6.1. We have now come to the final stage of our discussion. We have so far discussed critically the doctrine of incarnation in both Vaishnavism and Christianity after having a survey of the historical development of the concept of incarnation in these religions. Before giving our conclusion, it would be appropriate to recapitulate what we have discussed in the preceding chapters, so that on the basis of it we can draw our conclusion. Therefore the first half of this chapter is devoted to give a summary of the preceding chapters and the second half to draw the conclusion.

6.2. Review of Chapters 1-5.

6.2.1. Chapter 1 is just an introduction to the doctrine of incarnation in general. But at the very outset, we have faced with a serious problem. If incarnation is taken as God becoming man or God's special manifestation in this world in any form to save mankind at different occasions as Gita advocates or the word of God becoming flesh as New Testament holds, it is a religious conviction accepted by faith without having adequate evidence to convince the modern man with his scientific and sceptical outlook. Therefore, it was necessary to start with the discussion on Religion in relation to contemporary philosophy, such as Logical
The chief opponent of religion, in any form, is Logical Positivists who denied the validity of religion on the ground of the principle of verification. For the Psycho-analysts like Freud, the world which has come of age need not uphold superstitious belief in God. To them we do not need to seek God to solve our emotional problems which psychology can solve. For the Marxists, if matter is the ultimate reality, it is absurd to believe in a super-natural being or God who comes to help man in his need. They may say that science and technology can explain all our problems and help us in our socio-economic advancement. To the Marxist religion has been invented by the capitalists. The New Theologians have become the Christian atheists by propogating the Death of God Theology. There are many other thinkers who have expressed their dissatisfaction about the traditional belief in God and his manifestations or incarnations.

In this juncture, how will we be able to ascertain the validity and meaning of the doctrine of incarnation in the modern context. It is an herculian task to attempt this. First we have to affirm the reality of God before we discuss the concept of incarnation, even though it is
not possible to verify it in the way the Logical Positivists demand. We have noted that the Logical Positivists' contention is one-sided, since they have ignored the possibility of metaphysics through intuition and the use of principle instead of 'verification principle'.

We cannot ignore the achievements of psychology. But psychology is only a developing science. It is too early for the psychologists to pronounce a final judgment regarding the validity of religion. The major part of human mind is yet to be explored. At least Jung's views regarding the nature of unconscious, giving it a metaphysical status is a clue to this problem. That means, there is room for investing the reality of metaphysics through the study of unconscious to realise the universal self in the sense the Vedantists or Advaitins hold.

We have to appreciate the achievements of Marxists in the field of science and technology. But we cannot agree with their contention that Religion is the invention of the capitalists. Of course, we have to admit that the capitalists might have exploited religion and religious ceremonies for their advantage. The Marxists are trying to explain all our problems in terms of matter. Even mind is only an epiphenomenon to them. They cannot accept the possibility to have a spiritual world or spiritual experience, on the ground that it is not given to our sense
experience. This view is undermining human values to the level of matter. Man is different from beast and also different from material objects. They may argue that religion has evolved out of necessity. According to them we have now reached a stage where we do not need religion.

The attitude of Death of God Theologians is that we need religion, but no need for God. They argue from the rationalistic point of view.

The Marxists are only against the outward form of religion which is controlled by the capitalists. But it seems that they are not against religion in essence, which is agape or love Divine. They want to promote the expression of love forgetting about its source. What they are emphasising is the ethical aspect of religion. Whether they acknowledge it or not, the presence of religion in marxism is evident since God is love. The Death of God Theologians or new Theologians in the west are only dissatisfied with the anthropomorphic concept of God, that is they are against the traditional form of Christianity. They have not yet denied the validity of religion as such.

Now our problem is, how to discuss the validity and possibility of incarnation in the context of the objections against belief in God. As we have discussed, unless we justify the theistic form of religion, there is no
room for incarnation. The meaning of the word 'incarnation' in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics is to be treated as the general view.

"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."

This shows that a 'God' who is there must exist to manifest himself as incarnation. For the rationalists, even if they admit the reality of God in some form, cannot admit the possibility of incarnation. In spite of the objections against the anthropomorphic concept of God in theistic form of religion, majority of the people in this world continue to believe in God of the theists. We have taken for our study two theistic religions, religions of grace and love - Vaishnavism and Christianity. Both claim to be revealed religions and in both incarnation is fundamental and the determining force.

