:1). This knowledge which is sovereign secret and supremely sacred (9:2) is called "dharma", i.e. according to dharma (9:2-3). And the central message of this chapter too is that of niskarmakarma. Here this sacred and most sublime message reveals that any work done is according to dharma provided that it is done as an offering, as a yajña (9:27; cf 9:24 and 25). If in the third and fourth chapters this sublime and sacred yoga is not explicitly called dharma but only as intimately connected with dharma, here it is called dharma (9:3; cf 9:2).

The supreme dharma preached by the Lord in chapters 3 and 9 are salvific. For instance after telling Arjuna to do his svadharma of fighting as an offering to him, with no self-ish interest the Lord says that such an action would liberate him (3:31). In 9:2 the practice of this dharma is taught as something leading to eternal
bliss (susukham kartum avyayam). And those who go away from this path of dharma (dharmasya 'sya) will not be released from this bondage. In 9:31 dharmatma and bhakta are identified, and are considered to be on the way of slavation.

From the above study it is fairly clear that the dharma, the establishment of which the Lord came, is primarily niskamakarmayoga. This rather sketchy study giving instances of texts scattered about in different chapters has to be understood in the context of our treatment in the second part, about the complementary aspects of the three margas. And this niskamakarmayoga which is marga-traya-samanvya, is the path to salvation. If therefore, the Lord says that the primary purpose of his avatara is the reestablishment of dharma, he implicitly says that the primary purpose of his descent is to lead people to salvation through the sublime, sacred and mysterious path of niskamakarmayoga. If Ramanuja explains in terms of caturvārṇya and caturārṇa in his commentary on 4:7, he means two of the branches of dharma as understood in the Hindu tradition. Neither the BG nor the Sruti and Smrti traditions teach that varnadharma and ārasadharma exhaust the total content of dharma.

2. Salvation and the Avatārin

a) In Relation with Dharma

In what sense avatāra has bearing on man's UL (Ultimate Liberation)? Aurobindo writes:
If there were not this rising of man into the Godhead to be helped by the descent of God into humanity, Avatarhood for the sake of the Dharma would be an otiose phenomenon, since mere Right, mere justice or standards of virtue can always be upheld by the divine omnipotence through its ordinary means, by great men or great movements, by the life and work of sages and kings and religious teachers, without any actual incarnation.\textsuperscript{12}

What Aurobindo says is that the establishment of dharma could have been achieved without the avatara. Of course, here he means dharma in its restricted sense. Then in what sense avatara would put an absolute necessity in God? We are reluctant to put such absolute necessities in the infinite being, and to put limits in the divine possibilities. Commenting on Sri Swaminarayana's unwillingness to put any restriction in God in choosing different possible ways of saving man J.A.Yajnik writes:

\begin{quote}
But this admission amounts to the denial of omnipotence which is one of the fundamental attributes of God. We believe that God is omnipotent and it must therefore, be possible for Him to create saving situations for the souls even without His avatara.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

We can, however, discuss the fittingness of avatara both for the establishment of dharma and also for the elevation of man to the divine 'level of being'. In the BG dharma primarily means niskamakarmayoga, which we called 'marga-traya-samvaya' or 'marga-traya-samuccaya'. For Karma-marga in so far as the Lord is a \textit{visible guide} for man to imitate (3:23, 22; 4:11; 7:8) the Lord's
avatāra is a great help. For salvific knowledge too, avatāra is most fitting. Man is a sensitivo-rational creature with a 'mixture' of spirituality and materiality in his knowing faculties. And according to a Western philosophical axiom "whatever is received, according to the mode of the being of the receiver". Since the knowledge communicated by the God-Man, i.e. the Theanthropos, is truly the humanized divine knowledge, it is a type of knowledge that is singularly suited to human nature. The fittingness of avatāraṇa for bhakti is very clearly brought out by Śrī Śvāminārāyaṇa, as it is given in the Vācaṇāmṛta. According to the Svamiji, since the bhakta is an embodied being (dehadhāri), the Lord by his avatāraṇa can act as a dehadhāri and can deal with the bhakta as a son, companion, relative etc., according to the needs of the situation. Indeed the Lord himself speaks of the difficulty involved in worshipping him as "avyakta" (unmanifest).

Even by this casual consideration we could see how the avatāraṇa of the Lord is most fitting for following the path of niskīma-karma-yoga understood as mārga-traya-samuccaya. And this dharma preached by the Lord is not an end in itself but rather the mārga (path) to UL. Our present question is whether there is implied anything more than this in the avatāra of the Lord. Is the Lord a savior only by pointing out the right way to salvation?
Explaining Śrī Śvaminarayana's position J. A. Yajnik gives the answer succinctly:

Thus, Śvaminarayanism believes that the Avatāra is the special expression of God's grace. When God the goal makes Himself available as God the guide, the mumukṣu finds his task most simplified, because he has only to take refuge in Him. It is then His responsibility to see that all those who take refuge in Him are saved. ¹⁵

b) The Divine Descent for Human Ascent

The avatarin being 'God-Man' is at once the goal as well as the guide. He is not only the way but also the 'vehicle' and this is the central purpose of avatāra. Otherwise it is difficult to understand the intimate connection the Lord points out between his jātma-karma and man's salvation. The Lord says:

\[ \text{jātma karma ca me divyam evam yo vetti tattvatah} \\
\text{tyakta deham punarjanma nai'ti mam eti so'rpmuna (4:9)}. \]

(Whose in this way understands the true nature of my Divine birth and (Divine) function, he, relinquishing his (present) body, does not come to birth again: he comes to Me, 0 Arjuna!)

According to this verse the knowledge of the Lord's "jātma and karma" "tattvatah" is salvific. Certainly the knowledge cannot be merely an informative knowledge. It is a sort of 'vidya' as the root of 'vetti' indicates. And 'vidya,' in the Indian religio-philosophical tradition usually means knowledge with experiential and intuitive dimensions. The following verse sheds some light on the nature of this knowledge as it is the description of the 'Yoga-vidya' of the Lord in his manifest form.
Arjuna's question in 12:1 is about the "yogavittamah", i.e. those with yoga-vidya. It is a vidya which implies 'yoga' in its etymological sense of union. The unifying aspect of this knowledge is brought out in a special way by the expression "mayy avesya mano" (lit: "mind entering into me"). And that is why people who are with such knowledge, such yoga-vidya are called "nitya-yukta".

