CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1. Religion and Contemporary Philosophy.

1.1. Contemporary Philosophy and Religion.

Religion was treated in the past as the inseparable and essential aspect of human nature as well as that of society. Even today, in spite of the scientific and technological advancement, religion plays an important part in the life of man. Yet, many contemporary philosophers are anti-religious. These philosophers are not only opposed to religion and religious ideas, but are also opposed even to a discussion of religion or religious ideas. Our concern in this introductory chapter is to find a justification for religious belief, especially, incarnation as against these anti-religious tendencies of some of the contemporary schools of philosophy like Logical Positivism, Marxism, Psycho-analysis, Death of God Theology, etc. These philosophers have been influenced by science and they have denied the validity of religious beliefs on the ground that these are unscientific. In fact, wherever man is found, from the cold ice-bound poles to the tropical jungles, man by nature is longing for something supernatural either in the form of higher ideals or in the form of a Supreme Reality on which he could find peace and rest.
1.1.1. Universality of Religion. Religion is thus a universal phenomenon. It is a part of the culture of mankind, though it appears in different forms and has different interpretations. Religion cannot be thought of apart from the society and vice versa. Some societies have tried to eliminate religion. Yet it is there. It still remains as a living reality. According to Mahatma Gandhi, even the atheist cannot deny God if Truth is treated as God. No one can reasonably deny the existence of something beyond man, influencing human conduct, culture, thought, and history. Even though some people may argue that all religions are undesirable, no one will deny the value or importance of religion expressed in the lives of many saints. Once the validity of religious expressions is accepted, we have to accept the reality of religion though the expression of it varies in its degrees and magnitude.

We have noticed that religious expressions cannot be same for all. However in the 20th century there arose movements like Theosophical Society and Rama Krishna Mission, holding the view that religion in essence is the same, though it appears in various forms. But, empirically only religions exist, not the common or universal Religion. However, it is possible to suggest that there is something which is behind all these different religions. This something should be called religious consciousness which should be distin-
guished from religions which are the manifestations or expressions of religious consciousness through human feeling, willing, and thinking. Just as there are variations in the medium, there are variations in the expressions of religious consciousness also. Each man is a unique individual and therefore, the expression of religious consciousness can be as many as the medium of these expressions. This view is correctly expressed by Whitehead when he remarked, "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness." That means, religion is some personal experience.

Whitehead's definition of religion is only one of the definitions of religion. Because of the complexity of religious experience, philosophers have made many mistakes while defining religion. For example, to Schleiermacher religion is an emotional experience in which there is the feeling of absolute dependence. Here, there is the mistake of neglecting cognitive and conative aspects of religion. Some of the sectarian religious groups do not recognise other religious groups. On the other hand, some have taken it in a too wide sense accepting all forms of religions. To some, religion and morality are identical. But in fact, if we take religion in essence as "numinous", then even an immoral person who is having a numinous spirit can be religious. The common sense view is that any one who does not believe in God is not religious. But here we need to
define the term God. The liberalists include in their definition of religion the extreme humanists, extreme mystics, extreme pantheists, devotees of nature, utopian enthusiasts (whose atheism may well mean non-theism). This means that one can behave very much like the conventional theists without believing in god (in any conventional sense) or one may be outwardly religious even without having any real religious experience.

In the light of the above mentioned difficulties in defining religion we may conclude that there is no universal religion but only universality of religion. However, students of comparative religions make an attempt to find out some common elements in the various forms of religions. We have mentioned that religious consciousness is common in all religion. But this excludes outward religions which are not based on real religious experience. Again religious consciousness is subjective experience that cannot be easily analysed for objective study. If it is so, how do we find the common element in all religions?

We have mentioned earlier that religion is expressed in various forms which are called religions. In order to find common elements in all religions we shall examine the behaviour and testimony of religious people belonging to different religious sects.
1.1.2. Foundation of Religion. One of the essential features of all forms of religions is the act of worship which is renewed self-commitment to God. Whatever rites, ceremonies, or other means are practised in worship, they serve to put the individual more completely under the control of God's creativity and at the same time release him from the powers of darkness or evil which resist the divine working in him. Through regular practice of worship one can overcome these resistances. Therefore worship, in whatever form it may be, is an essential feature of all religions.

Worship may be corporate or private. It may be worship of god or gods, dictator or king, ideology or truth; it may be ritualistic or non-ritualistic. But all genuine worship is a total commitment of oneself to his God. This commitment is made out of a sense of need for God in whom he finds personal stability and security, peace and joy. This is the deepest need of human life. In the heart of hearts every individual asks the question consciously or unconsciously, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) In the act of genuine worship the individual meets this deepest need of human life.

The basis of worship is faith which is the essence of religion. The essential feature is found in all forms of
Religion. Religion without faith is empty, meaningless. Hebrews 11:1 states that "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It means that faith is the guarantee of our salvation and the vision of the future glory. By faith we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death; by faith we can face trials and persecutions; by faith we can have the courage to face problems; by faith we can truly live on the earth a heavenly life. The religious life is thus founded on faith. In other words faith is the foundation of religion.

What is this faith? "Faith is the giving of oneself to be controlled and remade by what commands trust and devotion." In this sense, faith is the same as worship which is the act of self commitment to the object of worship, God. The definition of faith given by the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 11:1) shows that faith is something more than just self commitment to God. It is the 'substance of things hoped for.' Religion gives the hope of heavenly experience which is idealistic in nature. But it is not just imagination. Faith makes religious hope a present reality. That is the meaning of substance of the things hoped for. Thus faith brings idealism and realism together. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. This means faith is the surest knowledge of reality without any doubt. Faith is the evidence of things not seen, that
means the unknown uncertain future becomes known and guaranteed through faith. Faith gives meaning to the present life. Faith accelerates the present life through the revelation of the divine life, the eternal life. Such an experience supersedes the present sufferings and imperfections. Reason may fail to realise it, but it is revealed to man through faith.

