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Reconsidering Faith and Worldview in Dialogue: Hindu and Orthodox Christian Perspectives

Rev. Prof. Angelo Nicolaides - Research Fellow
Department of Philosophy and Applied Ethics
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Zululand, South Africa
Orcid.org/0000-0002-2153-2853

Pandit Hanumanth Parasram
Khachrod, Ujjain District,
Madhya Pradesh, India, 456224

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Abstract

This study explores the epistemological and philosophical differences between the two belief systems, focusing on Orthodox Christian worldviews versus the Vedantic tradition of Hinduism. The researchers employ a qualitative, comparative, and doctrinal research methodology based on a critical textual analysis of primary religious scriptures and relevant theological and philosophical literature. A comparative hermeneutical approach is used to examine the epistemological, doctrinal, and philosophical similarities and differences between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Vedantic tradition of Hinduism.

The purpose of this paper is thus to offer a fleeting comparative analysis of Eastern Orthodoxy and Hinduism in terms of an array of theological and religious characteristics. The epistemological foundation for each weltanschauung is considered and their philosophical arguments are compared. Orthodoxy is based on the Holy Bible, the teaching of the Church Fathers and holy traditions, and the Vedantic tradition of Hinduism based on three primary Hindu texts, the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita are compared in part and some key points of connection and divergence are discussed. The paper examines the basic concepts, tenets and principles, in particular, of the Orthodox Christian religious worldview and that of Hinduism's four major sects or denominations including Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and the Smarta tradition. The concept of the divine in Orthodoxy is deeply entrenched in a triune, personal God *ex-nihilo* whereas Hinduism (particularly through the Vedantic tradition) is often associated with pantheism, holding that Brahman (an impersonal ultimate reality) pervades all things. The human soul is a critical consideration and Orthodox doctrine rejects reincarnation, accentuating that individuals retain their unique identities to achieve union with God (*theosis*). On the other hand, Hinduism integrates reincarnation (*samsara*) and the belief that the individual soul (*Atman*) is identical to Brahman. In terms of creation and suffering, Orthodoxy understands the world as created out of nothing, with Christ victorious over death, while Hindu cosmology habitually views the universe as cyclical and subject to the cosmic law of karma. Hinduism and Christianity are two of the world's foremost religions, each possesses a rich history, and have they have diverse traditions, and profound beliefs. Explicit weight is placed on the idea that while there are fundamental differences between the two religions, there are also similarities that accentuate the universality of certain human spiritual apprehensions. Both faiths highlight the dire need for a moral life and the importance of prayer and adoration. Hindus are deeply spiritual individuals that habitually prioritize spiritual values. They have a distinct understanding of God, the cosmos, humankind, immorality and the path that leads them to salvation. Hinduism is polytheistic, while Christianity is monotheistic. Hinduism trusts in the cycle of reincarnation, while Christianity stresses the resurrection of the dead. These are just some of the many complex similarities and differences

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between the two faiths. Christianity revolves around the persona of Jesus Christ as expounded in the Holy Bible. Hinduism is however not grounded on any one particular person or book but revolves around the idea that there is a God, or no God and just self. Hinduism and Christianity also diverge in their fundamental views when it comes to *inter-alia* heaven, hell and reincarnation. The paper is original in that it reconnoitres both the key differences and similarities between Hinduism and Christianity and proposes ways in which adherents of Hinduism can be taught about the saving grace that Jesus offers Christians. The limitations of the study, as well as areas of possible future research, are also considered. Artificial intelligence - based tools were used to assist with language editing in part, grammar correction, and improving some clarity of expression. The author retains full responsibility for the final content.

Keywords: Christianity, Hinduism, religion, salvation, spirituality, faith.

Introduction

A person's worldview is invariably grounded in faith of some kind. Hinduism possesses a distinct origin and character, shaped by a unique worldview, ethical framework, and set of values. As one of the world's most ancient religious traditions, it is neither the descendant nor the fulfilment of any other religion. Rather, it stands independently, having been shaped by the insights and writings of sages from prehistoric times. This process remains ongoing, as new sages continue to emerge and contribute fresh mystical experiences and spiritual insights to the tradition. (Hoefer, 2013). Hinduism's seminal scriptures are its four books of "Vedas," which are principally an assortment of recordings from the sages throughout the ages (Flood, 1996:35). Hinduism does thus not possess a creed as such, but is rather grounded on the sages and its largely variable beliefs and observances are accepted as long as they keep on moving the faithful in the direction of understandings the sages (Hume, 1921:32-42) who deliver ongoing revelation.