6.2.2. Therefore in the second chapter, we have made a historical survey to understand the origin and development of the concept of incarnation in Christianity and Vaishnavism. The Christian concept of incarnation has its own history. Christianity being a religion developed out of Judaism, we have to find out the origin of this concept in the Old Testament. Jesus, the founder of Christianity claims that he came to fulfil the laws of Judaism. Old Testament is having several references to Christ,
called the messianic passages. Jesus Christ is believed to be the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the doctrine of incarnation is not developed, though it is originated right in the book of Genesis where it is mentioned about the promise of incarnation (Genesis 3:15). But only during the fourth century A.D., as a result of the Christological controversies, the concept of incarnation developed as a doctrine. During the medieval period Christian doctrine of incarnation remained as a part of dogmatic theology. During the modern period, because of Rationalism, Logical Positivism, Existentialism, etc., the Christian doctrine of incarnation became a hard problem to deal with. At the same time contemporary Indian Christian theologians made an attempt to discuss the Christian doctrine of incarnation in the light of the Indian concept of incarnation (avatara) and Advaita.

The Vaishnava doctrine of incarnation was developed as a system by Ramanuja who was influenced by the Alvars of South India. As a matter of fact the concept of incarnation or avatara was originated from the Vedas, especially Rg-Veda where it is mentioned about the three strides of Vishnu. The Vaishnavites are the worshippers of Vishnu and his incarnations, especially Krishna and Rama. The doctrine of incarnation was further developed
by other Vaishnava theologians like Madhva, Vallabha, Nimbarka, Caitanya, etc. One thing we have to note here is that even though Vaishnavism is a theistic religion, its doctrine of avatara is based on the Advaita philosophy (monism). However, it is not the Advaita of Sankara but the qualified monism (Visistadvaita) of Ramanuja which provides room for belief in God and the possibility of incarnation. The contemporary Indian philosophers like Radhakrishnan, Sri Aurobindo are the supporters of this doctrine of avatara from the Advaita stand point.

6.2.3. In the third chapter, the problem of avatara in Vaishnavism is discussed, including the various theories of avatara formulated by the Vaishnava theologians like Ramanuja, Vallabha, Madhva. All of them formulated their theories based on Advaita though different from Sankara’s.

To understand the Vaishnava concept of avatara, we have discussed it on the basis of Vaishnava concept of God, man, and world and their relation to the ultimate reality, Brahman. The Bhagavata doctrine looks upon Brahman or Absolute or Ananda having immanent and transcendent nature. Hence, Vaishnava or Bhagavata cult recognises God as Absolute from
Vedantic point of view. At the same time, it accepts, the theistic concept of personal God who manifests himself to redeem man. Hence there is room for incarnation in the qualified monism of Vaishnava doctrine.

One of the chief characteristics of Vaishnava avatara is that they are predominantly mythological. To John Hick, incarnation is not a theological theory not a hypothesis, it is a religious myth, rather a mystery. Hence, it is immaterial whether an avatara is historical or not. All the different avataras are only the manifestations of Vishnu, who is thought of as Brahman himself, whose manifestation in Krishna is Vishnu himself in his fullness. This can be accepted only in mythological language and historical Krishna is entirely a different person. Not only that, Krishna of Mahabharata and Krishna of Gita cannot be the same.

Ramanuja's theory of incarnation includes five-fold manifestations of Brahman- Para, Vyuha, Vibhava, Antaryamin, and Archa. When we closely examine these incarnations we find that only Vibhava is avatara in the strict sense of the term, because only in Vibhava, Vishnu makes a special manifestation for the salvation of man. Para or VYuha is not descent of God. Antaryamin is only God as indweller in all souls, and Archa is the symbolic representation of God's manifestation or avatara.
Unlike Ramanuja's theory of avatara, the other Vaishnava theologians give more importance to Krishna's heaven (Vrindaban). Here we have a parallel to Christ's Kingdom of God. This idea of incarnation reveals the purpose of incarnation. To Sri Aurobindo, incarnation is incomplete unless the human beings have been up-lifted to be divine. Jesus and Krishna established the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men so that it may grow towards its fullness.

6.2.4. In the fourth chapter the Christian doctrine of incarnation is discussed in detail. The question "What do you think about the Christ?" is approached in two ways - an objective and external study of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ including the belief of his followers and a subjective approach through the personal Christian experience of early Christians as well as all the christian devotees (believers) of all ages in general, so as to provide a reasonable interpretation of Christian concept of incarnation. Yet this concept is a paradox, because of its complex nature.