John H. Hick makes a distinction between faith and belief, as it is quoted from F.R. Tennant's Philosophical Theology.

"Belief is more or less constrained by fact or Actuality that already is or will be, independently of any striving of ours, and which convinces us. Faith on the other hand, reaches beyond the Actual or the given to the ideally possible which in the first instance creates, as the mathematician posits his entities, and then by practical activity may realise or bring into Actuality."7

Scientific faith is verifiable objectively whereas religious faith can have no such objective verification.

"But religious verification ... consists in the inwardly satisfying and spiritually fortifying effects of his faith upon the believer himself."8

Faith worked in the lives of hundreds of Faith Warriors. Faith is thus pragmatically verified and the unseen is established as a reality.

Just as faith is the basis of worship, revelation of God is the basis of faith. The word revelation is in the Jewish and Christian theology with a special mean-
ing in connection with the concept of personal God who revealed his will through creation as well as through special revelation or incarnation. Some may argue that faith can work even without any objective reality behind it, because faith is concerned of only purely subjective verification and subjective certitude which can give inspiration and vitality to the religious individual. But as a matter of fact it is wrong to think that there is no reality behind faith. Faith leads to knowledge of actuality or reality which exists even when one does not exercise his faith. Act of faith is viewed in different ways. To Tillich (as quoted by John H. Hick), "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned." This means faith is man's realising God as the ground of his being. Faith is conceived in this way as a voluntary recognition of God's activity in human history. This realisation is made possible through God's revelation. Hence, it is true that faith is grounded on the revelation of God and religion is grounded on faith.

Worship is nothing but the faith in action or expression of faith. It is the act of commitment. Every time we worship God, we renew our commitment to him. We rededicate ourselves to God. Our total life must be an acceptable worship to God or object of worship. Such is the life by faith. Our worship is thus not limited to the
moments of private or corporate form of worship. It includes the total life of a religious soul. Corporate worship signifies the religion which is a binding force or fellowship according to the word 'Religre' from which the word religion has been derived. This common element in all religions is responsible for the 'congregation', 'fellowship of believers', 'church' etc. One Congregation or fellowship or denomination may not recognise another because each group stands for a particular type of religious experience and rather a particular type of interpretation of such experience. Some may claim that God is revealed to them in such and such way and therefore their concept of God is one thing; another group may claim that they have realized God through meditation in a quite different way. In this way there arise various forms of religions and practices. However, faith and worship are two important elements that are common to all religions.

1.1.3. Relation between Philosophy and Religion. In this section we have to discuss religion in contemporary philosophical perspective. Many definitions come to mind as one considers the meaning of 'philosophy'. Its function is to gain as comprehensive a view of human experience and its world, as is possible at any particular time of history. Philosophy, to be comprehensive, includes interpretation of nature using scientific knowledge. It also works out
an interpretation of culture, and here it will be noted
that philosophy, itself, in so far as it is considered
historically as in the case of religion, is a part of
culture and thus is open to continuous reinterpretation
and further development.

Religion is manifestly an element of human experience.
Religious experience is a part of the total experience
of man. In this sense the contents of the religious
experience needs philosophical interpretation as it is
part of the total experience of man. The task of philo-
sophy of religion is to examine, criticise, and assess
the validity of religious experience. Religion is,
ultimately, seeking Reality and as such the expression
of religion in the lives of believers is itself an in-
terpretation of reality. In other words, the ultimate
Truth or God is revealed to man in religious experience.
Philosophy and religion are characteristically and inte-
grally related in the sense that both are committed to
the pursuit of Truth.

Of course, religion has to seek the help of philo-
sophy for clarification and interpretation. But the aim
of philosophy to render coherent account of all experience
cannot be fulfilled. According to the philosophy of
William Temple, as expressed by Padgett:

"Frustrated at every turn to discover a fully
adequate principle of explanation to account for an ordered universe and sufficient to satisfy the mind's demand for coherence, the philosopher finds both the need and justification to turn to religion."

Moreover, the scope of religion is much wider than what we thought of. It is wrong to make religion distinct from secular, because Religion aims at unification of the various elements in man's being and experience.

1.2. Challenges Against Religion.

After having discussed the functions of philosophy and religion and their close relation, let us examine the arguments of some of the recent schools of philosophy which have not only challenged religion, but also threatened it. We need to examine whether religion is something we can talk about or whether it is meaningful in the present day context of contemporary philosophy.

There are four important schools of philosophy that are in some way or other against religion. They are Logical Positivism, Marxism, Psycho-analysis, and Death of God Theology. Logical Positivists do not find religion meaningful as the propositions in religion are not verifiable. As such religion need not be talked about in philosophy. To the Marxists, religion is only opium invented by the capitalists to exploit the poor and once capitalism is abolished religion will dis-
appear. To the modern Psychologists, especially to Psycho-analysists, religion is obsessional neurosis as such it is abnormality and it should be removed to develop a healthy world. Lastly, to the modern Theologians or the Death of God Theologians, God is already dead and never will rise again. He is no more present in the faith of man. Yet, they claim to be Christians as they want to follow Christ who is a good influential social reformer.

Let us examine briefly the doctrines of these contemporary Schools of philosophy before we give our justification of religion.

