



The concept of incarnation in philosophical and religious traditions juxtaposed the concept of incarnation in Christianity

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Abstract

Incarnation, as per definition in its simplistic form, wherein God assumes a human nature, is central to the Christian doctrine of faith. The premise upon which the uniqueness of the Christian doctrine of incarnation, as opposed to other religious traditions, is embedded in and among other texts of the Christian Bible, and in the Gospel according to John 1:1-18. This article will articulate some of the philosophies in existence at that time which may allegedly have influenced and elicited a response from the writer of the Gospel according to John (GAJ). An attempt will be made to understand how some of these philosophies view incarnation in forms that may not necessarily reflect incarnation as is traditionally understood in Christianity which is primarily 'God becoming flesh'. Central to the understanding of Christian incarnation is the philosophical concept of *logos* which emanated in Greek philosophy. Finally, it should become apparent, that the understanding of 'incarnation'¹, in some religious traditions, which will be explored, cannot claim the same uniqueness of the Christian tradition of 'God becoming flesh'.

Keywords: incarnation, logos, theosis, deification, avatara

Introduction

This article opted for a particular structure of firstly entrenching the belief that GAJ differed from the historical philosophical and contemporary tradition to the time GAJ was penned, and therefore begins with dispelling philosophies and the Gnostic Mandaean teachings that some claim to have been assimilated into the GAJ. This is primarily to indicate the independence and uniqueness² of the GAJ. Hereafter, the article provides a list of fundamental beliefs by Christians of the incarnated logos substantiated also by a few first and second century historians. These beliefs are then compared to concepts such as theophany, apotheosis, theosis, deification, canonisation, anthropomorphism and avatara, which are alluded to by Huxley (1947:60), as being equated to the logos. These concepts are sometimes used, inadvertently, in other religious traditions to describe 'incarnation' within their religion.

¹ The word 'incarnation' is at times incorrectly used to refer to 'appearances' of gods in the form of humans or animals on earth. Therefore the word incarnation is inserted within inverted commas.

² Danijel Casni (2015:189) substantiates this uniqueness by providing an excellent exegetical study on the prologue to the GAJ in reference to *logos*. He states that there is a latent revelation in this prologue to the Trinitarian *logos*. He intimates that 'in the beginning was the Word (*i.e. the Holy Spirit*), and the Word (*i.e. the Son*) was with God, and the Word was God (*i.e. the Father*)'. In supporting this revelation, he explores the lexical and stylistic characteristics of this prologue and structure. See also de Villiers (2014:5) articulating the mystical union of the trinity.



Methodology

The research methodology opted for in the study is the phenomenological deductive approach embracing qualitative research based on an historical, philosophical and comparative literary study. These approaches are based on:

1. The historical understanding of logos in the Gospel according to John
2. The philosophical understanding of logos in classical Greco-Roman / Jewish system
3. The influence of the above (1 & 2) including the religious and gnostic religions
4. A literary study of religious traditions of contemporary beliefs of incarnation and
5. A comparative study between the Christian doctrine of logos as incarnation juxtapose the traditions mentioned above (2 to 4).

Much has been written about the Christian understanding of incarnation to the extent that other religious traditions have equated and or claimed, the same characteristic features in their respective religious traditions. It is for this reason that at the onset of this article, and to avoid any confusion, I begin with the understanding of the *logos*, which features prominently as the prologue to GAJ. This is intentional, as it will address the position that GAJ was not an assimilation of theories prevalent before nor during the writing of GAJ. It serves also to confirm that Jesus is the only uniquely incarnated God. This uniquely incarnated God, the *logos*, does not fit into the theoretical arguments of Greco-Roman³ and Jewish⁴ philosophers, and Gnosticism. These Greco-Roman and Jewish philosophies theorised about the concept of *logos* as a 'universal mind' (Heraclitus 550-480 BCE) as 'reason' (Plato 427-347 BCE) as 'logic' (Aristotle 384-322 BCE), as 'divine active principle' (Stoicism 300 BCE)⁵, and the '*logos-wisdom*' idea of Philo (20 BCE-50 AD). I intentionally do not discuss any of these theories or philosophies in depth, but refer the reader to the work of Hillar (2012) in my footnote for an in depth examination of these philosophies. I also briefly address one of the Gnostic religions, Mandaism, which was believed to have some sort of influence in the writing of GAJ. I also address their understanding of Jesus, and, Hibil, the 'redeemer' and whether this teaching influenced GAJ.