In order to understand the nature of Christ we have discussed the two natures of Christ in relation to his pre-existence as well as the legacy of the incarnation (his existence after earthly ministry). The Council of Chalcedon insisted that the two natures of Christ, both
human and divine, were not temporary but existed and is existing for ever. The presence of Christ is felt in the lives of his believers through the operation of the Holy Spirit which is identical with the God's presence with us. Jesus Christ is Immanuel, meaning God with us.

It is, of course, a difficult problem to affirm the two natures of Christ in one person, that is, he is true man and true God. We have mentioned a number of Bible references to support this view of the Nicene creed. The unity of divine and human in one person, Jesus Christ, can be explained in terms of creation of man in the image of God, which is general revelation. Like wise Son of God possessing eternally humanity and divinity, manifested humanity as special revelation without giving up his divinity.

So far we have described the nature of eschatological Christ. But Jesus is not a mythological figure. He is a historical person. But for the believers he is their Lord and personal Saviour who is no more historical, but a reality present anywhere at any time. The historical Jesus is thus Messiah (Christ) in the mythological language. If we demythologize the New Testament account of Christ, we miss the eschatological aspect of Christ. Therefore to make New Testament acceptable to the modern man it should be reinterpreted retaining the eschatological aspect of
it rather than demythologizing.

Thus the validity of incarnation is discussed on the basis of its historicity mixed with eschatology on one hand and the linking of past historical event with the present experience (history). To Y. Masih, the living presence of Jesus today is much more important to the believer than the historicity of the gospel account. Existential interpretation of incarnation has reduced Christ to a mere moral teacher and not very God of very God in human form. The validity of incarnation is thus based on interpretation of historical Jesus. History of Jesus is hypothetical, while faith gives certainty.

6.2.5. The purpose of our discussion of the doctrine of incarnation in Vaishnavism and Christianity is to have a comparative study of both. Therefore, our fifth chapter is used to deal with the parallels as well as differences in these religions with regard to the nature of Krishna of Gita and Jesus Christ of the New Testament.

We have noted that the twelve characteristics of avatar mentioned by Geoffrey Parinder are common in Christian doctrine of incarnation also. Both the doctrines assert that the incarnation is real, not appearance; having both divine and human natures; the purpose of incarnation is redemption of man and destruction of the powers of darkness;
incarnation is both mythological and historical; incarnation is special revelation of God.

There are quite a good number of parallels collected from the New Testament and Gita regarding Christ and Krishna. The four gospels support the historicity of Jesus Christ; so also the Mahabharata gives clue to the historicity of Krishna. Christ claims his pre-existence (John 8:57, 58, 6:41); so also Krishna claims his pre-existence (Gita 4:4-9). The claims of Christ and Krishna as God are recorded in John 3:38, 11:25, and Gita vii:6, 7, 25, 26 respectively. Christ and Krishna as unique redeemers are mentioned in John 14:20, 17:3 and in Gita 9:29, 32, 11:53 respectively.

The most important parallel we notice here is that both religions are religions of grace and love. Salvation is by grace alone and faith and works are only the two sides of religion.

A good number of Christians theologians and philosophers tried to point out the close relation between Christianity and Vaishnavism on the basis of these parallels. They even made an attempt to show that the Vaishnava religion, though originated in time immemorial in India, is indebted to Christianity for its doctrine of redemption by grace and faith and also for the Krishna story,
According to Macnicol this view is much more probable.
But Vivian Phelips holds the view that the resemblance is because of the progressive revelation of God. He finds parallels not only in Vaishnavism but even in other religions also.

It has been claimed by both Christ and Krishna as unique incarnations. But we cannot admit two rival unique incarnations. To avoid this we have to say that both are one and the same incarnation. Some of the Christian theologians support this view argued that Christ is already in Vaishnavism. M.M. Thomas, Bishop Appasamy, Stanley Jones, Robin Boyd, and Panikar are some of the Christian theologians who hold this view.

Though the arguments regarding the alleged indebtedness of Vaishnavism to Christianity cannot be fully accepted, at least there we see greater probability for such influence at a later stage. However, we shall mention some of the points of differences between the Vaishnava doctrine of avatara and the Christian doctrine of incarnation.