1.2.1. **Logical Positivism.** The Logical Positivists deny the validity of religion. No one can deny the existence of religion in the history and culture of mankind. Religion was meaningful or useful to mankind throughout the history. Then why do the Logical Positivists deny the validity of religion? The Logical Positivists eliminated not only religion but also metaphysics as a whole, in their attempt to exalt science. To Ayer metaphysical statements are nonsensical as they express neither tautology nor an empirically testable hypothesis. To them all statements like 'Transcendent God exists' are nonsensical. We have to note that Logical Positivists' condemnation of religious
beliefs must not be confused with agnosticism or atheism. The statement 'God exists or does not exist' has factual significance to the agnostics and atheists, while Logical Positivists enquire whether the words used to express religious beliefs have any meaning at all. If they are meaningless the question of truth or falsity of such beliefs does not arise.

Wittgenstein has mentioned why religious language seems meaningless to people of today.

"... this may be because they have lost sight of the practice and the contexts with which the language is associated ... The remedy would be to return to the way of life in which the linguistic practices were born ..."13

In general we might say that Religion involves languages like prayers, creeds, sermons, etc., and the meaning of such languages depends on the contexts and the purpose of it. The understanding of such languages takes long time as it involves the spiritual transformation and the participation in religious experiences of the religious souls who used those languages.

Logical Positivists regard themselves as philosophical analysts. Linguistic analysis consists of philosophical statements about statements which may be affirmed in philosophical or scientific or moral or religious uses. According to Logical Positivists be-
Before answering the question "Does God exist?", it is necessary to enquire whether the word 'God' can be defined. Since religious statements cannot be empirically verified, they are taken to be meaningless.

When we make a distinction between the religious statements and philosophical and scientific statements, we understand the weakness of the arguments of Logical Positivists that religious statements are meaningless because they are not empirically verifiable. But Prof. B.B. Braithwaite argues that if it is so, they should treat moral statements also in this category for they are also unverifiable. The moral statements are accepted as meaningful on the basis of the use principle. If we accept the view of Braithwaite that the meaning of any statement depends not on the way it is verified, but the way it is used, then the religious statements can be treated as equally meaningful as empirical propositions. This is true in the case of logical and mathematical statements also.

Religious statements are declarations of religious experiences of believers as in the case of moral statements which are declaration of adherence or commitment to a way of life—the way of life led by the believer. "By their fruits ye shall see them." (Matt. 7:16) For example, the assertion that 'God is love' recorded in the Bible is tested on the basis of the agapeistic way of life of the Christians.
In this way we can come to the conclusion that religious assertions are meaningful only when it is linked with the moral assertions. In other words religious belief or faith is meaningless unless it is expressed in moral actions. Faith without works is meaningless. (James 2:17)

(The drawbacks of the contention of Logical Positivists can be shown in another way.) Let me refer to the view of Francis Schaeffer in this connection. Against the Logical Positivists he states:

"There is much spirituality about us today that would relate itself to the word 'god' or the idea of god; But this is not what we are talking and spirituality is not a relationship to the word god or to the idea god. It is a relationship to the one who is there, which is an entirely different concept." 

(To the Positivists God is not there in the proposition or word 'God'. They have confused the word with the reality. Word is only shadow, not real. Word can be a means to reality. Unless the Positivists come to an encounter with the reality, which is spiritual in nature behind the word 'god', they fail to understand the meaning of religion.)

1.2.2. Death of God Theology. Now let us examine the arguments of Death of God Theologians against religious belief. The philosophy of 20th century, in its extreme form, the Logical Positivism, has gone as far as to call all religious propositions meaningless as we have discussed
earlier. Such increasing skepticism about religious knowledge resulted in the total disrespect for religion among the sophisticated intellectuals. Philosophical skepticism has caused the death of God.

What does it mean by the expression "The Death Of God"? It does not mean that modern man is incapable of believing in God or modern culture is far away from the presence of God or we exist in an age in which God is keeping silence. On the other hand, a theological statement that proclaims the death of God must mean that God is not present in the so-called religious belief or faith. Probably they mean that since God has disappeared from modern history and the world of science, he is no more available to the religious people.

The growth of science over the last three hundred years has excluded God to explain the origin of the universe. The God of theism has been pushed into the farthest corner as a useless entity, totally denying the existence of God. Natural law has displaced God whose providence is unnecessary to explain natural events.

In the light of this modern spirit and modern scientific approach, faith has become irrational and irrelevant to the modern world. The Death of God Theologians however claim to be Christians in the sense that they have adopted for
themselves Bonhoeffer's definition of Christ, 'The man for others'. That means, they have accepted only the moral teachings of Jesus, not his divinity. In actual fact the new theology has a dead god because all knowledge concerning God is dead. Bishop Robinson, the author of 'Honest to God' also displays a similar attitude. To him God is dead, at least, in the realm of faith. He has challenged many of our traditional ways of thinking about God.

According to Francis Schaeffer, 'God is dead' to the modern theologians because they are influenced by mysticism in which all knowledge concerning God is dead. He puts this position of modern theology like this:

Non-rational  No categories for God, all knowledge concerning God is dead. The personal God is dead. No categories for man or his meaning.
Non-logical  = cerning God is dead. The personal God is faith dead. No categories for man or his meaning.
All rationality, i.e. all contacts with the cosmos (science) = and man is all contacts with history a machine

The Death of God Theologians have failed to recognise the non-rational element in religious consciousness. Their argument that God is dead, just on the basis of rational approach, is not tenable. It is Rudolf Otto who has pointed out a distinction between rational and non-rational elements in religious consciousness. He argues in favour of the non-rational elements in our religious consciousness. To him the experience of God or experience of the Holy is
non-rational element which supersedes the rational elements. Hence religious experience is not fully comprehensible because of the involvement of the non-rational. We have to admit the fact that religion is a deeper experience that goes beyond our reason. Thus the Death of God Theologians have got confused totally.

