Preface

The dissertation “The Parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa: A Comparative Study” compares and contrasts the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa from a thematological perspective. It also attempts an analysis of the literary qualities of the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa from a formalistic point of view. Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa have used the parabolic method in order to make the readers/listeners comprehend the divine truth easily. Not only to the educated did they appeal but to the uneducated mob who flocked around them as well.

The first chapter introduces Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa as parabolists. It attempts to show how the parable became a powerful medium of creative communication in the hands of these great men of God. This chapter also provides a review of literature mainly relating to the discussions and interpretations of the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa separately. There are only very few studies fully devoted to a comparison of the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Remakrishna Paramahamsa.
The second chapter "The Parable in a Nutshell" deals with the parabolic form – its origin and development from the ancient scriptures to the ecclesiastical mission of the parabolists Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. The word ‘Parable’ is classical in origin and is derived from the Greek word ‘Parabolae’ which means a short story bearing a moral in it. Parables are ever old and ever new. Jesus Christ’s parables are based on the Old Testament parables and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s parables are recreations of the stories in the Hindu Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. In the hands of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna the parables took a new shape and form and evolved into a full-fledged parable.

The third chapter "The Parables Christ: A Bird’s-Eye View" gives an overall picture of the parables of Jesus Christ and the meaning they convey. It also attempts a thematological categorization of the parables of the parabolist, paving the way for a deep study of the parables in the subsequent chapters. Jesus Christ, through his parables, has thrown light on God, kingdom of God, faith, love, forgiveness, sin, and renunciation. In addition, Jesus Christ has brought out the fundamental message of the Second Coming - ‘The Last Judgment’ in the parables.

The fourth chapter "The Parables of Ramakrishna: A Bird’s-Eye View" seeks to present a broad spectrum of a representative selection of the parables
of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. A thematological categorization is also
sforth for further study in the subsequent chapters. Sri Ramakrishna
Paramahamsa has also discussed in detail, through the parables, the major
themes of God/Brahman kingdom of God, faith, love, women and gold,
renunciation, force of evil, guru, yoga, maya.

Both these chapters are devoted to a discussion of only the major
themes expounded by Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.
However, the thematic delineation such as the Second Advent, incarnation,
humility, chanting the holy name, yearning, rebirth, man man-in the divine
state are either parabolist-exclusive-specifics or parabolic-periphery of Christ
and Ramakrishna and which find their homiletic space in either of their divine
discourses are taken up for detailed discussion in the next chapter.

The fifth chapter "The Parables of Christ and Ramakrishna: A
Thematological Perspective" analyses the major themes together with the
parabolist-exclusive-specific and the parabolic-periphery themes expounded
by Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in their parables and
discusses the similarities and differences between them. Though Jesus Christ
and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa show ample similarities in their views of
God, kingdom of God, love, faith and renunciation, yet they differ a little in
handling other themes that are socio-culturally conditioned by time and space. Jesus Christ reveals the apocalyptic message that “He is the only way, the truth and the light”. But Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa emphasizes the great spiritual truth that “Different paths lead to the same goal”. One may call God Allah, Krishna or Christ. But their goal is one that is to reach the kingdom of God. But at the same time the comparative study makes it clear that the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa have a single basic message, that is, reaching God, even as it demonstrates the surprisingly greater degree of similarity found in the Unity of Vision of these great spiritual masters.

The sixth chapter “The Parables of Christ and Ramakrishna Paramahamsa: A Formalistic Perspective” brings out the fundamental characteristic features of the parabolic form. This chapter also shows how far Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa have succeeded in handling the parabolic form. Jesus Christ has used parables, allegories, similitude's, metaphors and figures of speech to drive home the divine truth to the common man. But Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has not only used all these methods, but has also made use of fables with animal images to bring home the purpose of God’s plan for man’s life. Both of these parabolists have used materials which are familiar to the readers/listeners and their parables are in the form of
a story or a brief narrative with a definite moral or a didactic message. The parabolic form has reached its perfection in the hands of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

The last chapter sums up the major findings of the present study. The parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa have revealed to man the divine truth about the way to reach the kingdom of God. The semiotics of symbolic representation of facts in their allegories proves them to be great symbolists. Their profound spiritual knowledge is expressed through images and they are great artists with the skill to invent apt stories to disseminate their religious message. They are men of powerful imagination and their parables are the fruits of their deeper spiritual experiences of God. Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa are not only ideal parabolists but also great semiotic-symbolists and inspiring teacher-preachers, spiritual gurus. Their parables will shed the ray of light of God, illuminate the spiritual knowledge and enlighten the world from generation to generation.

For the parables of Jesus Christ, The New Revised Standard Version of The Holy Bible (1990) together with the Authorised Version (KJV - 1611) is taken as the basic text for the present study. However, the other translations/versions were also consulted with a view to confirming the
authenticity of the textual variation. Similarly, for the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa *Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna* (1943), which provides a comprehensive account of all parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is taken as the basic text for the present study. However other collections especially Swami Nikhlananda's *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (1974) which offers a detailed presentation of the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa where also consulted by way of authentically ascertaining textual variations, if any.

Apart from the Select Bibliography, the Appendix at the end provides a detailed data-base for the parables of Christ and Ramakrishna arranged alphabetically and categorized thematically, besides a Glossary of the technical terms used in this study.