With this model of knowledge of the "vyakta" form of the Lord, we shall further inquire into the nature of the knowledge of the Lord's "janamakarma" which is salvific. It is a knowledge which is "tattvatah". Belivalkar rightly translates it as "in its true nature", i.e. as it is, in its true reality. The following verse sheds further light on the nature of this 'yoga-vidya'

\[ \text{vīta-raga-bhaya-krodha manmaya mam upasritah} \\
\text{bhavao jnana-tapasa puța mad-bhavam agatah (4:10).} \]

(Many are they who, getting rid of passion, fear and anger, seek refuge in Me; become attuned with Me; and purified by the penance (in the form) of (the above) knowledge, they attain oneness (of essence) with Me.)

In this verse it is easy to see how karma, jnāna and bhakti work together for unity with the Lord in liberation. Aurobindo builds his theory of the human-ascent through the avatārin on this verse, especially on the expression "madbhavamagatāh".
Explaining the meaning of verses 4:9-10 Śrī Aurobindo says:

The inner fruit of the Avatar's coming is gained by those who learn from it the true nature of the divine birth and the divine works and who, growing full of him in their consciousness and taking refuge in him with their whole being manmaya mam upasritah, purified by the realising force of their knowledge and delivered from the lower nature, attain to the divine being and divine nature, madbhavam... He comes as the divine power and love which calls men to itself, so that they may take refuge in that and no longer in the insufficiency of their human wills and the strife of their human fear, wrath and passion, and liberated from all this unquiet and suffering may live in the calm and bliss of the Divine.16

To establish his view of the human ascent through the divine descent Aurobindo relies chiefly on verses 4:9-11. However, he is aware that the overall ontology of the BG lends itself to this interpretation. He says:

We have to remember and take together its doctrine of the one Self in all, of the Godhead seated in the heart of every creature, its teaching about the relations between the creator and his creation, its strongly emphasised idea of the vibhūti.17

c) Human Ascent through the Loving Lord of Grace

We have seen how according to our sacred book the experiential knowledge (yoga-vidya) of the avatarin is salvific. It must not be forgotten that the avatarin is a God of love and grace. Here what
has been said in the second part about the love and grace of the
UR has to be recalled. He is the "friend of all contingent beings"
(suhrdam sarvabhutanam, 5:29). It is his love for the world that
makes him take the initiative to take birth "yuge yuge" to reestab-
lish dharma through which to lead man to salvation. Man's salvation
by attaining unity with the Lord, or attaining to the being of the
Lord (madbhavan agatah) is by his own special initiative and grace
(18:56, 58, 62, 66; 12:7 etc.). It is an experience of the Lord's
goodness, lovableness, power etc. that makes the man of "yoga-vidya"
what he is, namely one who surrenders himself totally to the Lord,
directing all his powers and energies to the Lord. Of course,
this unitive knowledge (yoga-vidya) which is salvific need not
necessarily be by receiving a divine eye (11:8). It is only for
those who are specially privileged like Arjuna (11:47-48). In
short, the divine descent is for human ascent because the Lord
is the Lord of love and grace, and he wants the establishment of
dharma, because it is only through dharma man can be open to the
divinizing power of the Lord. And this dharma is primarily
niskama-karma-yoga or marga-traya-samuccaya.

B. THE SALVIFIC FUNCTION OF CHRIST

According to the Christians Jesus Christ in his very being and
mission, is savior. In fact the name 'Jesus' means precisely this.
'Jesus' comes from the Hebrew-Aramaic 'Yesus', a late form of Hebrew
'Yehosua' which means 'Yahweh is salvation'. This name was proposed
for Jesus by the divine messenger Gabriel to Mary, even before Jesus
was conceived (Lk 1:32; Cf 2:21 and Mt 1:21).
The question of the salvific function of Christ is a very complex one, and a fairly satisfactory treatment of it is far beyond the scope of this section of a chapter. Though there is an overall agreement in most of the central issues connected with this question, some of its details are very much controverted and many of its details are not given sufficient attention in Christian theology. The Christian thinkers of the early centuries were primarily concerned with the Christ-fact in their speculations. It does not mean that they were not interested in the Christ-value, but rather they took it for granted. Though today Christian thinkers are paying serious attention to this question, among the majority Christians still many untenable and even crude ideas on this question are prevalent. There are many who still say that Christ saved man by shedding his blood as a ransom either to God to 'satisfy his justice' or to the devil to liberate man from his bondage. Some still hold such surprisingly unethical and juridical ideas that Christ achieved salvation for humanity by "imputing" extrinsically his sinlessness without implying inner transformation, something which goes diametrically opposed to the BG concept of the reestablishment of dharma as the primary purpose of incarnation.

Many of the strange ideas with regard to the salvific function of Christ is due to the misunderstanding of the symbolic expressions in the NT to indicate this function. Hence, first we shall try to examine some of the terms through which this function is explained, such as redemption, expiation etc. Then we shall try to have somewhat systematic view of this function through some of the categories
given in the NT or traditionally held among the Christians like sacrifice, satisfaction and union with Christ. Of course, it is assumed that none of these categories or terms is adequate to give expression to Christ's mission. Of course, the fundamental assumption behind this study is that man constitutionally is in bondage to sin.

1. Some of the Concepts that Express Christ's Salvific Function

a) Salvation

Among the various concepts through which the saving-mission of Christ is expressed, this is the most common in the NT and the most popularly used in the Christian tradition. Because of this popularity, it now has a general meaning including the meanings of other terms like 'redemption', 'expiation' etc. Here we use the concept in its more restricted sense as found in the NT. We have already seen the etymology and the various senses of this term when we dealt with the concept of salvation in the second part. There we considered this term in a general way, and concentrated on its objective content. Our present study is in terms of Christ's function in bringing about man's salvation.

Christ is called 'Savior' (soter) on a number of occasions in the later NT writings especially in those which are attributed to St. Paul. St. John calls Christ "savior of the world" (Jn 4:42 and 1 Jn 4:14). St. Paul uses the word 'savior' to designate God the Father (Tit 1:3, 2:10, 3:4) as well as Christ (Tit 1:4, 2:13, 3:6).
In the AA we read: "To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Savior" (13:23).

The significance the NT writers attached to this concept can be understood if we realize how in the OT yahweh is designated by this very concept in a number of books (cf. Dt. 32:15; Is 12:2; 17:10; Ps 23:5, etc.).