1.2.3. Psycho-analysis. Another modern critic of religion is the School of Psycho-analysis. Psychology is interested in the behaviour of man including his religious behaviour. For the behaviourists no one has ever touched a soul or has seen one and hence it does not exist. However, the psychologists do not deny the existence of consciousness. To Freud religion is illusion. By illusion Freud means belief in which wish fulfilment is a prominent factor in utter disregard of reality. Ordinarily, this wish remains repressed in the unconscious and yet gives rise to various experiences. He traces the repressed wish, ultimately, to the experience of primitive men, living in small hordes in prehistoric times. Freud teaches that God at bottom is an exalted father. Our belief in God is thus dependent on our relation to our physical father. For Freud, the God of monotheism is the projected image of the primaeval father of the primitive horde. The religious experience is, thus, the expression of the infantile experience which is highly repressed. In this sense, Freud compares religion
with obsessional neuroses. He argues that religious belief is illusory. To him religion is collective neurosis, caused by conditions similar to those producing abnormalities in neurotic patients.

Freud goes further attempting to prove that religion is a danger because it teaches people to believe in an illusion and prohibits critical thinking. Psycho-analysts believe that mind is capable of infinite rationalization. Some believe that religion is harmful, because it makes people abnormal. Some skeptics even suggested that all religious experience can be explained on the basis of conditioned reflexes.

But to attempt to explain all religious experiences on a psychological basis does not fit in with the facts. It is true that religious experience can be described psychologically. But it does not mean psychology can explain religious experience. To explain one thing, is to explain the cause of it, why it happens. Though the psychologists may observe certain points of similarity between the behaviour of a religious person and an abnormal person, they cannot deny the reality of religious experience. The practical life of a religious soul is definitely one clear evidence to prove the reality of religion. One of the challenges a religious man can throw to skeptics is, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psalms 34:8)
The objection that religious experience is merely a conditioned reflex is not justifiable because man is different from animals. Pavlov's conditioning theory is based on animal psychology. Man has reason and a critical faculty and has powers of self-analysis, self-contemplation, and self-criticism which make him quite different from animals. If man's religious experience is only conditioned reflex, he does not have any moral responsibility. Religion is a commitment and it is a personal faith in God. After having a personal commitment to God, a religious soul experiences a radical change in his life. Religion has changed the lives of thousands, especially agapeistic religion (Christianity) which brought about a tremendous change in the history of mankind.

Unlike Freud, Jung seems to be a friend of religion. To him religion is "numinosum". The essence of religious experience is the submission to powers higher than ourselves. Religious experience is characterised by a specific kind of emotional experience, surrendered to a higher power. This higher power is unconscious, according to Jung. To him the unconscious cannot be merely a part of the individual mind, but is a power beyond our control intruding upon our minds. Hence Jung reduces religion to a psychological phenomenon and at the same time elevates the unconscious to a religious phenomenon. For Jung, God is a metaphysical
reality and as such he does not agree with Logical Posi-
tivists nor Freud, but it seems that he agrees with Rudolf
Otto to whom essential religious experience is numinous.\textsuperscript{20}
The presence of God is experienced as a 'mysterium tremen-
dum', which is unexplained. But Jung shows that ego grows
out of the collective unconscious which is non-ego which
is having the quality of eternity. To him religion is
rooted in the unconscious.\textsuperscript{21} He does not see the ultimate
reality behind the unconscious. William James goes fur-
ther and points out that the sub-conscious reveals to us
an unsuspected peculiarity in the constitution of the
human mind. The conscious mind is continuous with a
wider self through which religious experience comes.\textsuperscript{22}

Anyway, it is so clear that the psycho-analytical
account of the origin and nature of religion, specially
the doctrine of Freud is not satisfactory. Religious ex-
perience is not normal experience. It is a kind of higher
experience. In fact neurotic patients find cure in re-
ligion. Religion is a satisfactory answer to all our
psychological problems. Jesus after casting out demon
from a man remarked that "Howbeit this kind goeth not
out but by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:21). Prayer
and fasting can drive out all our unconscious problems,
(demons).
1.2.4. Marxism. The fourth critic of religion is Marxism. The Marxist is dead against religion. According to Marx, "Religion is the opium of the people." This postulate is central in the philosophy of Marxism, with regard to religion. To the Marxists, religion is the invention of the capitalists who make others tolerate all their sufferings in the hope of compensation hereafter. Thus the capitalists use religion as means or tool to exploit the poor class of people. According to Marxists the helplessness of all the exploited in their struggle against the exploiters naturally develops a belief in a better life hereafter. This is true in the case of savages whose helplessness makes them believe in gods, devils, miracles, etc. So long as the poor people do not know the cause of their poverty and misery, they seek religion. Therefore the communists believe that religion can be removed by removing ignorance and helplessness. This can be done through socialism.

Marxism is a dialectical theory of human progress. Although Marx criticised Hegel for identifying Absolute with reality, his dialectic is the basis for his theory of dialectical materialism. To Marx, material world is real and the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into terms of thought, whereas, to Hegel material world is only the manifestation of the real ideal world or Absolute.
Though the Marxists do not believe in God, to the followers of Marx, Marxism has become a religion. A true Marxian believer accepts the dogma of Marx as a gospel of salvation. "The doctrines of Marx are never held by a natural scientist but as an act of religious faith, as a doctrine without which life would have neither meaning nor direction." The inadequacy of Marxism as a religion is due to its effort to solve the total human problem in political terms.

