

A Comparative Approach to the Concept of Incarnation of God in Hinduism and Christianity

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Abstract : This is a comparative study of the incarnation of God according to Hinduism and Christianity. After dealing with their basic ideas on the concept of the incarnation of God, the main similarities and differences between each other will be examined by quoting references from their sacred texts. In Hinduism, the term avatara is used in order to indicate the concept of the incarnation of God. The word avatara is derived from ava (down) and tri (to cross, to save, attain). Thus avatara means to come down or to descend. Although an avatara is commonly considered as an appearance of any deity on earth, the term refers particularly to descents of Vishnu. According to Hinduism, God becomes an avatara in every age and entering into diverse wombs for the sake of establishing righteousness. On the Christian side, the word incarnation means enfleshment. In Christianity, it is believed that the Logos or Word, the Second Person of Trinity, presumed human reality. Incarnation refers both to the act of God becoming a human being and to the result of his action, namely the permanent union of the divine and human natures in the one Person of the Word. When the doctrines of incarnation and avatara are compared some similarities and differences can be found between each other. The basic similarity is that both doctrines are not bound by the laws of nature as human beings are. They reveal God's personal love and concern, and emphasize loving devotion. Their entry into the world is generally accompanied by extraordinary signs. In both cases, the descent of God allows for human beings to ascend to God. On the other hand, there are some distinctions between two religious traditions. For instance, according to Hinduism there are many and repeated avatars, while Christ comes only once. Indeed, this is related to the respective cyclic and linear worldviews of the two religions. Another difference is that in Hinduism avatars are real and perfect, while in Christianity Christ is also real, yet imperfect; that is, he has human imperfections, except sin. While Christ has never been thought of as a partial incarnation, in Hinduism there are some partial and full avatars. The other difference is that while the purpose of Christ is primarily ultimate salvation, not every avatara grants ultimate liberation, some of them come only to save a devotee from a specific predicament.

Keywords : Avatara, Christianity, Hinduism, incarnation

Conference Title : ICSRD 2020 : International Conference on Scientific Research and Development

Conference Location : Chicago, United States

Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020