The concept of Christ as mediator and redeemer and as one who sacrificed his life to redeem mankind is the core of the Christian doctrine. But this concept of mediator and also his vicarious death are absent in the Vaishnava doctrine of incarnation (avatara). In the case of Vaishnava doctrine, the incarnate God reveals himself directly and
saves devotees without a mediator. Secondly, in Christianity there is only one incarnation whereas in Vaishnavism, Vishnu has manifested himself through the ages in several forms or incarnations. Thirdly, Christians believe that the body of Jesus was real human body similar to ordinary body, but Krishna's body was not ordinary material body. His body was composed of Suddha-sattva. Fourthly, in Christianity, salvation is by faith and grace only, while in Vaishnavism it is by bakti and grace. But there is a distinction between faith and bhakti. Faith is commitment or surrender to God and trust in God, whereas bhakti implies nearness of God. This nearness of God is experienced in Christianity through prayer. But Radhakrishnan interprets bhakti as a relationship of trust and love to a personal God.² If 'bhakti' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'bhaj', it means "sharing" which again implies mutual relationship between God and the devotee. In this sense faith and bhakti are same and prayer is only the expression of that faith. N.K. Devaraja, on the other hand, has a different view. According to him 'bhakti' involves personal effort whereas 'prapatti' is self surrender and dependence on God.³ To him 'bhakti' is only devotion to God, the direct apprehension of the presence of God. 'Prapatti' is then same as 'faith'.

Fifthly, there is a difference between the terms
'Avatara' and 'Incarnation'. Though some of the Christian theologians like Sadhu Sundersingh, Bishop A.J. Appasamy, and V. Chakharai have accepted Jesus as avatara, but those theologians, like B. Upadhyaya, who have philosophical and spiritual affinities with advaita Vedanta feel that the concept 'avatara' is unsuitable to describe Jesus. Avatara is considered as a descent of God himself in different forms, not necessarily historical. Avataras are many, while incarnation is unique and once and for all. Avataras are intended to destroy the wicked and save the righteous, while incarnation is to save the sinners. It seems that Vaishnava concept of avatara is more or less docetic, a divine theophany, God appearing in human guise only, not the Logos (Word) becoming flesh.

When the Christians believe in Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and man, there is the difficulty of identifying Jesus as God at the same time. But in the case of Vaishnava doctrine this problem does not arise because Krishna avatara is not a mediator but the direct descent of God himself. Again in the case of Christian concept of incarnation there is the problem of explaining the process of God becoming flesh, while in Vaishnavism the body of avatara is not material body. Hence that problem does not arise in Vaishnavism.
When we closely examine these points of differences between Vaishnava doctrine of avatara and Christian concept of incarnation, we will be able to understand that it is only a question of difference in interpretation. We have noted that the concept of incarnation as mediator between God and man is peculiar to Christianity. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). He is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24) by means of his death, for the redemption of sinners, that are under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15). Here it is made clear that Jesus became a mediator through his vicarious death; that aspect is lacking in Vaishnava doctrine. As in the case of Old Testament priests who were the mediators between God and men through the offering of sacrifices to God, Jesus, the eternal High priest, is the mediator. In this case he is sacrifice and mediator at the same time. So also he is the High Priest and God at the same time. We have to treat this interpretation as mythological.

Regarding the question of the finality of incarnation, we have discussed earlier that Krishna is also the final and supreme unique incarnation. Other avataraas are partial incarnations or manifestations of divinity only. Krishna is the incarnation of God himself in his fullness. Jesus is also full incarnation of God-head (Colossians 2:9).
Another difference observed in the Christian doctrine of incarnation is the doctrine of Virgin birth. The traditional belief of the Church is that Jesus Christ is very God of very God, born of the virgin Mary. It is believed that the virgin birth is a physical birth of God. But the rationalists cannot accept this theory. The fourth gospel tells that God is spirit and born of the flesh is flesh and born of the spirit is spirit. If it is so how is it possible to explain the birth of Christ as divine birth? Of course, the whole creation is the manifestation of God in general and the incarnation is a special manifestation in terms of creation. In any case we have to explain the process of incarnation in mythological language as in the case of the Vaishnava doctrine. If it is so, why not we accept the view that incarnation and avatara are not two but the same process of descent of God. Incarnation is the image of the invisible God. "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

The general view regarding the purpose of avatara as mentioned in Gita Chapter 4, is that it is for the protection of the good and the destruction of the evil doers and the establishment of the law. But the purpose of the incarnation in Christianity is the redemption of mankind as a whole, because there is no one righteous in the sight of God, and salvation is by grace only. Since Vaishnava doc-
trine also affirms that salvation is by grace and faith alone, it is obvious that there is no distinction between righteous or wicked, all are welcome to Krishna's Vrindaban experience. The descent of avatara into the temporal world is not to destroy all evil doers, but the powers of darkness. Jesus Christ also did the same thing. He defeated satan through his vicarious death on the cross of calvary.