St. John writers: "For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved (Jn 3:17). When Peter and John were brought before the Jewish Supreme Court (Sanhedrin) soon after the Pentecostal experience, Peter declared, referring to Christ's name; "For all the names in the world given to men this is the only one by which we can be saved" (AA 4:12). St. Paul considers the words and deeds, known as the 'Good News' (Gospel), as the power of God saving all who have faith" (Rom 1:16). Whether salvation is considered as a present reality or a future event or as something seminally present in the present but growing into the future, it is obvious that salvation according to the NT is achieved by God's own initiative through Christ.

b) Redemption

This NT concept to express Christ's saving mission has been very much misinterpreted in the Christian tradition. 'Redemption' comes from the Latin word 'redemptio' which is a translation of the Greek term 'apolutrosis'. Among the Romans 'redemptio' used to signify the act of liberating a captive by paying a fixed emmu
amount of money. 'Lutrotes' is translated as redeemer who redeems by paying the price. 'Apolutosis' would mean liberation from bondage by paying the ransom or compensation. In the early Christianity some of the Acaryas like Origen interpreting this term literally, taught that Jesus redeemed man from the slavery to the devil by paying him ransom with his own blood. A Quinas was of the opinion that the price was paid to God to satisfy his justice. However Lionnet Points out that there is no mention in the NT as to whom the price was paid. What is the true meaning of this term?

This terminology has to be understood primarily in the OT background as the NT was written by the Jewish followers of Christ in the Jewish idioms and concepts. In the OT this term expresses simple liberation without the implication of any payment. For the OT, the archetypes of all liberations, so to say, was the liberation of the Israelites from the Egyptian captivity. In Ex 6:5-7 Yahweh say that he would "redeem" (Gk: lutrosomai; hebrew original: gaalti) the Israelites without the implication of his paying any price. In Dt. 7:8 Yahweh speaks of his redeeming action of the Israelites from Egypt as a sign of his special love for them (cf Dt.9:26). "Redeem Israel from all his troubles": this is a constant theme for prayer in the Psalms (Cf. 25:22;Ps 130:7;26:11). The following statement expresses the gratuity of redemption by Yahweh: "Yes, Yahweh says this: You were sold for nothing and you will be redeemed without money." (Is 52:3).

The coming of Jesus is described by Luke as God's visit to "redeem" his people (1:68). Redemption is often understood in terms of the remission of sins, in the sense of reconciliation of the
sinner with God (Col 1:14; Eph 1:7). All the same in quite a number of passages, the idea of paying back a debt is present (Cf. Mt 10:45; Mt 20:28; Rom 3:25; 1 Pet 1:8). Lyonnet interprets passages like these in terms of self-giving love of Christ. He says:

Whatever the case may be, such a statement not only expresses implicitly an act of love, but is often explicitly connected with love: Gal 2:20 (who loved me and delivered himself up for me); Eph 5:25 ("He loved the Church and delivered himself up for her.") Similarly in John such a statement is often connected with the verb 'ponere' (= lay down) and with the idea of love: Jn 10:11, 15, 27 (about the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, because he has 'concern for the sheep,' v.13, and because of this reason the Father loves him, v.17); Jn 15:13 ("greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends"). It can rightly be concluded, therefore, that Christ has been lutron on behalf of all, in as much as his death was the supreme act of love. 23

Redemption, in the NT means that man is liberated from all sorts of bondages by God's initiative and he achieves it through Christ. And he takes this initiative because he is essentially love. "Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Here, therefore, no question of Christ buying the sinful man by paying something under strict commutative justice.

Here in passing we may make mention of some of the passages which seem to say that Christ bought man by paying a definite price
by using the terms 
agorazo, exagorazo (= to purchase, buy) (Cf 1 Cor. 
6:20; 7:22; Gal 4:5; Apoc 5:9, 14:3; 2 Pet 2:1). Apoc 5:9 even says 
that Christ bought men by the price of his blood. This term too 
has to be understood in the OT background. In Ex 19:5 Yahweh calls 
the Israelites his "Possession" (segullah), and St. Peter using 
the same terminology speaks of the followers of Christ (1 Pet 2:9) 
as the priced possession of Christ. In the OT there are a number 
of texts which speak of the Israelites as Yahweh's possession 
(Dt 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Is 43:21; Ps 74:2). This expression only 
means that just as the Israelites were chosen by God and became 
God's "property" so too the followers of Christ became God's prop­e­rty or possession through Christ.

C) Expiation

This is another term which is widely used among the Christians 
to express Christ's salvific function. We shall first cite the four 
texts where the various forms of 'expiation' occur, and they shall 
try to understand its significance/terms of in the context of 
Hebreo-Hellenistic use.

...they are justified by his grace as a gift, through 
the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God cut 
forward as an expiation (hilasterion) by his blood, 
to be received by faith (Rom 3:24-25, RSV).

Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every 
respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful 
high priest in the service of God, to make expiation 
(hilastethai) for the sins of the people (Heb 2:17 RSV)

...and he is the expiation (hilasmos) for our sins, and
not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn 2:2 RSV)

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation (hilašmon) for our sins (1 Jn 4:10 RSV).

From the above texts it is obvious that the words used to express the idea of expiation are the derivatives from the Greek root hilakešthai. In the Greek religio-cultural situation the derivatives of 'hilakešthai' are used to express the rites of placating the angry gods, or to make them propitious. At times it had the meaning of bribing, especially in the secular context.

'Hilakešthai' is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew verb 'kipper'. Citing numerous passages in the OT where the term kipper is used Lyonnet gives such meanings as the removal of sin which implies reconciliation with God and intercessory prayers for divine money. Commenting on the use of this term (hilakešthai) in Heb. 2:17, quoted above M.K. Bourke says that it is God's work of removal of sins or of the priest through the means prescribed by God's revelation, and endorses Richardson's following opinion; "Mediaeval conceptions of God as a kind of feudal overlord who requires satisfaction for his outraged honor have no place in a genuinely biblical theology". For understanding the meaning of "expiation" in the Hebrew context, Lv 16 where the great expiatory sacrifice is described on the feast of Kippurim can be of great help.

Among the NT texts Rom 3:24-25 are of special interest to us.
Here both the terms 'redemption' and 'expiation' come together. Here Paul calls Christ *hilarion* which is the translation of the Hebrew term 'kapporet'. Now 'kapporet' was one of the most sacred of places in the temple at Jerusalem. It is a golden cover over the ark of the covenant which was kept in the "holy of holies" of the temple. The Jews believed that Yahweh was present enthroned on this *kapporet* (hilastarion (Gr) = (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2) propitiatory, mercy-seat). By pouring the blood of the sacrificial victim on this *kapporet*, the Jews believed that their sins were wiped away by Yahweh and they were reconciled to him. By calling Christ the redeeming and reconciling *kapporet* he also shows the meaning of the salvific function of Christ as reconciling man to God through his blood. This idea of the *kapporet* can give us an insight into the Christian conception that Christ saved man through his blood. Lyonnet says:

antinomistically to be the place of the presence of God, inasmuch as he shows mercy and condones sins. For if the propitiatory, according to the beautiful phrase of Philo, was considered by the Jews as 'the symbol of God's benevolent power', how much more the same must be said of Christ crucified in whom, according to the same Paul, 'God was reconciling the world to himself, by not reckoning against men their sins' (2 Cor 5:19).