It is noteworthy that Hinduism and Christianity are among the few major world religions that embrace a doctrine of divine incarnation, although they understand and interpret this concept in decidedly different ways. Jesus Christ is held in high regard by many Hindus and has, in various ways, inspired and enriched their spiritual lives. Some Hindus recognize Jesus as an avatar - a divine manifestation in human form - while others view him as a *yogi*, a deeply contemplative and spiritually enlightened person. Still others regard him as a *satguru*, a great teacher and supremely wise spiritual guide.

Hindus have a tendency to focus on Jesus love-filled life of compassion, empathy, sympathy and in the forgiveness he offers people who have transgressed (Rao, 2001). Danielou (1964) states that "a great number of events which surround the birth of Christ - as it is related in the Gospels - strangely reminded us of Buddha's and Krishna's legends". The Hindu faith trusts in *Svarga* (heaven) and *Naraka* (hell) but these are considered to be provisional abodes in which every soul has to live (Flood, 1996). Which one is lived in by a Hindu depends on whether or not one has completed good or evil deeds in life. *Svarga* is also referred to as *Indraloka* and *Svargaloka*, and refers to the heavenly abode of the devas in Hinduism. In the Puranas and in the Atharvaveda, Svarga is one of the seven higher *lokas (Vyahrtis*) in Hindu cosmology and there are seven lower ones (*Pātālas*), namely *bhu, bhuvas, svar*, *mahas, janas, tapas*, and *satya* above and *atala, vitala, sutala, rasātala, talātala, mahātala*, *pātāla* and *naraka* at the bottom of the hierarchy. Svarga is often translated as "heaven," but it differs significantly from the Christian understanding of Heaven. In Hindu thought, Svarga is commonly regarded as a temporary celestial realm where souls experience the rewards of their good deeds before returning to the cycle of rebirth. By contrast, the Christian concept of Heaven is typically understood as the eternal dwelling place of those who are reconciled to the Creator God.

Communicating the message of Jesus Christ to Hindus can be challenging because Hinduism is shaped by a complex and deeply rooted philosophical framework. Central to this framework are concepts such as *karma*, which links human actions to a moral and cosmic order; *maya*, the belief that the material world is ultimately transient or illusory; and atman, the understanding of

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the true self or soul as a spiritual reality. Other important ideas include *moksha*, or liberation from the cycle of rebirth, Brahman, the ultimate and all-encompassing reality, and yoga, a spiritual discipline through which one seeks (Samuel, 2010; Clare & Spadaro, 2001). Hinduism has historically exhibited an openness to recognizing elements of divine truth in a variety of religious traditions. Consequently, it has often regarded the founders and exemplary spiritual figures of other faiths with respect, viewing them as individuals who have contributed to humanity's search for ultimate reality and spiritual fulfilment.

> Jesus signifies to the Hindus the transcendence of the ego as the whole purpose of morality and spirituality. The enlightened person gains release by the surrender of his little self and its vanities by the purity of self and devotion to God. The New Testament symbol of the Kingdom of God made a powerful appeal to modem Hindu reformers. It showed them the Christian message in its moral aspect. (Rao, K.L. Seshagiri, 2001)

Points of Convergence and Divergence Between Hinduism and Christianity

There are several important points of similarity between Christian orthodoxy and Hindu theology. However, substantial differences emerge in their understanding of God. Hinduism is characterized by a rich diversity of gods and goddesses, and its various traditions offer differing perspectives on the nature of the divine. While some Hindu schools emphasize devotion to a particular deity, others understand the many deities as manifestations of a single ultimate reality. Consequently, the concept of one all-powerful God is interpreted in a different way across Hindu traditions and does not correspond directly to the Christian understanding of God.