In the fifth chapter, therefore an attempt is made to show the close relation between Christianity and Vaishnavism with regard to the doctrine of incarnation. Even though these two religions differ in many respects they come closer in the interpretation of the doctrine of incarnation. As a unique redeemer, Krishna comes closer to Christ. Not only that, some theologians claim that Christ is already in Vaishnavism. When we analyse the Christian experience it seems that it is very similar to the bhakti experience of the Vaishnava devotees. The Christian experience is the flow of love of God operating in the lives of Christian devotees. God is one and the love of God that flows into the lives of Krishna Bhaktas also must be the same. Christianity and Vaishnavism, both claim to be agapestic religions though outwardly they are different.

6.3. Conclusion.

Now on the basis of the preceding discussion of the
doctrine of incarnation, including the comparative study of
the avatara doctrine of Vaishnavism and Christian doctrine
of incarnation, we shall conclude our work by showing the
significance of incarnation (Christ and Krishna) for men
today. Let us consider the challenge of incarnation in as
realistic a way as possible to the individual and his daily
life today as well as that of the society. To establish
the significance of incarnation of Christ and Krishna ava­
tara for modern man we have to show firstly, the place of
Christ and Krishna in contemporary philosophy and religion
as interpretation of God; secondly, the parallels in the in­
terpretation of God as experienced in these two religions
followed by the inner unity of Vaishnavism and Christianity;
thirdly, the evidence of the Kingdom of God or Vrindaban
on earth being interpreted as incarnation in operation.
We shall elaborate this three-fold conclusion.

6.3.1. The Place of Christ and Krishna in Contemporary
Philosophy, and religion as Interpretation of God.

Majority of the people of this world in some form or
other profess their belief in the incarnation through they
differ in their interpretation of it. But people are
gradually losing their faith in incarnation because their
belief does not agree with the contemporary scientific,
Psychological and philosophical thoughts. To many people
the benevolent God of the past is absent today or dead.
Some may not oppose openly the belief in incarnation because they are under the control of the tradition; yet they are indifferent to it. Materialists and rationalists, on the other hand, openly deny the validity of incarnation. In the west there is a great demand for New Religion, New Morality and New Theology. The New religion is secular religion (the religionless Christianity) ignoring the place of God in it.

In Bonhoeffer's letters and papers from prison, he anticipated a complete disappearance of men's trust in the power of religion to give them peace of mind or the kind of personal adjustment to life that psychotherapy could now achieve for them. He declared that the contemporary 'man has come of age', able at least to stand on his own feet without the prop of religion. But Kenneth Hamilton writes:

"After the world war II our western world was in a mood to reconsider the value of religion in its culture. It seemed reasonable to do so, for, while old-fashioned atheists had blamed religion for keeping mankind so long in the Dark Ages and prophesied a future of increasing freedom and world wide brotherhood of man when religious superstition was left behind, the twentieth century had twice already been plunged into destructive wars and had recently seen tyrannies spring up that had brought back the evils of the Dark Ages, made more deadly through the development of technological know-how."

In the face of this situation in the fifties, many
turned back to the traditional religion, in the west, which promised to solve man's deepest problems that technology had left untouched. In the east, of course, the traditional ritualistic religion continues to exist. But the modern man with his scientific and sceptical outlook cannot accept the traditional religious doctrines unless it is reformed and its content be reinterpreted. That does not mean that the modern man needs a new religion. Of course, "a living faith cannot return to yesterday's vision and will not be nourished by manna gathered and kept over until the next day."  

Paul Tillich was considered as an Apostle to the intellectuals speaking in their language. His basic purpose was to communicate Christian faith to intellectuals and to protect the substance of the Christian faith from dangerous misinterpretations. He describes the meaning of God as that which concerns men ultimately. To be really ultimate, God must transcend everything concrete, and finite. Yet, the transcendent must be mediated through concrete objects. To him faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, of God. He was against literalism. For him literalistic approach to scripture is absurd and has less power than the existential symbolic approach. He recommended deliteralizing rather than demythologizing the religious doctrines.
We shall agree with Paul Tillich in this new approach to religious doctrines. That means the doctrine of incarnation needs reinterpretation, before deliteralizing, communicating it to the intellectuals of today.