Philosophies and their possible influence on the GAJ including Mandaism

The authorship of the GAJ, is still debated amongst the Johannine scholars. It is not the intention of this article to delve into the merits of this debate about the authorship of the GAJ. The intention is rather to address the GAJ, which seemingly refer to the concept of incarnation of the Christian tradition, as well as to explore the prevalent philosophies of the day, which may, or may not, have influenced or elicited a response from the writer of GAJ. A foremost philosophical concept with which John 1:1-18 has always been associated with was the philosophical idea of the *logos*. Scholars have disagreed amongst themselves as to whether this concept of *logos* did indeed influence the writer of GAJ although most scholars have agreed that the writer of GAJ would have had an understanding of the concept of *logos*. (Cullman 1980:258-259).

Again, there are many theories put forward by different scholars with regards to the influential philosophies on the GAJ, but the intention is to address some of these philosophies that could

³ See Hillar (2012:6-35) for an in depth reflection of *logos* in Greek culture.

⁴ See Hillar (2012:36-70) for an in depth reflection of *logos* in Judaism

⁵ Although Stoicism (established by Zeno of Citium in the early third century BCE) began to decline around fourth century CE.



have prompted the writer of the GAJ to express himself by way of John 1:1-18 (yet not at the exclusion of other texts in the GAJ). This approach is intentional to extrapolate the text in question, not only in relation to the philosophical theories of the time as stated above, but also in relation those philosophies that may have an impact on a rendition of 'incarnation' within its ideology. Thereafter, this text will be subjected to the understanding of 'incarnation' within other religious traditions, which will eventually illustrate the uniqueness of the Christian doctrine of incarnation of 'God becoming flesh'.

There are two prominent sources of philosophical thought which could have impacted rudimentary on the GAJ or, as Brown (1997:371) suggests, could be a combination of both philosophy and religion. The philosophical thought would be: (1) Greek (Hellenism) and (2) Judaism. The religious thought would be: (1) the mystery religions and (2) Gnosticism (together with its accommodating literature such as *Corpus Hermeticum* and that of the Mandaeans). The Gnostic religions such as Hermeticism and Mandaeanism were not convincingly, but rather substantively, proven to be prominent only after the first century of Christianity and as such could not have had a bearing or influence on the GAJ (see Dodd:1985:52; Rose:1946:132; Tripolitis:2002:135). Therefore, I will firstly want to dispense with the idea that Mandaeanism could have had some sort of influence on GAJ. I will nevertheless return to Mandaeanism later, to address the idea of a 'redeemer' figure in his religion.

Buckley (2002:30) who spent many years researching the Mandaean religion, confirmed that the religion is commonly classified with Gnosticism, and could be traced to the Jordan/Palestine area, although Bhutia and Lotha (2018:np) expands the area to southwestern (*sic*) Mesopotamia to early Christian or even pre-Christian era. Of significance is that the Mandaeans viewed Jesus as a false messiah but revered John the Baptist. Buckley (1993:182) contends that the story of Miriai, who converted from Judaism to Mandaeanism, and that although her name indicates that she is the mother of Jesus, yet, 'her (Miriai) association with him (Jesus) is absent in the accounts that portray her (Miriai) as a positive figure'. Jesus was actually regarded as an apostate Mandaean and was vilified for starting a new religion! Nevertheless Buckley (1993:184), in addressing Miriai and Nisbai (Elizabeth) in the Mandaean text and in drawing the conclusion that:

Miriai and Nisbai are... linked positively in the Mandaean collection of texts called The Book of John⁶. These traditions demonstrate that the Mandaeans knew of the ties between these two women, from Luke's gospel and/or from Christian apocryphal texts, including the Infancy Gospel literature...

somewhat affirms the suspicion that Christianity may have influenced Mandaeanism in some way rather than the other way round. It is therefore not necessary, in this article, to address the 'influence' of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and Mandaean religious thought in this article. Magezi and Manzanga (2010) and Buckley (2002) has addressed this issue substantively in their paper titled 'A study to establish the most plausible background to the Fourth Gospel (John)'.