**Conclusion:**

We have made a brief survey of some of the chief terms through which the saving-mission of Christ is expressed. And we have seen that these concepts are primarily based on the Jewish religious
background especially as found in the OT though the Hellenistic influence on them cannot be overlooked. All these concepts convey the idea that man cannot attain salvation by himself but only through God's help. And God saves man through Jesus Christ. It is also obvious that none of these terms can be taken literally to understand Christ's saving function. To get more insight into the content of Christ's salvific function we shall now approach it more systematically making use of certain definite categories and themes.

2. The Thematic Consideration of Christ's Salvific Mission

a) Christ's Function as Sacrificial

In our discussion on niṣkāmakarma in the second part some general ideas on sacrifice (yajña) were given. Sacrifice is a religious act whereby man, with the consciousness of his total dependence on the transcendent, numinous and absolute Reality, tries to associate himself with this power in self-surrender usually with the mixed attitudes of fear, gratitude hope, love etc, through ritual symbols. Sacrifice is an expression of man's awareness that what he is and what he has are from God, and so he has to live as God wants and he has to use the things of this world with the attitudes of trustees. In a sacrificial offering the gift or the sacrificed animal, if it is a bloody sacrifice, represented the offerer, and he expressed his self-surrender. Though sacrifice symbolizes primarily self-surrender, it can degenerate into a magical rite whereby the sacrificer tries to force the deity to
grand his desires. It is this type of sacrifice that is condemned in the BG (2:43).

In the NT the salvific work of Christ is expressed in sacrificial terminology. Three main Jewish sacrifices are mentioned in the OT, viz. the Paschal Sacrifice, the Covenant Sacrifice and the Expiatory Sacrifice. The NT speaks of the saving mission of Christ in terms of all three of these sacrifices.

(1) Christ as paschal sacrifice

This sacrifice is described in Ex. 12:1-27. The blood of the sacrificed lamb was sprinkled on the lintel of the door and on two of the door-posts. Ex.12:27 calls this ritual "sacrifice" (zehah (Hebrew) = thusia (LXX Greek)). The purpose of this rite was two fold: The first, to protect themselves from the destroying angel of Yahweh who would be killing the first-born sons of the tyrannical Egyptians (Ex 12:7, 13) which later on began to be understood as the destruction of evil men; the second, to liberate the "chosen people of Israel" from the Egyptian servitude (Cf Ex.3:7-12). These two reasons remind us of the purposes of avatāra as the destruction of evil men and the liberation of the good.

Jesus is called the Paschal Lamb, the victim of the Paschal Sacrifice. John the Baptist introduces Christ to the people calling him "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29, 36). In Apoc. 13:8 John speaks of Christ as the sacrificial lamb (Cf also Apoc. 5:8, 12; 14:1). St. Paul would say that "Christ our
(ii) Christ and covenant sacrifice.

This sacrifice is described in Ex 24:3-8. The blood of the sacrificed animal was poured on the alter which represented Yahweh, and on the people. "The meaning of the rite is evident: the same blood joins the two contracting parties, namely, the people who promise fidelity and God himself, represented either by the altar (in Exodus) or by the book of the Law (in the Epistle to the Hebrews)."

Christ after giving his 'blood' symbolised by the sacralized wine, to the disciples said that it was "the blood of the New Convenant" (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:30; cf Jn 6:53-56). Paul too speaks of the blood of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is called the New Covenant (1 Cor 10:16; 11:25, 27). The covenant sacrifice is explicitly applied to Christ in Heb 9:15-20 where Christ is called "the mediator of the New Covenant".

(iii) Christ and expiatory sacrifice

Mention has been made of this sacrifice when the concept of expiation was explained. This solemn sacrifice was performed, as described in Lv. 16 by the priest on the feast of Kippurim (Cf also Ex. 29:11-16). The chief rite consisted of pouring blood on the 'mercy seat' (hilasterion). Blood was believed to sanctify the
people (Ex 29:19-21) because it was the belief among the Jews that the blood is sacred to the Lord as it contains life (Lv. 17:11).

The main application of this sacrifice to Christ is found in Heb. 9:11-14; 20-28. According to this letter what was done in the OT sacrifice was only a shadow of what was realized in Christ. Jesus did not enter into a man-made temple but he stood before the Father directly approaching him. The blood he used to purify humanity from sins was not the blood of animals but his own. Paul called Christ "hialasterion" (mercy seat Rom 3:25; of also 5:9; Col 1:20; Eph 2:13). John says that the "blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7; Apoc. 7:14). Peter means the same thing when he says that we have been "sprinkled with Christ's blood" (1 Pet 1:2). To be saved means to follow the sacrificial life of Christ in oneself (Heb 13:10-16; Rom 12:1; 15:16; Phil 2:17).

b) As a New Covenant

Another Biblical category which seems to explain the salvific function of Christ is 'Covenant'. We are already familiar with this concept as it has been dealt with in the chapter on the NT concept of the UR and just above in connection with the covenant sacrifice. Hence our treatment of this concept here can be very brief. This word is the translation of the Greek diatheke which is that of the Hebrew 'berit'. This term was used to express the contracts between the sovereign and his vassals. The Subsidiary System under which the Britishers brought under their rule many of the Indian kings with certain obligations and rights is a typical example of
'berit'. 'Diatheke' expresses the idea that both of the partners of the OT covenant, are not equal since one of the partners is Yahweh himself.

In the OT it is Exodus (Cf 19-24) which elaborately describes Yahweh's covenant with the people of Israel. "Yahweh said, 'I am about to make a covenant with you. In the presence of all your people I shall work such wonders as have never been worked in any land or in any nation " (Ex 34:10). Jeremiah speaks of the breakdown of the covenant due to the unfaithfulness of 'israel and prophesies about a "new covenant" in the future (Jer 31:31; of Ez 16:60-63).