The doctrine of incarnation is so significant to modern man in the respect that incarnation is the interpretation of God. New Testament interprets Jesus Christ who interprets God. Similarly, Gita interprets Krishna who interprets God. In this connection let us refer to the dictum of Nicholas Berdyaev,

"that both philosophy and theology should take their start, neither with God, nor with man (there being no bridge between these two principles), but with the God-man."\(^9\)

This is because the basis of religious life and the raw material of theology are the meeting and mutual interaction of God and man, the movement of God towards man, and of man towards God. We can know nothing of God as he is in himself. Apart from God, man ceases to be a person. Man is a person and individual at the same time. Being an individual he is a part of the nature and being a person he is subject, unique not part of anything but a creative being indestructible.\(^10\) Personality thus belongs to the realm of the spiritual. Hence man is made in the image of God and he belongs to both spiritual and physical worlds. Some western theologians do not agree with the
view that man is divine potentially. But they accept only Christ as God-man.

How do we know that there is divinity in man? God cannot be known through objectivisation and analysis applied to ultimate reality. Saint Paul says, "But now we see in a mirror darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). This view insists that all real knowledge of God is symbolic or real symbols. Myths belong to the class of real symbols. A myth is to be treated as a reality not as fiction, though different from empirical fact. "It is the story of a past event of spiritual significance as that event is preserved in the popular memory."¹¹

"Myth presents to us the super-natural in the natural, the super-sensible in the sensible, the spiritual life in the life of the flesh. It brings two worlds together symbolically."¹²

In both the religions the myth of the incarnation is the drama of love between God and man, the birth of God in man, and the birth of man in God. This is the true expression of religious experience. This experience of having love between God and man is the basis of incarnation which is expressed in mythological language. We can only think of God symbolically and mythologically. The rationalists tried to construct a purely objective concept of God. But they have described God as an abstract intellectual concept and not as a living and dynamic reality.
In this sense we shall accept incarnation as the interpretation of God. Incarnation in Christ as well as the avatara of Krishna both interpret God's nature as love. It is recorded in New Testament and Gita. Incarnation is the manifestation of Divine love in its fullness in a special way. It explains that it is initiated by God himself and not simply because of man's hunger for God. Infinite love cannot exist without a loving subject and a loved object. Incarnation is God-man who raises human nature from the depth of sin and links them to the heart of God. Through the God-man, men return to God; as a result the kingdom of love or kingdom of God has been established. Christian doctrine asserts that Christ, the God-man, has identified himself with man, and restored the image of God in him which was obliterated at the fall of man. This, in other words, is the birth of God in man and the new birth of man in God by means of divine love, divine spirit. According to Gospel of John chapter 3, this restoration of man into the image of God or the experience of New birth (spiritual birth) takes place by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Hence it is clear that incarnation involves the continuous working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals and community. This leads to the formation of a divine society in which God's love operates. We realize the presence of God in individuals and in the divine society through the operation of the Holy Spirit or the love of God.
(agape) in action. Incarnations- Christ of the New Testament and Krishna of Gita- both interpret: God as love. This divine love is different from friendly love (philo) which is natural; whereas divine love (agape) is supernatural, yet works in human life. Matthew 5:43-48 make a distinction between friendly love and agape.

"You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you, and persecute you."

This agape, in its fullness, is manifested in Christ and Krishna. It continues to manifest. This interpretation of God as love is the determining force of Christianity and Vaishnavism.

6.3.2. The Inner Unity of Vaishnavism and Christianity Follows from the Interpretation of God as Agape (Love Divine).

God is love divine (agape) and incarnation is the descent or manifestation of agape on earth, particularly, the operation of divine love in and through the lives of the devotees or bhaktas. On the basis of the similarities between the bhakti experience of Vaishnava saints and Christian experience of believers and also the interpretation of God as agape, we shall be able to establish an inner unity of Vaishnavism and Christianity, in spite of the historical, geographical, ritualistic, and other differences.
In all the Bhakti writings great emphasis is laid upon the love of God. God is not merely an omnipotent, omnicient, and omnipresent being. He is a God of love. That is the fundamental attribute of God which appeals to the Vaishnava Bhakta. God overflows with love for mankind. In this respect God is considered as heavenly Father and sometimes he is described as the mother who is one with her children. God is also considered as the bridegroom to express the intimate and intense relation between God and the bhakta.

If God is a God of love, he is best reached by love. Not only that, God is love itself.