In the Orthodox Church, as in most Christian traditions, Jesus Christ is understood to be the second Person of the Holy Trinity, the eternal Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages without a mother. In time, He was born of the Virgin Mary, the *Theotokos* ("Mother of God"), without a human father. He is the *Logos*, the eternal Word of God, who became incarnate and dwelt among humanity for approximately thirty-three years (Ware, 1973). According to the doctrine of the Incarnation, Jesus Christ is God made flesh. He is the *Theanthropos* - the God – man - not partly God and partly human, but fully God and fully human. He is perfect both in His divinity and in His humanity. Consequently, He possesses two distinct natures, divine and human, united in the one Person of Christ without confusion, change, division, or separation. Likewise, because He is fully God and fully man, He possesses both a divine will and a human will, with the human will existing in perfect harmony with and submission to the divine will. Despite possessing two natures, Christ remains one Person and one hypostasis. Orthodox Christians identify Him with the divine "I AM" revealed to Moses. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the eternal God who entered human history as a child, suffered and died on the cross, and rose from the dead on the third day. Following His resurrection, He ascended into heaven, and He and the Father are one. As the eternal Son, He is consubstantial with the Father and shares fully in the divine essence. As a member of the Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Jesus Christ endured suffering and death in His human nature during His Passion, while remaining fully divine. He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of God foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament. Christians worship Him as the Savior of the world, the Lamb of God, and the Son of Man.

Within Christianity, the ontology of the human person is understood as fundamentally real and grounded in humanity's creation in the image and likeness of the Triune God. The Church (*Ekklesia*) is viewed as the Body of Christ on earth, embodying His continuing presence in the world (Nicolaides, 2010). Christianity is a monotheistic faith centred on belief in one God who exists eternally as three Persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity constitutes one of the foundational tenets of Christian theology. Comparisons are often drawn between the Christian Trinity and the Hindu concept of the *Trimurti*, comprising Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, who are regarded as three principal manifestations associated with the divine reality known as Brahman. While such comparisons

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may be useful at a superficial level, significant theological differences remain. The Christian Trinity consists of three co-equal and co-eternal Persons sharing one divine essence, whereas the *Trimurti* represents distinct divine functions within Hindu cosmology, commonly associated with creation, preservation, and destruction.

Some scholars and commentators have attempted to identify parallels between the members of the Christian Trinity and figures within the *Trimurti*, proposing correspondences such as Brahma with the Father, Vishnu with the Holy Spirit, and Shiva with the Son. Such comparisons, however, remain approximate and should not be understood as exact theological equivalents. Hindu traditions generally recognize an ultimate reality, often referred to as *Parabrahman*, which transcends and encompasses the various manifestations of the divine. This concept has no direct counterpart within orthodox Christian theology.

Another important distinction concerns the nature of the human person. Many Hindu philosophical schools teach that every individual possesses an *atman* (true self or soul), which is ultimately identical with or inseparable from Brahman. By contrast, Christianity maintains a distinction between the Creator and the created order, affirming that human beings are created in the image of God but are not identical with the divine essence. Hinduism also encompasses a wide variety of devotional expressions, allowing adherents to worship different deities according to their spiritual inclinations and traditions. For example, many Hindus direct their devotion toward Krishna as a loving and compassionate manifestation of the divine, while others venerate Shiva, who is often associated with both destruction and transformation within the cosmic order. Christianity, by contrast, emphasizes the unity of God and teaches that God is love, while also affirming divine justice, righteousness, and holy wrath against evil.

> The trends in Christianity and Hinduism can point to the Trinitarian aspect of not just God Himself, but also the very nature of Existence in which an Existence is best understood by mortals when it is divided into three distinct phases, namely the Creation, Preservation and Destruction and so the Trinitarian aspects actually symbolically represent these three facets of Creation and as such the existence of a Cosmic and Benevolent Father-figure is a must in these two religions. Now though the Christian idea of Trinity existing in the form of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit or Ghost cannot be simply equated with the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara, because in the latter though each God is a Father in His own rights each of them is actually different sides of the same Divinity and are best realized when placed against their respective spheres of activity, namely Creation, Preservation and Destruction. Here each is simply inconceivable without the other. (Patra, 2021)

Salvation for a Christian adherent is a process which incorporates not only the whole earthly life of a person but also the eternal life of the age to come as one seeks *Theosis* (becoming God-like). This process comprises of three distinct phases - *catharsis* (purification), *theoria* (illumination) and *theosis* (divinization). Salvation is not only becoming sinless (purification), but it is rather a progress when one is filled with the divine light. It means becoming filled with God in union with Him that the Christian shines forth with the image of God, even possibly literally becoming a carrier of what is termed the uncreated light. When one attains *theosis*, one becomes full of the divine life an assumes God's characteristics, but does not fuse with the Holy Trinity.