Bertrand Russel formulated another theory regarding the origin of religion. For Marx ignorance and helplessness are the foundation of religion, while Bertrand Russel holds that religion is based primarily and mainly upon the fear of the unknown. He states,

"It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing—fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty,... fear is at the basis of those two things." He says that he is not a Christian because he does not believe in God, immortality of soul, and the divinity of Christ. According to him science can help us to get over this craven fear in which mankind has lived in, instead of looking forward for heaven that religion promises.

Skutch Alexander does not agree with the fear theory
of religion. According to him the fear theory is half-truth.

"We fear only when that which we wish to preserve is threatened. Love of life, concern for things that support and embellish it, is prior to fear ... Religion begins at its natural starting point, the instinct of self-preservation which has been called the first Law of Nature."^26

The theory of Marx is also not true because he himself admits that man's power of knowing the universe, in which he lives, is so limited and his ignorance and helplessness can never disappear. If it is so, religion cannot be liquidated though he claims that science can remove religion. It is true that we cannot have the knowledge of the universe as a whole, we do not know when we die, we do not know what comes after death. In this regard, we are ignorant and helpless. Only religion gives us hope and meaning to life.

1.3. Justification of Religious Belief.

We have noted that the arguments against religion raised by the Logical Positivists, Psychologists, new Theologians and the Marxists are not convincing and valid. However, we cannot say that they are totally wrong. If we examine these arguments in the light of Syadvāda (doctrine of stand points), we have to admit that they are right from the stand point from which they are made. They are true under certain conditions and no judgment is absolutely
true. Only an Omniscient being can have the Kevala-jñana (immediate knowledge) of an object in all its innumerable aspects. Logical Positivists claim that religion is meaningless on the ground that it is not verifiable. What is wrong with them is that they pretend that they know everything and there is no other source of knowledge except sense experience. They eliminated religion for the simple reason that they cannot observe God under their microscope. They forgot the fact that man's understanding is limited and besides empirical knowledge there is intuitive knowledge.

Of course there are objections against the acceptance of intuition as a valid means of knowing because the knowledge supposed to be given in intuition cannot be verified in sense experience and also the intuitionist cannot describe the object of intuition. This objection is due to the failure on the part of the Logical Positivists to take note of the peculiar nature of intuition. In fact intuitive judgments can be verified only by different method. Since the objects of intuition are not empirical and therefore the question of empirical verifiability does not arise in this case. Mystics have claimed that intuition or immediate experience gives them the knowledge of an infinite being which is all inclusive without subject-object distinction. Mysticism can be monism as in Vedantism or personal
mysticism as in Christianity or Pantheistic (nature) mysticism. Through intuition we come to know God as he is and by thinking we get the idea of God. Thus it is clear that objections raised by the Logical Positivists are not tenable. Religion is meaningful and verifiable though not in scientific ways (methods).

Secondly, the arguments of the psychologists against the validity of religion is not convincing especially, Freud's application of psycho-analysis to the study of religion. We have noted that, to Freud religion is universal obsessional neuroses of mankind, by means of which individuals are able to nurse themselves into an unhealthy state of immaturity. He contended that religion is an illusion due to be destroyed when mankind has overcome its infantile prejudice. God, in short, is nothing but a creation of man. Religion is a technique by means of which the person who is afraid of life tries to find a heaven of false security. He even reduced the idea of God to a rationalization of the father image for protection. In his attempt to explain religion, he ignored the religious needs of man. He attacked the logic of theology which justifies these needs. His argument is that science and intellect will take the place of religion in future. But his discussion of religion is full of inconsistencies. One thing we have to admit that Freud's treatment of religion helps us to distinguish
genuine religion from unhealthy religion. When Freud regarded religion as mainly associated with human weakness, he was only referring to neurotic religion and thereby he was only attacking the abuses of religion rather than the use of religion. He never concerned himself with healthy religion. In fact, he did not have the same religious experience.28

Thirdly, the new Theology of the Death of God Theologians is dying, whereas, religion still remains as a living reality in the lives of millions. The Death of God Theologians really differ little from today's optimistic humanists. To them all knowledge concerning God is dead on the basis of rationality. Again, on the basis of the new mysticism any concept of a personal God is also dead. Bishop Robinson also may be treated as a Death of God Theologian as he denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. To him theism is supposedly, dead, since man can no longer know God directly from his acts in the world. He accepts the deity of Jesus only in language, i.e., by using God language for such interpretations. However, he accepts Jesus as a man in whom God's love is manifested in the highest degree. Though he may talk much about love, yet there is no note of loving God.29 The Death of God Theologians by using the phrase "God's saving acts in history" retained the belief in God. But their position is weak be-
cause they do not mean by this that God has in any sense literally entered our space-time world at a particular point in order to begin and complete man's salvation. They mean that God is in some way saving or redeeming all history. This shows that the Death of God Theology is inconsistent, yet it does not deny God totally rather it affirms the need for religion to satisfy the spiritual aspirations of man.