"The ignorant say that love and God are two. No one knows that love itself is God. Whoever knows that love itself is God, shall rest in love, one with God."  

God is God of love and the response which he expects from men is that of love. Bhakti is the incessant flow of love for God.

Not only in Vaishnavism, God is interpreted as love, but also the New Testament describes God as love (agape). In 1 John 4:7-8, we read,

"Let us love one another for love is of God; and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love."

No one has seen God, but the bhakta can know that he is
in God and God is in him through the spirit or love of God operating in his life.

Here we notice the relation between bhakti and Christian experience. The classical arguments for the existence of God were criticised by Kant. He emphasised the moral argument. But now greater emphasis is laid upon the religious experience as the basis of knowledge of God. God realization is made possible through bhakti experience. It is now common in the philosophy of religion that belief in God is asserted on the basis of the body of religious experience in the world. The Church and the Bible have not ceased to possess importance, but they are no longer the final and infallible sources of authority they were. A religious proposition is accepted not because the Church teaches nor because it is found in the Bible, but also because it corresponds to something real and vital in the bhakti experience. So long as Church and the Bible are the sources of authority Christians cannot recognise the relation of other religions to Christianity. But when we stress on religious experience the sectarian tendency disappears. In the case of bhakti experience and Christian experience, both, the devotees enjoy the presence of love of God and his clear guidance.

There are some thinkers today who dismiss all religious
experiences as subjective and illusory. Both Christian saints and bhakti saints had visions and attached considerable importance to them. To the modern psychology such visions are only subjective experience depending on one's own mind and temperament. It is true that a vision occurs in a pictorial form depending on the artistic temperament of the individual. But the bhaktas experience God's guidance through such visions.

The validity of religious experience of bhakti saints and Christian devotees can be tested. Men have different degrees of religious experience. We cannot just take it for granted what they report, but the validity of bhakti experience and Christian experience rest upon the total life of the individual devotee. God is a God of love and those who have drunk deep of his love do not keep this experience to themselves, but share it with others.

We can mention some examples to show that the Krishna experiences of Vaishnavites and Christian experiences of Christian devotees are one in essence and valid. A.J. Appasamy mentions in his book 'The Theology of the Hindu Bhakti' that the social and religious condition of Bengal during the middle ages was very poor. But after the introduction of Vaishnavism of Caitanya a tremendous socio-religious revival took place there. The history of the
Christian mission reveals that the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is tremendous. Both Christianity and Vaishnavism are missionary religions. Because of their conviction that religion ought to be shared with others, both the bhaktas and Christian believers burn with a missionary passion. The religious revival that took place in South India and Bengal, and also the reformation in the Christian Church show that the love of God (incarnation of God) continues to operate in the world. The inner unity of Vaishnavism and Christianity is evident in the working of the same agape incarnate in the lives of baktas and Christian believers.

6.3.3. The Evidence of the Kingdom of God or Vrindaban on Earth is Interpreted as Incarnation in Operation.

The love divine operating in the lives of bhaktas and Christian believers resulted in the formation of a Divine Society or Kingdom of love or Vrindaban which is the continuation of Krishnavatara and Christ incarnation. Let us now discuss the nature of the Kingdom of God on earth.

We have mentioned earlier that to Nimbarka, avatarā is not limited to the life and works of Krishna or temporary appearances of God, but it means the heaven of Krishna becomes manifest on earth and the bhaktas are capable of witnessing the inner life of God, which is the
prema lila (love sport) of Krishna and the gopis. Salvation is attained by entering into the heaven of Krishna to participate in prema-lila. Vallabha and Caitanya also shared this view.

This view is emphasised in Christianity also. At the commencement of the public ministry of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, the fore-runner of the Messiah proclaimed that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 3:2). Again Jesus himself said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This can be interpreted as Jesus Christ himself is the Kingdom of God and a spiritual birth or divine awakening is essential to enter into the Kingdom of God or heavenly experience.

According to Tillich the Kingdom of God is the answer to the quest for the meaning of history. To him the earthly life of man is ambiguous life because of its fallen nature. But the essence of man is spiritual. Therefore, there is a quest in man for the unambiguous life. Kingdom of God is immanent and transcendent. It is involved in historical events, moving toward a final goal. It is God who brings the Kingdom of God to fulfilment. The Kingdom of God means salvation for human history.