Root beliefs of Orthodoxy

Orthodox Christianity is grounded in divine revelation received through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and preserved within the Holy Tradition of the Church. This Tradition is expressed through the creeds, ecumenical councils, the writings and lives of the saints, apostolic succession, and the liturgical life of the Church. For Orthodox Christians, the promised Messiah is Jesus Christ, who will return at the end of time. His return will be unmistakable and revealed

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in power and glory, although the exact timing remains unknown. As Scripture states, “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36). At His coming, Christ will judge the nations, separating the righteous from the wicked (Matthew 25:31–46).

Orthodox theology affirms the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment of humanity, after which eternal life is understood in terms of communion with God or separation from Him. It also teaches the resurrection of the dead and the universal scope of divine judgment. As Christ foretells, His followers will also endure suffering and persecution in the present age (Matthew 24:9). At the final judgment, each person’s life will be examined, and the outcome will be either eternal life in communion with God or eternal separation from Him (John 5:29).

> The theology, devotion and religious life of contemporary Greek Orthodox Church draw in particular on the Greek patristic synthesis of Christianity and Hellenism, as well as on neo-patristic, Byzantine and post-Byzantine sources that reflect a strong commitment to liturgical and ascetic traditions of Eastern Christianity. In Greek Orthodox theology, religious truth cannot be individually attained on the ground of mere intellectual capacities. On the contrary, it emerges as a by-product of shared experience and interpersonal communication within the body of the church (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2009).

Within Orthodox theology, the created world is understood as being permeated by divine presence, such that creation itself becomes a medium through which God is revealed. In this view, every created entity is endowed with an intrinsic *logos*, a rational and spiritual principle that defines its uniqueness and its relationship to God (Ware, 1973; Clapsis, 1995). The universe is thus seen as being sustained and transformed through divine activity, understood as the uncreated energies of God, which communicate grace and glory throughout creation (Sopko, 1998).

In this theological framework, Orthodox thought maintains a careful balance between affirming God’s transcendence and His immanence. God is understood as wholly other, yet simultaneously present and active within creation. Consequently, each human being is regarded as having a unique vocation: to participate in revealing the divine *logoi* of creation by actualizing the potential inherent within the world (Yannaras, 1972, 1984; Zizioulas, 1993).

Root beliefs of Hinduism

Hinduism and Christianity, as religious traditions, have distinct sets of objectives and goals that guide the lives of their adherents. It's important to note that these objectives are shaped by the respective beliefs, scriptures, and practices of each religion. The key Objectives of Hinduism is to obtain *Moksha* (Liberation) from the cycle of reincarnation (*samsara*).(Ryan,1999). This is often pursued through righteous living, self-discipline, and spiritual knowledge. *Moksha* thus denotes ones ultimate state of liberation of the soul and it is the highest state (*parandhama*) to which any human being can ascend. In the liberation of the soul It returns to its natural and original state. Devoid of darkness and sin.

Smartism is a tradition within Hinduism that developed significantly with the emergence of the Puranic literature. It reflects a synthesis of four philosophical strands, namely *Uttara Mīmāṃsā* (*Vedānta*), Advaita, Yoga, and theistic devotion (Killingley, 2007; Koller, 2013). The *Smārta* tradition emphasizes the essential unity of the divine, holding that the various gods and goddesses are different manifestations or perspectives of the all-pervading ultimate reality, Brahman (Melton, 2014). These components are briefly outlined below and are revisited later in the discussion. *Uttara Mīmāṃsā*, more commonly known as *Vedānta*, is one of the six orthodox (**āstika**) schools of Hindu philosophy. It is primarily concerned with interpreting the Vedas, particularly the Upanishads, in order to understand the nature of ultimate reality (Brahman) and the relationship between Brahman and the individual self (*Ātman*). Vedānta

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encompasses several major sub-schools, including *Advaita*, *Dvaita*, and *Viśiṣṭādvaita* (Lochtefeld, 2002; Koller, 2013).