Fourthly, let us try to justify the religious belief against materialism especially Marxism which is antireligious. Probably, Marxism came into existence as a reaction against the exploitation and the hypocrisy prevalent in the community. But now the Marxists have started experiencing the emptiness of life without religion. Today there is spiritual awakening among Russian youths. People are beginning to understand that a desolate soul cannot be satisfied with alcohol, drugs, or even wealth. They want to know about God, they need God. Interest in religion in the Soviet Union has unquestionably declined, since the Bolshevik revolution, but young men and women are now turning back toward religion—and often not to the relatively passive and ritualistic ancient Russian Orthodox (Church) faith of their grandparents, but to the passionate evangelical Christian sects. It is reported that similar spiritual awakening is taking place in China
also. Now the people of China admit that religion is a part of culture of man and not opium as it was thought of.

After having discussed the defects of the arguments of some of the critics of religion, let us examine the validity of religious experience. Religious experience is different from sense experience. According to Schleiermacher, religious experience is an unique and autonomous mental activity. Religion is essentially religious experience. Religion, he regarded as a natural, even necessary aspect of the developed human personality, essentially feeling of absolute dependence on God. Theology is dependent on religious experience.

Kenneth Hamilton writes:

"With the rise of secular society, religion seemed to be on its way out, a failing force doomed to ultimate extinction ... After world war II our western world was in a mood to reconsider the value of religion in its culture." Of course, nobody demands a new religion but only reformation. "It is always needed, (reformation) because a living faith cannot return to yesterday's vision." Now it is clear that there is nothing wrong with the old religion which is in essence the religious experience. Religion in essence is different from the everyday religion which is formal religion. The form and the interpretation (Theology) need to be changed to meet the challenges of
Now the question arises, how do we understand what is beyond our knowledge. Religious knowledge is not empirical knowledge, but intuitive. The prophetic religions claim that reality is revealed to man through intuition. Christianity and Vaishnavism even claim that God becomes man to save mankind. Christ and Krishna are thus God incarnations (special revelations) of God. The doctrine of incarnation is not acceptable to the rationalists. Yet, thousands and thousands of people have been enlightened and blessed by their faith in the incarnation of God, Christ and Krishna. This cannot be verified and therefore we have to adopt the attitude of the blind man who said about Christ, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, I was blind, now I see." (John 9:24) All those who have experienced the working of God in their lives can testify the same thing. The new life they enjoy in fellowship with God is the explicit evidence to the meaningfulness and validity of religion.

In Isaiah chapter 6 the prophet speaks about his vision. He describes what we might call an inward experience. Therefore it cannot be explained.

"This experience purported to be no mere by-product of ordinary sense-experience, such as
one has an idle dream of flying through windows ... It purported to be the experience of what is beyond ordinary experience so that in having it one's range of experience is somehow or other increased, extended or enriched. Such an experience, a religious person would insist, is more valuable than ordinary experience. It has a deeper reality.\textsuperscript{34}

In this chapter, therefore, we shall try to find whether the concept of incarnation is meaningful in the light of the contemporary philosophy.

1.4. Doctrine of Incarnation and Contemporary Philosophy.

1.4.1. What is Incarnation?

The term 'Incarnation' is defined in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics as:

"The act of a divine or super-natural being in assuming the form of a man or animal and continuing to live in that form upon the earth."\textsuperscript{35}

Incarnation is thus different from transmigration in which a soul imigrates from one individual to another. It is also different from a person who possesses divine powers temporarily. Holy men and magicians are also different from incarnation. It is mentioned in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics that among primitive people there is really no such thing as incarnation in the strict sense of the term. The difference is, for the primitive people all those men and women possessing divine powers must be treated as actual deities or at least divine and not as manifestations of certain gods or demons. But at a
later stage, sacred beings of this type might be treated as incarnations of certain god. It was the practice of the primitive people to worship certain animals and medicine men thinking that they were endowed with supernatural powers. But because of the craving for immediate presence of deity there was the practice of deifying men. The belief in incarnation developed only at a still later stage. The doctrine of incarnation in its highest developed form is found in Christianity. But its origin can be traced back to the Egyptian and Hellenistic traditions in the west. So also is the case of Vaishnavism in which this doctrine originated in the Vedas and Puranas. The origin and development of the concept of incarnation in these two religions will be discussed in the next chapter. Aurobindo in his Essays on the Gita stated that the word incarnation is used in a definite sense in religion. "It is the descent of God on earth in human form through human birth." According to Aurobindo, the idea of avatara or incarnation is developed out of Vedanta.

"In the west, this belief has never really stamped itself upon the mind because it has been presented through exoteric christianity as a theological dogma without any roots in the reason and general consciousness and attitude towards life. But in India it has grown up and persisted as a logical outcome of the Vedantic view of life and taken firm root in the consciousness of race."37

According to A.C.Das, the conception of incarnation is scarcely to be found in the principal Vedantic texts,
which teach that Brahman, the Supreme Reality or Being, manifests itself or himself in the form of the universe and that in the ultimate state of realization the aspirant sees that Brahman pervades the world. This means that every finite spirit is an embodiment or an appearance of Brahman. But this embodiment or appearance is conditioned by ignorance. Brahman manifests in the multitudinous things and beings of the world, only under the veil of ignorance. But the incarnation is different from the general manifestations of Brahman. A.C. Das states:

"The incarnation is a man with full divine consciousness, wisdom and power remaining at the same time the Creator and preserver of the universe. This is a mystery which no logic can penetrate."