Does it mean that the Kingdom of God is earthly? No! Jesus Christ said, "My Kingdom is not of this world..." (John 18:36). There are many people today who think that
the Kingdom of God will come in this world, that peace will be established on earth, that mankind will enjoy lasting happiness. Before the world war, the western theologians thought that the British civilization will be extended throughout the world, thereby the Kingdom of God will be on earth. Suddenly the world war broke out.

When Bonhoeffer emphasized 'man's coming of age', he means a secular godless Kingdom of God. Daniel Jenkins explains this expression 'man's coming of age' from the Biblical standpoint. To him man has come of age in Jesus Christ. He has entered into his heritage of freedom as the child of God through Christ. He means that the Christian maturity (Ephesians chapter 4) is the source of 'man's coming of age'.

The new world, the Kingdom of God, is already present among us. The Kingdom of heaven is in your midst or within you (Luke 17:21). Paul Tillich explains this concept of 'Kingdom of God among you'. According to him man is redeemed through the Divine Spirit which is not separated from man and reality. He uses the symbol 'spiritual presence' which is correlated to the human spirit. This Divine spirit overcomes the ambiguous life in the dimension of the human spirit, the symbol of the Kingdom of God overcomes the ambiguities of life in the dimension of history; the
symbol of 'Eternal life', in turn, shows the conquest of ambiguities in the dimension beyond history.\textsuperscript{15} This shows that the Kingdom of God is in the world but not of the world. It is other worldly.

The Kingdom of God/Love is the Church but the institutionalised Church is not the Kingdom of God. According to Bede Griffiths, the Church is only the 'sign' of the Kingdom of God which is the world of the Resurrection though it is already present among us. We may only catch glimpses of it now, but it is spreading throughout the world.\textsuperscript{16} A beautiful passage of the New Testament informs us that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

This is true in the case of the concept of Kingdom of heaven (Vrindaban) in Vaishnavism. Klaus Klostermaier has written an interesting book entitled 'In the Paradise of Krishna'. He gives a beautiful description of the earthly Vrindaban in North India. It is a place of pilgrimage. According to the writer one can attain the highest degree of prema-bhakti in Vrindaban. But he experienced in this sacred Vrindaban the ambiguities of life. The life here is not without sorrow. The disappointment and bitterness of life, suffering and misery, loneliness and illness, death and old age are realities even here, compelling
people to probe beyond the surface of a gay, traditionally popular religion into the deeper strata of truth. Here also there is fear and uncertainty, doubting of religious authority and despairing of the gods. There are many honest and pious people here, but also many who only wish for a fool's paradise, who cannot bear the idea of a demanding God, but only require an idol freely distributing health and wealth. There are many for whom religion means business or politics, many who do not wish to enter the Kingdom of God and also try to prevent others from doing so. There are many who speak of love for God and have no love for their neighbour, there are many who impose upon themselves severe renunciation, and there are also many hypocrites. This picture of Vrindaban on earth can be taken as the picture of Vaishnavism and Christianity today in miniature form. This makes it clear that the Kingdom of God is invisible though it is here and now.

As we mentioned earlier the basic principle of the Kingdom of God is agape, (Love Divine). It is the extension of the incarnation of the Love Divine. It is the Kingdom of love. Since the Love Divine is in operation in this world we can assert that the Kingdom of God is present in history and it is here and now.

Men today, in their longing for a friendlier world
order, can hardly dispense with the social vision of the Kingdom of God mentioned in the New Testament and Gita. Although many of the social movements of our time are secular in form, they reflect the influence of the teachings of New Testament and Gita, the Kingdom of love. The idea of the disinterested service of God (Gita) and the idea of love your enemy and love your neighbour as yourself (New Testament) are the same agapeism.

For a long time it was thought that the word 'religion' came from the Latin verb 'to bind' (religare). It is more likely that it comes from the verb 'to care for' or 'to give heed to' (religere). The religious man is concerned with preserving firm standards of morality than with the personal happiness of individuals (Nishkarma Karma). To obey the will of God is for him more important than to find immediate personal development. He believes that enduring happiness lies in obeying and serving God.

Thus we shall conclude that the Love Divine (Agape) manifested in history and interpreted in Gita and New Testament is the same reality. Both the religions of love and grace uphold the fact that incarnation is still in operation extending the Kingdom of God in this world. The influence of the idea of the Kingdom of God on modern man is the indication of the validity of incarnation.
REFERENCES


6. Ibid P. 34.

7. Ibid P. 35.


10. Ibid P. 381.


12. Ibid P. 35.