In the NT Christ's salvific life, especially his death and resurrection are considered as the New Covenant prophesised by Jeremiah. Mt 26:28 and Mk 14:24 considers the blood shed by Christ in terms of the blood of the covenant described in Ex. 24:8 ff, and Lk 22:10 and 1 Cor 11:25 refers not only to this covenant but also to the "New Covenant" prophesised by Jeremiah. Paul considers the New Covenant in the person of Christ as far superior to the old covenant (2 Cor 3:6-18). In Gal 4:21-31 Paul speaks of the freedom that this new covenant gives due to the divine filiation through Christ by sharing his covenantal life. Eph 2:12-18 stresses the universality of the Christic covenant which includes the whole of humanity. In the Hebrews (7-10) we have the longest treatment about the New Covenant in the person of Christ. Here the underlying idea of the covenant as union between God and man, are stressed and Christ as the intermediary between God and man for this union is brought out.
c) Christ's Salvific Work as Satisfaction

A few decades ago this was one of the most popular categories through which the salvific mission of Christ was explained. But because of its overjuridicism and because of its lack of strong scriptural support it has become very unpopular. Here we shall just make a few casual remarks on this category, and shall just point a direction through which this concept could be given some meaning in the Indian context.

It was St. Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century who systematically applied this concept to Christ's saving mission in his book [Cur Deus Homo?](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anselms-theory-of-satisfaction) (Why God (became) Man?). L. Sabourin briefly puts Anselm's theory thus:

> Sin, he says, is nothing else than not to render God his due, not to be subject to his will, and this dishonours him. To restore the right order it is not enough to bow again to his supreme will. A further restitution must be made for the dishonour done to God. **Either satisfaction will be made or punishment will follow, for otherwise the right order of things would be offended and this God cannot permit.**

One of the ways how Anselm's theory of satisfaction got interpreted is as follows: Sin is an offence against God. Now justice demands that the dishonour against God must be restituted or repaired by adequate satisfaction. But God being infinite, no human being can render this adequate satisfaction. But Christ being God-Man could do it. And Christ did it by his death in the most generous and self-less way.
The theory of satisfaction interpreted in this way is very unsatisfying indeed. It seems to make Christ a substitute for man's sins. How can God's justice be satisfied by letting an innocent person suffer for it? Besides, what is the use of such a restitution if the sinner remains the same? Besides it makes the God who tells us to forgive even our enemies too demanding. Such a God has very little to do with the God of the NT.

According to F. Lakner there is no scriptural basis for this theory: "We must note in the first place that when Catholic theology speaks of satisfaction it is well aware nowadays that no formal statement on satisfaction is to be found in Scripture or in earliest tradition". Or course, later on he points out some implicit references. Certainly the understanding of Christ and his mission in terms of the person and mission of the Servant of Yahweh as we have explained in the first chapter of this part is a basis for speaking of Christ's suffering and death, as vicarious, as for men. Besides the Pauline concept of justification and the theory of expiation can easily lead us to this understanding of salvation in Christ.

We have seen the texts in the NT where Christ's function is mentioned as ransoming, buying man by paying with his blood, and the like. In the contexts of texts like these it is difficult to escape from the concept of paying back the debt. But to whom? In our opinion, the Indian concept of the threefold debt, to the gods, to the sages and to the ancestors with which a man is born can shed some light on this. And this debt is paid back by the
three of the five great sacrifices (panca mahāyajñas). The five
great sacrifices imply two more debts, viz. debt to the bhūte which
could be in this context interpreted as the material creation,
and to Brahma understood as vedic revelation. These sacrifi­
cences imply that man is born with debts to the supreme being for his
creation, to the parents for his procreation, to the teachers for
impacting vidya, to other men for various social benefits and to the
subhuman aspect of creation for the fulfilment of various
needs. This view emphasizes the interrelationship between various
grades of being, and consequently disorder in one sphere can cause
disorder in the other spheres too. In fact, this interpretation
can be better understood in the context of the teaching of the
BG about the reestablishment of dharma through the avatarin. Christ's
sacrificial death can be understood in terms of a Great Yajña
unifying all the mahayajñas giving them a divine content. Obviously
our views are just tentative and suggestive, and without deeper
study these statements cannot have any conclusiveness or definit­
ness.

d) Divinizing Union with Christ

Perhaps the most satisfying category through which Christ's
saving work is expressed by this one. This theme is basically
Joannine and Pauline. The early Acaryas of Christianity like
Ireneus and Athanasius strongly emphasized this idea. Ireneus
elaborating on the Pauline idea of recapitulation (anakephaleosis)
of all things in Christ (Eph 1:10) considers Christ as a sort of
Cosmic Person in whom the whole of humanity is included. And Athanasius following John more directly says that Christ "became man so that we would be made gods". The Greek expression "ina emeis theopoiethmen" (in order that we would become God) is very similar to the "madbhavamacah" of the BG (4:10).

In John this idea is best conveyed through the allegory of the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-11). "I am the vine you are the branches" (15:1). Here the word "abide" in Christ (meinate hen hemoi) occurs some eleven times. It is a mutual immanence. ("I in you you in me" ; 15:4). In 15:5 it is said that apart from union with Christ man can do nothing in the sense of achieving man's destiny in God through union with him. As the branches independently of the vine cannot bring forth fruits so too, independently of Christ divine life, cannot be shared by man (15:2).

As the branches share the life of the vine so too man has to share the divine life of Christ for salvation. Elsewhere John says that Christ is the source of life as God is (5:26) and he gives life to man (5:21). Christ says about the purpose of his coming: "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10; cf also Jn 17:2). Indeed, Jesus would say that he is life (Jn 14:6) and resurrection (Jn 11:25). Having heard Christ's speaks of himself as the source of divine life for man later on John would write in his epistle saying; "God has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son; anyone who has the Son has life,
anyone who does not have the Son does not have life" (1 Jn 5:11-12). This idea of union with Christ is brought out by the metaphoric designation Christ gives to himself as the light of the world (Jn 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; cf Jn 1:5; 1 Jn 2:8-9). In Jn 17:20-23, Christ's union with the Father is given as a pattern for the union of man with God and men among themselves when they share the divinizing life of Christ.

St. Paul In Rom 6:5 using the term "symphytoi" (grafted) goes along with John's metaphor of the union between the vine and the branches, to express the union needed for salvation. In Gal 2:20 and Phil 1:21, the identity between Christ and those who are saved through Christ are expressed in very strong terms. However, the well-known Pauline texts (1 Cor 12:4-30; Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:9-13) which speak of incorporation with Christ of those who appropriate to themselves the salvific content of Christ's mission, speak not only of man's unity with Christ individually but also socially. In Eph 10:10, the unity of the whole of contingent reality is stressed as the goal of Christ's salvific mission.