Having dispelled the idea that Mandaeanism somewhat influenced GAJ, we now turn our attention to understanding the term *logos* as explained by the Greco-Roman and Jewish philosophers pre and contemporary GAJ. In examining these philosophies, I hope to draw the conclusion that their understanding of *logos* have no bearing on GAJ.

⁶ According to popular, present-day Mandaean belief, Jesus, an apostate Mandaean, made sure that he first received baptism from John the Baptist, so that Jesus' soul would still have a chance to be saved, despite his apostasy (Buckley: 2002:183)



Logos according to Greco-Roman and Jewish philosophies and Gnosticism

According to Brown (1997:371), the GAJ was 'characterized as a Hellenistic Gospel'. He supports this observation by referring to abstract concepts such as light and truth, where the dualistic tendencies of light and darkness, truth and falsehood and even its concept of *logos*, is evident. Smalley (1994:43) considers the chief idea of Plato's philosophy to be centred around:

...(the) dualistic contrasts between the invisible, 'real' world beyond time (above), and its inferior copy in this world of time (below). Allied to this basic conception, and deriving from it, is the further contrast between man's superior mind and inferior flesh, and the notion of perfection as the mind released by contemplation from its material confines in order to unite with true reality in God.

In Platonism, we find this understanding that the earthly realm is a temporary one as compared to the heavenly realm, which is considered to be an eternal one. Does the GAJ not endorse this philosophy when the writer refers to Jesus who says, 'You belong to this world here below, but I come from above'? (John 8:23). The words, upon which emphasis is placed to describe what comes from above, are the words 'true' and 'real'. John 8:23 Jesus is considered as being the true One, the real One. Other texts explicating these contrasts as found in John 1:9 (Jesus is the **real** 'light'); John 6:32 (Jesus as the **real** 'bread'); John 15:1 (Jesus as the **real** 'vine'), further establishes this idea of what comes from above is real and true. Therefore, this whole idea of what descends from above (heaven) is real and true. This form of contrasts in Platonism, according to Brown (1966:LVII), is of a 'real world, invisible and eternal, contrasted with the world of appearance here below'.

In Mandaeism a similar understanding is expressed: the idea of a World of Light (world above) and a World of Darkness (world below). This thought is thoroughly explained, in the Right Ginza⁷ (the story of Hibil's⁸ descent to Hades⁹), where Hibil is sent on a mission to determine whose plan it was to wage war against the Light ('God'). He therefore descends through different stages (seven underworlds), which was a dangerous mission. He eventually ascends to the World of Light and reports to the Light. As such Hibil is seen as a redeemer figure emanating from the World of Light, descending through the World of Darkness and after conquering the powers of darkness ascend to the World of Light. Again the idea of contrast: what comes from above is 'Light' and, what exists below is 'Dark'.

Similarly, Corpus Hermeticum, presents a 'cosmogony of the world as emerging from Divine Light and created through Divine Intellect. The "birth of the cosmos," begins as a Light realm of spiritual powers'. (Corey:2016:57). As this light descends, it becomes darker. This light is conceived of as the *logos*. Corey (2016:57-58) explains that

The Logos of light and life descends on the natural world causing spirit, fire, and air to ascend upwards, while earth and water begin to move in a circular motion. The circling motion brought about by the Logos causes creatures to emerge. The Logos makes seven controllers (not viewed negatively) who circle the world. These are the planets moving in orbits who control fate. The first human, who is an androgynous being, is made in the image of the Logos.

⁷ The Right Ginza (consists of 18 books) is one of two parts of the Mandaean Holy scriptures called the Ginza Rba. The other part is called the Left Ginza (consists of 3 books and known as the 'Book of the Dead').