Here we have mentioned three types of definitions of the word incarnation. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics gives us a definition which is based on the natural origin of the concept of incarnation while Aurobindo gives a logical explanation of its origin. To him, the concept of incarnation is derived from the Vedantic concept of Reality. A.C. Das also agrees with Aurobindo. But he differs from Aurobindo as he believes that incarnation is a mystery and as such it cannot be logically interpreted.
We have seen that incarnation is a unique kind of revelation of God. But the Vedantic view of revelation and the concept of incarnation in religion are entirely different. Incarnation is a spiritual phenomenon while Vedantic view of revelation is speculative theory of Reality from which it is impossible to deduce the concept of incarnation. Religion is a matter of religious experience and the concept of incarnation is also based on such experience and therefore in order to interpret the concept of incarnation we need to begin with the religious experience, not Vedantic Reality nor religious dogmas.

1.4.2. Why is Incarnation Necessary?

The purpose of incarnation, according to Gita as quoted by Sri Aurobindo in his Essays on the Gita is:

"Many are my lives, that are past, and thine also, O Arjuna, all of them I know but thou knowest not, O scourge of the foe. Though I am the unborn, though I am the Lord of all existence, yet I stand upon my own Nature and I come into birth by my self maya. For whosoever there is the fading of the Dharma and uprising of unrighteousness, then I lose myself forth into birth. For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil doers, for the enthroning of the Right, I am born from age to age. He who knoweth this in its right principles by divine birth and my divine work when he abandons his body, comes to rebirth, he comes to me, O Arjuna. Delivered from liking and fear and wrath, full of me, taking refuge in me, many purified by austerity of knowledge have arrived at my
Swami Ramakrishnananda holds the view that no man can give us everything we need except God who can give us salvation. Therefore infinite God came down in the form of incarnation to save us. This is the purpose of incarnation. This can be expressed in a quite natural way as stated below. Inspite of the achievement of science or the promises of technology, man seems to be helpless and dissatisfied. He is longing for something supernatural to which he can be attached for his eternal life. Therefore it is quite natural to accept one, who reveals supernatural power and divine spiritual influence in his life, as incarnation of God because man needs a saviour who can be with him to be an ever present and never failing friend and Lord. Sometimes extraordinary men may be treated as incarnations by deifying them, assuming divine powers by adding certain myths to their lives to meet this essential need to satisfy man's quest for a saviour.

Now the question arises, if there is no reality behind the deification and mythology in the case of incarnation, how will we explain the efficacy of belief in such incarnations. It may be possible to give certain psychological explanation regarding the efficacy of
belief in incarnation even if there is no God becoming flesh. But such explanation is not satisfactory. Therefore we need to believe in the metaphysical explanation of the reality who reveals Himself in a special way to man through incarnation though it is not convincing to the rationalists.

Stephen Neill states that, "The incarnation was inevitable because God is what he is." Bible states that the Son of God took upon him the form of a servant for our sake. It was the love that led to redemptive action. Love entered into time and redeemed time. Love entered into human race as a man and made all things new. Stephen Neill tells us the inevitability of implication of 'God is love'.

Sri Aurobindo after expressing the Gita view regarding the purpose of incarnation, gives his own view. According to him, Dharma is not the only object of the descent of the avatara. He says,

"There are two aspects of the divine birth, one is a descent, the birth of God in humanity, the God-head manifesting itself in the human form and nature, the eternal Avatar; the other is an ascent, the birth of man into the God-head, man rising into the divine nature and consciousness (Madhdvamagatah); it is the being born anew in a second birth of the soul. It is that new birth which Avatarhood and the upholding of the Dharma are intended to serve."
He continues,

"If there were not this rising of man into the God-head 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."43

The purpose of avatar in this case is to manifest the divine nature in the human nature in order that the human nature may be transfigured itself into the Divine, Christhood, Krishnahood, Buddhahood, etc.

Sri Aurobindo emphasises the fact that what is more important in incarnation is the birth of man into the God-head and not simply the preservation of Dharma. The birth of avatar makes it clear that each man is capable of becoming an avatar or God-head. Otherwise what is the necessity of God's becoming flesh. Thus Aurobindo explains the two aspects of incarnation without which it is incomplete.

As it was mentioned earlier God's descent to humanity is inevitable as it is the nature of God's love that should flow to man and at the same time the urge of man to become one with God is made possible by the incarnation, i.e., the ascent of man. The first is the birth of God into humanity and the second is birth of man into God-head.
Thus the new birth of man (the spiritual birth) is the sole purpose of incarnation. Man must be born again to enter into the kingdom of God, i.e., God's presence and fellowship leading to the experience of God-likeness.  
(John 3:3)

1.4.3. **How Is Incarnation Possible?**

Now we shall take up the question - How is it possible? It is a very difficult question to answer, because it is a metaphysical problem. We have already discussed the arguments against the validity of religious belief. The doctrine of incarnation is mere foolishness to the rationalists.

"If God is an extra-cosmic Being, they argue, His assumption of human form through human birth is absurd. If God chose to come down to earth, He might have come in His own original form, if He had one. On the other hand, if He is transcendent, there is obviously a gulf between Him and human beings. So they contend, it is blasphemy to talk of God as assuming human form. The rationalist, if he in the least believes in God, conceives Him as pure spirit, and to him conception of Avatara appears fantastic. He finds it hard to reconcile the fact of Incarnation with the infinitude of God."44