Two concepts intimately connected with that of union with Christ is that of divine filiation and of divinization. St. Paul says: "Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. The spirit you received is not the spirit of slaves bringing fear into your lives again; it is the spirit of sons, and it makes us cry our, 'Abba, Father!'" (Rom 8:14-15; cf Gal 4:6). And John says: "Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by allowing
us to be called God's children; and that is what we are." (1 Jn 3:1). And in Rom 8:28 Paul speaks of man's getting conformed to the image of God's Son. In speaking of the manifold blessings the incarnation of God has bestowed on humanity Peter says: "In making these gifts, he has given us the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come: through them you will share the divine nature (Theias koinonoi phusews) and to escape corruption in a world that is sunk in vice" (2 Pet 1:4). Though this sharing of divine nature is spoken of as an eschatological reality, Peter does hint at its seminal beginning already here on earth, as the Pauline concept of the "first fruit" (aparxhe) of the spirit. This concept of divinization has to be understood in connection with the second birth spoken by Jesus (Jn 3:3-5; 1 Jn 2:29; 1 Pet 1:3; 3:2; Tit 3:5) which makes man a new creature in Christ (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

Conclusion:

What answer can we give to the question "Cur Deus homo?" (Why God (became) Man?) asked by St. Anselm in the eleventh century? It would have been foolish on our part had we pretended to give an adequate answer. In questions implying God's unfathomable wisdom and unscrutable plans our puny little reason can find no final or definite answer. However, with the awareness of this human limitation it is relationality given to man by god it is right to make an effort to fulfil the demands of reason as reason itself is God's creation. Hence, we tried to have a glance at the divine plan of salvation of man through Jesus Christ.
We first tried to understand the main concepts through which the salvific function of Christ is expressed in the NT. The concept 'salvation' is the most widely used one. The concept "redemption" signifies that Christ's saving function was an 'expensive' one, though a closer look at these terms in the background of the OT made us see that he achieved redemption at 'his own expense' in the sense that through the deepest and most perfect expression of love by laying down his life. The term 'expiation' means not placating an angry God but of becoming the medium like the 'kapporet' of the expiatory sacrifice for the union between God and man.

In order to have a more systematic view of the saving function of Christ and to get into its very content we tried to have a glance into this function through the categories of sacrifice, covenant, satisfaction and divinizing union with Christ. Divinization of man by union with Christ is the underlying idea of the other three categories. Of course, 'satisfaction' is the least scripturally based and most juridical and externalistic of these categories, though it too implies unity with God by reconciliation. Sacrifice, certainly is one of the most intelligible of categories to express the content of the mission of Christ since it is common to all the religions.

To understand the question of Christ's saving function two other considerations are vitally necessary: namely the function of the Holy Spirit and the concept of "corporate personality". Since any meaningful and relevantly intelligible treatment of these topics would take us far beyond the scope of this study we had to
leave it aside. Though we do not like to overmystify the concept of corporate personality as something very mysteriously peculiar to the Semites. In fact, all the primitive peoples felt at one with the head of the tribe or 'kingdom', in a way quite unintelligible to the modern man. It must be remembered that even in mediaeval Europe the kings in a very real sense represented the people of his kingdom. His religion became the people's religion, what is right to him became right to the people. But this concept could be enriched from the Indian tradition by considering the ambience of influence a true yogi or a saint can have, saturated with what some people call spiritual vibrations. If every particle of matter has its own ambience of influence, how incalculably great must be the ambience of influence of the humanized divinity of Christ?

The human ascent achieved in the person of Christ is achieved by the power of the spirit which is the principle of life in Christ (Jn 14:38 ff). One is made the son of God in Christ through the power of the Spirit (Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6). The Spirit of God dwell in a man as in a temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 8:11) and gives a foretaste (Rom 8:23) and a pledge (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5) of the eschatological union with the Trinity. It is the spirit which gives the divine eye to see the true reality of Jesus (Jn 14:26; 16:13). The spirit is sent by the Father and by Jesus (Jn 14:24; 15:26). According to the NT the divine descent and the human ascent through Jesus is the function of the Father, Son and of the Holy Spirit.
The BG and the NT seem to give value to other ways of salvation than those shown by them; but it is only in so far as they are related and subordinate to the ways shown by them. According to the BG Lord Krsna is the most reliable guide to and the one and only goal of Ultimate Liberation, and the non-Krsnistic paths are given value only in dependence on the Krsnistic path. In the NT this exclusivistic view is more pronounced than in the BG, Christ is presented as the one and only way to salvation though some of the NT texts and some of the NT themes like the universal salvific will of God do give value to other paths inasmuch as they are subordinate to the NT path. Do the BG path and the NT paths cancel each other mutually? Or do they try to bring each other under subordination in benign condescension? Or rather do they give full value to each other while at the same time holding the view that they are related to each other with a sort of relationship of dialectical complementarity? These are questions not easily answerable. A lot of study has been done in the recent past especially among the Christian thinkers since the exclusivistic tendency in the NT is much more powerful than in the BG. It is far from the scope of our thesis to try to give a satisfactory solution to these involved questions. What is intended here is to pose the problem on the basis of our sacred books somewhat clearly and then hint at suggestively a way of approaching this problem.

First we shall cite some texts which seem to advocate tolerant exclusivism or even total exclusivism. Then we shall suggest three
standpoints from which the theanthropoi have to be viewed. These are the historical, historico-transcendental viewing this problem with a dialogal attitude from and the transcendental standpoints. We believe that these stand-points can point towards the right direction for a solution. Since this problem is more acute in the NT than in the BG special attention will be paid to the former.

1. Texts that Uphold Exclusivism, Tolerant or Total

a) In the BG

There is no statement in the BG which makes Krsnaism as the one and only path in the totally exclusivistic sense. However, tolerant exclusivism is upheld in a number of verses. The following verse seems to be one of the most obvious verses which uphold tolerant exclusivism:

Those devotees likewise who, endowed with faith, offer worship unto other Divinities: they, O Son of Kuntī, offer service (vajanti), (albeit) not in the prescribed mode, unto none but myself (9:23).

Verse 7:21 is parallel to this except for the statement that it is the Lord Kṛṣṇa himself who confirms their faith (tasva-tasya 'calam' sraddhāṁ ...vidadhāmyahāṁ). According to 7:22, the benefits ("labhate ...Kaman") derived from such devotion to other gods are in accordance with the decree of Lord Kṛṣṇa (mayaṁvā vibhitān hi tān). However verses 7:23, and 9:25 speak of the relativity and temporariness of these benefits. The worshippers of these gods are assimilated into them gradually but they being not the ultimate,
these worshippers will not obtain final liberation through these gods. Worship of them, certainly, leads to Lord Kṛṣṇa eventually.