⁸ Hibil is regarded as a 'redeemer' because of his descent into 'darkness ultimately to be saved by divine intervention. As such he is regarded as the saviour to be saved. In other legends he is regarded as the creator. (Baker:2017:29).

⁹ Hades should not be seen as is generally understood as hell nor as the material world and of humanity. It is simply a World of Darkness inhabited by underworld forces which were rumoured to wage war against the World of Light.



This spiritual archetypal human desires to create as well and unites with the seven celestial bodies. From this union, seven androgynous beings are created, half-immortal and half-mortal. After a time, the androgynous beings split apart and the creatures populate the earth. This creation myth symbolically portrays that our world is an extension of divine Light and Intelligence.

This understanding of above and below may have been a development of the philosophical conceptual interpretation of the word *logos*. The word *logos* has many meanings. The most common meaning in Greco-Roman and Judaic culture are reason, thought and speech. However, according to Hillar (2012:6), the word *logos*, is 'not used for a "word" as used in grammar' rather it is used as an expression in Greek philosophy to designate:

a rational, intelligent, and thus vivifying principle of the universe. This principle was deduced from an analogy to the living creature, and because the ancient Greeks understood the universe as a living reality in accordance with their belief, it had to be vivified by some principle, namely, the universal *logos*.

The vivification of *logos* as a metaphysical concept was developed by Heraclitus (d. 475 BCE), as far as is known. He was probably the first philosopher to express this concept of *logos* both philosophically and theologically. He claimed that, between all things, there is a hidden connection between opposites, which produces a dynamic equilibrium. An example is the idea of seawater. Seawater drunk by humans is harmful, yet fish live in seawater. Seawater therefore, seen to be positive and negative, yet produces a dynamic equilibrium. For Heraclitus, the connection between these opposites is the product of a 'universal mind', the *logos*, 'according to which all things in the world happen'. (Hillar:2012:10). Although the world is in a state of flux, the underlying principle that brings order is this 'universal mind', the *logos*. The *logos*, therefore, according to Heraclitus, is the organising principle of the universe. In this understanding of *logos*, there is no reference of an incarnated being similar to the *logos* understanding in the GAJ.

There is a sense that the philosophy of Plato comes closest to the Christian doctrine of *logos*. This may be conceded to, if the *logos* of Plato symbolises the Trinitarian idea of God in Christianity (cf. Casni:2005:189). This is certainly not the case in Plato's philosophy. Plato teaches the ontological distinction between the eternal, intelligible world of Form and Ideas and the perceptible world. In this, the perceptible world is a shadow of Forms and Ideas. Drozdek (2007:153), in explaining the concept of Forms and Ideas and the good in Plato's philosophy, makes the following remark, especially in respect to the idea of good, as the pinnacle in the hierarchical structure, that 'The world of ideas is hierarchical with the idea of the good at the top. It is higher than other ideas since other ideas depend on it and "their being and essence" stem from it'. The idea of good is referred to as the *logos*, and at other times, is called divine (Drozdek:2007:154). Nowhere in Plato's philosophy is the *logos*, the divine principle, incarnated as a human being similar to the *logos* understanding in the GAJ.

The Stoics developed the concept of *logos* further to speak of it as the *seminal reason* through which all things came to be, by which all things were ordered and to which all things returned. (Funk 1996:np). Philo persisted with the concept of the *logos* and blended it into the Jewish conception of God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and serves as the intermediary between god and the world (Tripolitis 2002:80). This notion of the *logos* as an intermediary found support in Dodd (1985:68), who analysed the contribution made by Philo to Judaism, to surmise that the *logos* is the 'medium of intercourse between God and this world'. This is to be understood in the Platonic idea of the dualistic contrasts between the invisible, 'real' world beyond time (above) as Form and Ideas, and its inferior copy in this world of time (below), the perceptible world. Funk (1996:np), summaries this idea of Philo who used the term *logos* more than 1300 times in his writings and suggests that Philo refers to the *logos* as the 'Divine Reason, by participation in which humans are rational; the model of the universe; the superintendent or governor of the universe; and the first-born son of God.' Yet,



again, there is no reference to the *logos* as an incarnated human being similar to the *logos* understanding in the GAJ.