The doctrine of incarnation depends on certain convictions such as the affirmation of the transcendence of God and also the affirmation of divine personality to God. But the belief in the transcendence of God must
include the truth of immanence to avoid the difficulty of dualism. Bradley is not against the idea of personal God. But his idea of God is only an appearance of the Absolute, however high God may be in the scale of degrees of reality. Some philosophers are against the anthropomorphic view of God as a person. John's Gospel states that God is a spirit, (John 4:23) and those who worship him must worship him in truth and spirit. The writer of the fourth gospel holds the view that the Logos who is a spirit became flesh, (John 1:14). Here it seems that a kind of mystical impersonal being goes along with the Theology in which God is conceived of as personal. No doubt that the God of the theist is a personal God, who is both transcendent and immanent, unlike the pantheistic view. The theist holds the view that the religious life is based on communion with God and not on identification with him. In this respect immanence of God means something different for the theist. For the pantheist, world is a phase of God, if not the complete expression of him. To the theist, on the other hand, God's immanence means the continuous interaction between man and God who sustains the world by the energy of his will. At the same time man has a will of his own. Accordingly when religious thinkers speak about "partaking in the life of God", it means response to divine influence and ethical communion with God, not actual identification with him.
In the light of this concept of immanence the theists believe in the transcendence of God. The spatial and temporal world is a manifestation of God's divine will. God himself is beyond the temporal and spatial world, yet he is transcendent ground of the whole universe.

Again for the theists God is infinite, eternal and Absolute. It means God is not subject to any limitations unless it is done by his own will. For the theists, God is Absolute. But God of religion need not be identical with the philosophical Absolute which is not personal whereas God of theist is personal.

The belief in the personality of God determines the nature of religious consciousness because there is a difference between a personal and impersonal relationship. Theists accept God as a person on the ground that he has a supreme will. He reveals himself in and to the souls of men. God could not reveal himself as personal unless he were a person.

According to Aurobindo, world requires sometimes special form of descent, manifestation of the Divine spirit, God. This is incarnation which is the manifestation of the whole Divine personality of God in human form. The need and nature of this descent is mentioned
in Gita chapter 4. But the question, 'How is it possible?'
still remains. We have mentioned that God is immanent
and hence he reveals his divine will to human souls. But
avatar is self-conscious Being, God in man. How do we
explain this process of God's becoming man?

Vedavyas in his 'Hinduism in the Space Age' discussed
the question, 'How a Universal Being like God descent
into a human frame which is limited?' This may be a
puzzle to the modern man. Vedavyas states that the sci-
cence of Biology and atomic physics give us the clue, as
to how such a mystery is possible in nature, even by
scientific analogy. The atom which is infinitesimal in
size, contains a universe of energy. This is true in
the case of a banyan tree which is contained in its tiny
seed.Probably Vedavyas here means that God in his full-
ness is concealed in the avatar as in the case of banyan
tree which is concealed in its seed. But this is not a
convincing illustration. Incarnation is a matter of trans-
forming God in his fullness to a limited finite being.

Incarnation is the descent of God into flesh. This
descent suggests that the body which God assumes is made
of Prakrti. But Ramanuja is opposed to this view. For
him the form of an avatar is not a product of material
elements comprised within Prakrti. An avatar of God
is thus a particular form of God which he assumes in order to come down to this empirical world. The creation and destruction of this world are sports of God. God's birth in the world is unnatural as it is not the effect of Karmas. God being above all Karmic influences, his divine nature remains unaffected even when he comes down to this world, (Gita 4/7). God preserves his divinity even in the stage of incarnation.

Though we have attempted to give a rational explanation of the process of incarnation, we could not find a convincing one so far. Now let me refer to the Gospel of John chapter 3 where Jesus explains the process of being born again, the spiritual birth of man. Spiritual birth is essential for one to come to the knowledge of God or to enter into the kingdom of God. But how is it possible to be born again? The answer is:

"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going, so is everyone who is born of the spirit."

John 3:8

It means that the new birth happens by the direct working of the Holy Spirit and only by the effect of the behaviour of a person we know whether he is born again. Similarly, we cannot give intelligible explanation of the process of incarnation. Only by the life such person lives, we know he is an incarnation of God. Incarnation must be
divine self-conscious being as God is, though he is in the limited human form. For example, the life and works of Jesus Christ including the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophesies regarding his life make it evident that Jesus is the incarnation of God. Not only that, the spiritual presence and the spiritual influence of Jesus in the lives of his followers (Christian believers) even today indicate that he is the unique incarnation of God though we cannot say how it happened. So also the case of Lord Krishna whose spiritual influence and presence is felt by the devotees of Krishna giving evidence to accept him as an avatara of God.

There are other difficulties also. Modern man can ask, why God should take the form of a man (incarnation) to set things right in the world. God, being omnipotent should be capable of correcting things by divine intervention. The problem of God's intervention through incarnation is needed because of some misdirection in the working of the world which is God's creation. The acceptance of this would be to accept that God could not envisage the future possibilities of his creation. The explanation that this misdirection or wrong direction is due to the working of free individuals whom God created, again leads to other questions. Is man really free? If God is omniscient and omnipotent, how could
man be taken as free? , etc. These questions are not answered satisfactorily by religion. I have only indicated some of the problems which arise from the doctrine of incarnation.

Many of these problems would not arise if we take the incarnation as ordinary human beings who have achieved superhuman status. Such persons are not mere men for ordinary people. At the same time they cannot be called as Gods, though they reveal qualities in some degree or other, which are usually attributed to God. From the standpoint of Absolutism such an explanation is an easy one because, Absolutism accepts some form of identity between man and the Absolute. So it is natural that man in the evolutionary process reveals superhuman qualities and such man is taken by the people of his generation or subsequent generation as incarnation.

Thus we shall conclude here, before we take up the discussion of the doctrine of incarnation in Vaishnavism and Christianity, that the meaning of religion lies in the religious experience of believers (either through mystical experience or influence and spiritual presence of incarnations). Into such religious experiences philosophical speculation does not penetrate, though philosophers are attempting to make analytic study of it.
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