Tilak interprets 9:23 in terms of Rg 1:164:46 (ekam sad vipraḥ bahudha vadanti) according to which though the deity is one, he is worshipped diversely by learned people. He corroborates this view citing Mbh. San 347:35 according to which the worshippers of Brahmā or Śiva come to Lord Kṛṣṇa, and Mbh. San. 345:26, 27 according to which the worshippers of ancestors, gurus, cows etc. indirectly worship Lord Viṣṇu. In this context one might ask the question whether it is the form of the deity (considered objectively) or the subjective attitude with which one approaches a particular deity that is responsible for one's salvation.

The following verse seems to answer this question:

The faith of each one, O Scion of Bharata, is in accordance with his inner constitution. A person is just the totality of his beliefs; whatsoever one believes in, just that he actually becomes (17:3)

(sattvāḥ anyurūpa sarvasya sraddha bhavati, bhāratā, sraddhāmayo'yaḥ puruso'yo yac-chraddhah, sa eva sah)

According to this verse a man's religious identity is dependent on his faith. But the object of faith does have an influence on faith itself, and so the man gets more and more conformed to the object of his faith. So, in salvation both the subjective attitude and the objective truth-value of the object of faith are important.
b) In the NT

Jesus says: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6)

("Egw eimi he odos kai he alethela kai he zwe")

Here Jesus considers himself not as one among many ways but as THE Way as the Greek definite article indicates. And St. Paul writes: "For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and mankind (eis kai mesites theou kai anthropwn) himself a man, that is Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 2:5). Paul makes this statement soon after speaking about God's will to save every human being (1 Tim 2:4). Christ as the mediator means that he is the medium in and through which man shares divine life to become truly God's children. In the following text Peter speaks of salvation only in Christ's name, i.e. through Christ: "For of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved" (AA 4:12).

The above statements seem to be totally exclusivistic. Yet in what sense the Second Ecumenical Council held at Vatican (Vat II) could make officially the following declaration?

The Church therefore has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture.
True, there are certain texts in the NT which uphold tolerant exclusivism somewhat along the BG line. For instance, St. Paul, after seeing the altar to the "Unknown God", says to the Athenians: "Well the God whom I proclaim is in fact the one whom you already worship without knowing it" (AA 17:23). True also, the it is a basic belief in the NT that a man's salvation is not determined by such extrinsic factors as the place of one's birth etc. since "God has no favourites" as Sts. Peter (AA 10:34) and Paul says (Rom 3:11). But the tolerant exclusivism of Christianity has to be understood in terms of the basic teaching of the NT that the only impediment the only obstacle that can prevent a man being touched by the saving power of God is man's own, deliberate (that is, knowingly and willingly) rejection of God's saving grace. And this basic teaching is called among Christian theologians as the Universal Salvific will of God. In Christianity too the chief deciding factor with regard to salvation is the subjective attitude rather than the objective, of the form of man's faith-commitment. In fact, the official teaching of the second Vatican Council implies that even an 'honest atheist' can be saved.

2. The Three Stand-points of Viewing the Theanthropoi

We can view the theanthropoi from three stand-points, viz. the historical, the historia~transcendental and the transcendental. Viewed from the historical stand-point Lord Kṛṣṇa was a Yādava prince, the charioteer of Arjuna, the Pāṇḍava, and Lord Jesus was a first-century Jewish Rabbi went about teaching religious doctrines
in the name of God. Both were men of extraordinary power, wisdom and sanctity. In this sense both were limited by spatio-temporal and socio-cultural factors, as their descents were not illusory but real. Viewed from the other extreme stand-point, viz. the transcendent, they are all that we have said about the UR in the BG and in the NT respectively. They 'are' the One Absolute Reality possessing the total value of being. They are Being as such. Of course, the UR in the NT is Trinitarian. But a deeper study on the Trinitarian a priori, than what we have done, can show that practically in all the religions this trinitarian pattern is observable in their conceptions of the UR. And we have also shown that the UR in the BG can be understood in terms of the trinitarian pattern though the different 'members' of this trinity are not discussed especially in personalistic terms.

When we speak of the avatāra of Lord Kṛṣṇa or when we speak of the avatāra-consciousness and power that pervade the world even millenia after 'passing away' of the avatārin, we mean this historico-transcendental aspect. Though we have our reservations in accepting fully Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the doctrine of avatāraṇa, his theory about the "eternal incarnation of the Divine, the everlasting bringing forth of the perfect and divine life in the universe and the soul of man" can shed some light on this conception of ours. He explains:

If the Infinite God is manifested in finite existence throughout time, then Its special manifestation at one given movent and through the assumption of one single human nature is but the free fulfilment of that same movement by which the Divine plenitude freely fulfils
itself and inclines towards the finite...If a human organism can be made in the image of God, if new patterns can be woven into the stuff of repetitive energy, if entity can be incorporated in these ways into succession, then the Divine Reality can express His absolute mode of being in and through a completely human organism. 41

To this philosophical explanation we could add the following remarks of Śrī. Aurobindo with certain amount of mystical insights:

On the other hand, the life of Rāma and Krishna belongs to the prehistoric past which has come down only in poetry and legend and may even be regarded as myths; but it is quite immaterial whether we regard them as myths or historical facts, because their permanent truth and value lie in their persistence as a spiritual form, presence, influence in the inner consciousness of the race and the life of the human soul. Avatarhood is a fact of divine life and consciousness which may realise itself in an outward action, but must persist, when that action is over and has done its work, in a spiritual influence; or may realise itself in a spiritual influence and teaching, but must then have its permanent effect, even when the new religion or discipline is exhausted, in the thought, temperament and outward life of mankind. 42

This is one of the fields in Christian theology which has not been sufficiently explored. 43 On the other hand, a coherent view of the following Christian doctrinal positions commonly accepted demand a deeper study on this question: (i) Salvation is only through Jesus Christ accepted explicitly or implicitly (ii) Christic salvation is by divine filiation in Christ through a quasi-physical

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union or incorporation with him (iii) Soon after death a man without sin, man in grace will enjoy beatific vision in and through Christ as he is the beginning and end (alpha and Omega) (iv) The salvation of a number of pre-Christian holy men like Abraham, Moses and Elijah are taken for granted in the NT. Indeed, Jesus himself said: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to think that he would see My Day, he saw it and was glad (Jn 8:56). This doctrinal position of Christianity leads to the conclusion that the incarnational, Christic value as a salvific power was present and active much before the incarnation.