The discussions thus far give a glimpse of the development of the concept of *logos* through the different epochs by the different philosophers. The concept of *logos* developed from the time of Heraclitus up and until Philo, who greatly, though allegorically, engaged Judaism. According to Tripolitis (2002:77) allegorical interpretation was a popular method of synthesising Greek and Hebrew thoughts. It was also suggested that there are no absolute factual proofs that the writer of GAJ was influenced by these philosophical idea of *logos* as developed by the philosophers mentioned above.

Having addressed some of the philosophies which were suspected of having some influence on the writer of the GAJ, it can be ascertained that the writer of the GAJ and his interpretation of the *logos* stands in contrast to what the prevailing idea of *logos* which was prevalent before and possibly during the time of the GAJ. The ideas of above and below, the concept of the 'real' and a mediator between above and below, the reference of who the true light is, was given a different interpretation to the idea of *logos* by the GAJ juxtaposed the philosophies at the time of the GAJ. The GAJ seem to have answered in no uncertain terms that the *logos* is indeed God who incarnated as flesh and now is the mediator between humanity and God. The *Logos* is indeed righteous or real and the true light which cannot be compared to the world below. The understanding therefore of incarnation in GAJ could, in many ways have answered and presented a different development and understanding of the *logos* as the philosophers attempted to do.

Christian understanding of incarnation juxtaposed other religions

A revisit of the text in question in the Bible, John 1:1-18, explains in clear terms who the *logos* is, where the *logos* originated, the purpose of the *logos* descending into the realm of humanity and what the *logos* had accomplished for humanity. Further references in the GAJ alludes to the death and resurrection of the *logos*. With this understanding of the *logos*, which is to be understood, in no uncertain terms to be Jesus Christ, an examination of incarnation in other religions would be attempted and then compared to the Christian belief about incarnation.

Brian Hebblethwaite (1979:189), somewhat probably sarcastically, when discussing the uniqueness of the incarnation, accuses John Hick of suggesting that if incarnation was at all possible why did it take place once rather than at many points in other religions? John Hick obviously did not support the idea of an incarnation (Hick:1979:192), but does raise an important question which needs to be considered and therefore what follows hereafter is a discussion on how other religions that claim a concept of 'incarnation' should be understood and why, when compared to the Christian understanding of incarnation, there is a difference. Please see footnote 1 for why 'incarnation', when referred to other religions is written in inverted commas.

Below is a list of fundamental beliefs by Christians about the incarnation of Jesus Christ (the *logos*). I have used the apophatic approach to conceive of an understanding of Jesus Christ as the incarnated *logos*. This list serves to compare the incarnation as understood in Christianity juxtapose other religions.

1. Jesus is not a hybrid. He was not half human and half God. He was fully God and fully man.
2. Jesus was not a demi-god. He was not a mythological being having more power than humans but less power than God.
3. The incarnation of Jesus was a once and forever event, never to be repeated.
4. The appearance of Jesus on earth was not a theophany. His appearance was not a temporary form to convey a message and then disappear.



5. Jesus did not seem to be human neither was He an illusion. Therefore the docetic explanation holds no substance. He was fully God and fully man.
6. Jesus was not an apotheosis. He was not made into a God. He was God.
7. Neither was Jesus a theosis. He was not united with God. He was God.
8. He died as any human being, but was raised to life thus fulfilling His purpose and mission on earth and return to His abode from whence He came only to promise that He will return.

These basic tenets of the Christian understanding of God is undeniable based on the Christian teachings as found in scripture but also the existence and tenacity of Christians are attested to in history by subsequent historians such as Flavius Josephus (47- 100 CE), Pliny (61-113 CE) and Tacitus (56-120 CE). How are other religions attested with regards especially to a form of incarnation? This article cannot cover all the religions in this regard, but attention will be given to a few religions which have as their teaching a semblance to incarnation. The basic tenets above will therefore serve as the basis upon which the following section on how other religions compare to the Christian understanding of incarnation.

Other religions semblance of incarnation

Aldous Huxley (1947:60), commenting on the doctrine of God stated that 'God can be incarnated in human is found in most of the principal historic expositions of the Perennial Philosophy – in Hinduism, in Mahayana Buddhism, in Christianity and in the Mohammadanism of the Sufis, by whom the prophet was equated with the eternal *logos*'. Further to this he suggests that, 'The *Logos* passes out of eternity into time for no other purpose than to assist the beings, whose bodily form he takes, to pass out of time into eternity.' (Huxley 1947:62). It can be noticed that Huxley misses the point of the incarnation when he includes Christianity in this statement. When compared to the understanding of Christian incarnation as discussed in point 4 above Huxley's comment borders on a theophany, apotheosis and theosis all of which have been rejected by Christianity. Therefore, hereafter, when the term incarnation is used, it will be used with the understanding that it will be a 'semblance' of incarnation rather than incarnation as in Christianity, when referring to other religions.

In the following discussion a look at different religious traditions which have a semblance to the Christian incarnation is addressed. Werblowsky (1987:279) confirms that in other cultures and traditions, incarnations are 'less unique, though not necessarily 'promiscuous' and unregulated'. He writes about a two-way traffic of (1) gods assuming 'human or other material and earthly shape' and (2) of human beings 'rising to the rank of divinity'. One can construe from this two-way traffic and his understanding and explanation thereof that the idea of deification, canonisation, theosis anthropomorphism, avatara and apotheosis comes into the reckoning. These terminologies can be used to explain, in certain circumstances, how many of the religious traditions view the semblance of incarnation within its own beliefs and traditions about god(s) and human beings assuming the forms of each other.

Weblowsky (1987:281) makes reference to the Egyptian god Amun who incarnates himself in the Pharaoh as an example of enfleshment. Hick (1977:169) refers to a comparison between Buddhology and Christology stating the belief that Gautama is regarded as the incarnation of a transcendent pre-existent Buddha similar to Jesus being the incarnation of a pre-existent *logos*. It is matter of common knowledge that this concept in Buddhology is not a universal Buddhist understanding, but found mainly among the Mahayana Buddhist, and practised very prominently amongst the Tibetan Buddhist. Among the Tibetan Buddhist the idea of an incarnated Buddha seems to be a syncretic assumption between Mahayana Buddhism and indigenous pre-Buddhist beliefs known as Bon.

In Hinduism, the belief in avatara is common. The word avatara is a Sanskrit word which is expressed in English as descent. Avatara means to 'come down', 'to go down' or to descend.



Broken down into its constitutive parts, 'ava' means 'down and 'tara' means 'saviour'. There are a plethora of books, comments and articles written about incarnation in Christianity and avatara in Hinduisim. Once again the points raised in point 4 above will be used as a yardstick to determine whether the Christian understanding of incarnation and the Hindu understanding of avatara are the same or not. The Christian understanding was addressed in points 2-4 above and will therefore not be repeated here. Only the Hindu understanding of avatara will be addressed and then compared to the Christian understanding of incarnation.

The earliest reference to avatara as a noun is found in Panini (3.3.120). Even here it is used to describe different deities in the Vedas. Scholars have placed Panini around 4 BCE and it was around this time that avatara was accepted to mean 'to descend'. (Mishra:2000:5). This descent was explained by Miranda (1990:50) as:

the godhead's crossing over from the celestial regions down to the earth. It is the manifestation of the power of the deity. As a specifically religious term, it signifies both the 'descent' of the godhead from heaven and his 'appearance' in the form of animals (boar, fish, and tortoise), monster (man-lion), or men with superhuman and divine attributes'

This descent, as explained by Miranda, refers to an 'appearance' of the god in the form of animals, a monster and superhuman and divine attributes. This understanding, juxtapose the Christian understanding of incarnation, once again reveals and borders on the idea of apotheosis, theosis and even to the concept theophany and hybridity – terms which is rejected by Christians as describing the incarnation of Jesus.