There are quite a number of texts in the NT which speak of the salvific presence of Christ even before the incarnation. Christ is considered as the beginning and end of creation (Apoc 22:12; 1:17; 2:8; Eph 1:10; Col 1:16 and 20; Jn 1:1-3; Eph 1:19; 1 Cor 8:6). In the light of some of these texts Kung remarks:

Because the incarnation was prepotently willed from eternity in God's decree, it could make that redeeming power radiate even before it became a historical event. And thus the grace of Jesus Christ was already able to operate in the OT. Abraham rejoiced because he 'saw the days of Jesus' (Jn 8:56), Isaiah prophesied about Jesus because he 'saw his glory' (Jn 12:41), the patriarchs drank from the Rock, Christ, which followed them (1 Cor 10:41), there was 'cloud of witnesses' who 'practised justice' and received (the) promises (Heb 11:33; 12:1) and 'saints' who died before Christ (Mt 27:52; 2 Pet 3:19; Eph 4:8). 

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But the historico-transcendental aspect of Christ is more obvious in the case of post-Christian salvation. A typical example is the theology of Bultmann. According to Bultmann "Revelation is an occurrence that abolishes death, not a doctrine that death does not exist". And this salvific revelation occurs when the Christic-truth, i.e. the Word of God in the NT, is preached. If at all the Christ-fact has any value for man's salvation" it is understood in its true character only when it is understood as something that takes place in the present, in my particular present. According to him what matters is the Christic truth, the salvific message found in the NT, the powerful Word of God in the NT has very little to do with the Christ-fact in its ability to achieve salvation. The proclaimed salvific Word of the NT achieves salvation for the man who responds to this message independently of the Christ-fact, transcending its spatio-temporal limitations. "And just as little as the proclamation communicates something that happened in a certain place at a certain time, but rather says what has occurred to the person being addressed, so little is faith the knowledge of some fact within the world of the willingness to hold some remarkable dogma to be true." There is no point in looking back to the historical Christ to introduce to some one Christ as the savior (kerygma) or to accept him as a savior (faith). To go behind a Christ who is preached is to misunderstand the preaching. As we shall point out in the following chapter we cannot agree with Bultmann in detaching Christ-value from Christ-fact. Indeed
we agree with Pannenberg's statement that "The Jesus proclaimed to-day is none other than the one who lived at that time in Palestine and was crucified under Pilate and vice versa". However, the truth contained in Bultmann's position has to be appreciated. The 'salvific kerygma' of Bultmann could be put in Aurobindo's terminology as the "spiritual influence" of power. And it could be put in the more tangible terminology of the Buddhists saying that it is a sort of divinely unleashed "vibration" present in the cosmos which makes man commit himself in religious self-surrender to the anthropoi in different forms. The following statements of Panikkar can shed a lot of light on this question:

The historically trained western mind has taken spatio-temporal coordinates as the central point of reference for answering the question of who Jesus is, being well aware, though, that this answer is not sufficient. If Jesus Christ were actually only what the spatio-temporal coordinates yield, no Christian could speak of the real presence of Christ in the sacraments, nor accept that whatever we do to these little ones we do it unto "unto" "him" (Cf. Mt 10:40; 18:5; Mk 9:37; Lk 9:48 etc.) not that he is "yesterday, today and for ever" (Heb 13:8) and much less admit that he was before Abraham, (Jn 8:58), not to say anything of the Cosmic Christ of the Epistles of St. Paul, of many of the sayings of St. John, his Prologue etc. The logos-theology of the early Christian ācāryas like Justin Ireneus and Origen can shed much light on the concept of the historico-transcendental aspect of the anthropoi. A deeper consideration of Bergson's "elan vital", Aurobindo's "Superman"
and Teilhard de Chardin's "Christo-genesis" can give much insight into this question apart from the conceptual tools, needed for expressing it intelligibly. However, it is the contemplation of the lives of saints that can convincingly show the theanthropos-value transcending space and time. What was that power which gripped so powerfully and lovingly, Mirābai that she became almost totally absorbed into Lord Kṛṣṇa? St. Francis was so totally, so powerfully under the grip of the Christic power, consciousness and love that even his very body began to resemble that of Christ by manifesting the five wounds of Christ.

3. The Meaning of Tolerant Exclusivism

From the transcendental point of view both Kṛṣṇa and Christ are identical with Being as such, and so both are identical. Of course, we have spoken of the minor reservation we have to make for the NT Trinity. As far as the historico-transcendental aspect too, as far as salvation is concerned the function of both are almost identical. Hence, from these two standpoints, one might say that the Christabhakti is "anonymous" Kṛṣṇa bhakti and the Kṛṣṇa-bhakti is the "anonymous" Christabhakti. Because of the functional or "homological" identity of these two aspects it could be said that the one implies the other and vice versa. From these two standpoints the teaching of our scriptures are not really tolerant exclusivism but rather enlightened inclusivism which goes beyond the names and labels nominalistically considered, in contrast to imperialistic or domineering inclusivism. The question of the meaning of exclusivism from the historical standpoint will be dealt with in the following chapter.
CONCLUSION

In our study we have seen that the chief purpose of avatāra and incarnation is man's salvation understood in the general sense of the term. The function of both of the theanthropoi is to help the human ascent to the "divine mode of existence", to use the Gita terminology or "supernatural elevation", to use the terminology current in the Christian tradition, meaning thereby the 'divinization' of man. We have seen in the second part that the final liberation is a state of union with the UR. The theanthropoi by their divine descent bring man in touch with the divine realm, so that man could prepare himself for the final union with the UR. Thus both of our scriptures are in agreement as far as the central issues of salvation are concerned.

As in the Hindu tradition as a whole, in the BG too dharma is at the service of mokṣa. We interpreted dharma in terms of nīskamakarma. It is nīskamakarma that attunes man to the reception of divine life and power for man's divinization. In the NT the salvific faith discussed in detail by St. Paul could be compared with the Nīskamakarma of the BG though the latter concept is more satisfying because of the clarity of its contents. In the NT as far as the function of Christ is concerned in elevating man to the divine realm, his resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit are of special importance. In the NT not only the descent of the theanthropos is stressed but also his ascent. And Christ, as the representative of humanity, includes humanity as a whole, in a not very easily intelligible way, in his resurrection or ascent. In man's ascent
the function of the Spirit of God is as important as that of Christ since it is through the power of the Spirit man shares the life of Christ and becomes truly God's children by being incorporated with Christ.

Both of our scriptures accept other ways of salvation in so far as they are implicitly or "anonymously" dependent on Kṛṣṇabhakti or Christabhakti. We began the study of this question calling it "tolerant exclusivism" but ended it by giving it the designation "enlightened inclusivism". However, this enlightened inclusivism is more obvious in the BG than in the NT since the latter gives greater importance than the former to the historical aspect of the theanthropos.