Parrinder (1997:19-20) suggests that the term avatara is a later word for which the original word to describe this phenomenon was 'manifestation'. According to Parrinder (1997:20) the term avatara does not occur in the classical Upanishads, but may have references in the later Upanishads and that in the later usage any unusual appearance' or a distinguished person may be given the status of an avatara. Depending on which texts one peruses, these 'appearance' in other forms range from ten to twenty-two avatars in the history of Hindu belief. Sukdaven¹⁰ (2012) explains the evolution of Hindu deities as avatars in greater detail in his article published in the NGTT journal.

Finally, in Hinduism there is the belief in reincarnation. This refers the regular descent of the god into the world whenever there is irreligion. In the Bhagvad Gita (4:7-8) we have a sense of the purpose of avatars: Whenever there appears a languishing of righteousness, when unrighteousness arises, then I send forth myself.

In considering the Islamic understanding of incarnation, there is no mention of it in the Qur'an. In as much as Jesus is referred to as the 'Word from God' and 'his word which he committed to Mary' it does not refer to the Christian concept of *Logos*. Muslims actually reject the idea that Jesus is God in the flesh. If one has to consider the reference which Huxley (1947:60) makes to Sufi Islam then Parrinder's (1997:198) claim that some Sufis believe in, not only unity with God but to be God, is indeed profound. Parrinder (1997:196) also makes the point that in Shi'ism belief was placed in divine manifestations especially with regards to Imam Ali and his sons although this manifestation was limited to 'right guidance'. Another reference made by Parrinder (1997:199) was to al-Hallaj who apparently identifies himself with God by claiming, 'I am Reality' or 'my 'I' is the Creative Truth'. This claim by al-Hallaj bordered on and if not, to be an incarnation. It is not clear whether this claim by al-Hallaj should be deemed apotheosis or theosis or the actual incarnation. He was nevertheless executed in 922 CE for heresy.

Therefore, in Judaism, there are no reference that can be cited with absolute claims to incarnation. There are many references in the Old Testament about theophanies, but, as

¹⁰ Sukdaven. M. 2012. A systematic understanding of the evolution of Hindu deities in the development of the concept of *avatara*. NGTT journal. Deel 53, nommers 1 & 2, Maart & Junie 2012 Pg 208-218



mentioned in point 4 above, this does not constitute the salient features of the Christian understanding of incarnation.

Finally, a brief reference to the Gnostic religion of Mandaism and the idea of Hibil as a redeemer figure, cannot attest to 'God becoming flesh' because Hibil was never God but an 'investigator' given the authority to determine the cause of an uprising against the World of Light.

Conclusion

This study set out to understand the concept of *logos* in the GAJ. In this regard a review was done on historical development of the word *logos* from various Greek philosophers and finally how the GAJ understood this word. It was also suggested that the philosophical discussions among the Greek philosophers as well as Philo on the concept of *logos* could not have influenced the writer of the GAJ to any great extent. It was conceded that the writer of the GAJ would have been exposed to the concept of *logos* nevertheless. Having established that the *logos* according to the GAJ was indeed Jesus as the incarnated God, and who was fully God and fully man at the same time, a comparative study was done to understand how a similar phenomenon in other religious traditions was understood juxtapose the Christian understanding of incarnation.

Point 4 of the discussion above delineated salient features upon which the Christian understanding of the incarnation should be tested against other religions and its understanding similar to incarnation. This study has shown, although not comprehensively engaging other religious traditions on this phenomenon of incarnation, that these religions cannot claim with absolute certainty that its understanding of incarnation is the same as the Christian notion of incarnation. As such John's understanding of the *logos* encapsulates the present belief of Christians that Jesus is the incarnated God, yet fully God and fully man. This incarnation is never to be repeated as God, in and through Jesus, accomplished what had to be accomplished once and for all to offer salvation from eternal damnation and to a life everlasting through his death and resurrection.

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