Advaita Vedānta, systematised by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, teaches non-dualism. The term *Advaita* means "not-two," and this school holds that Brahman alone is ultimately real, while the multiplicity of the world is the result of *māyā* (illusion or ignorance). In this view, the Ātman is ultimately identical with Brahman, and liberation is achieved through direct realisation of this non-dual truth via spiritual discipline and self-inquiry (Isaeva, 1993). Yoga is both a philosophical system and a practical discipline originating in ancient India. It includes a variety of methods aimed at physical, mental, and spiritual development. The term yoga denotes "union," often understood as the union of the individual self (*Ātman*) with ultimate reality (*Brahman*), or as a state of profound spiritual equilibrium. Major paths of yoga include Rāja Yoga (meditative discipline), Bhakti Yoga (devotion), Karma Yoga (selfless action), and Haṭha Yoga (physical and breath practices).

Theism within Hindu traditions refers to belief in a personal and transcendent deity or deities who are actively involved in the creation and governance of the universe. Within Indian philosophical contexts, this is expressed through devotional traditions such as *Vaiṣṇavism* (devotion to Viṣṇu), *Śaivism* (devotion to Śiva), and *Śāktism* (devotion to the Goddess Śakti). These traditions often emphasize ritual practice, prayer, and devotion as means of attaining divine grace and spiritual liberation.

In general, Hinduism affirms that the divine is the source of all reality and encompasses a wide diversity of philosophical and devotional perspectives on ultimate truth. This diversity reflects, in part, the perceived limitations of human cognition in fully comprehending ultimate reality (Doniger, 2009; Bharati, 2005). Within this framework, divine knowledge is understood to be revealed through multiple channels, including incarnations (*avatāras*), deities, sages, saints, and in some narratives even adversarial figures, all of whom may contribute to the unfolding of spiritual insight (Hawley et al., 2006). For example, Krishna is understood as an incarnation (*avatāra*) of the divine who appears on earth to restore cosmic order.

The Hindu tradition also describes the Trimūrti - Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva - as three principal divine functions associated with creation, preservation, and destruction (Bharati, 2005). Alongside this, Hindu eschatology anticipates the future advent of Kalki, the tenth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. References to Kalki appear in texts such as the Mahābhārata (Flood, 1996), and later Purāṇic literature. Kalki is described as appearing at the end of the Kali Yuga to restore dharma, destroy evil, and inaugurate a new cosmic cycle (yuga). Some traditions describe him arriving on a white horse named Devadatta, bearing a sword, and accompanied by symbolic figures such as a parrot, Shuka, who is said to possess knowledge of past, present, and future. The Agni Purāṇa also describes Kalki's role in restoring moral order (Agni Purāṇa, ch. 16).

Dharma, understood as righteous duty, is central to Hindu ethical life. Individuals are encouraged to fulfil duties appropriate to their social position and stage of life, as this is seen as essential for both personal and cosmic harmony (Klostermaier, 1994). Bhakti (devotion) emphasises loving surrender to a chosen deity as a path toward spiritual fulfilment. Karma Yoga, or the path of selfless action, similarly encourages detachment from the fruits of one's actions as a means of spiritual development (Samuel, 2010). The doctrine of karma articulates a moral law of cause and effect that governs the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), determining one's future existences (Eliade, 1963; Clare & Spadaro, 2001).

Closely related is the concept of *māyā*, which refers to the illusory or transient nature of the phenomenal world. Behind this apparent reality lies Brahman, the ultimate and absolute reality, while the individual self (*Ātman*) is understood in many schools as either distinct from or identical with Brahman. Liberation (*mokṣa*) is the highest spiritual goal, characterised as release from the cycle of rebirth and union with or realisation of ultimate reality. In some philosophical interpretations, this is described in terms of supreme peace and bliss.

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Dharma, understood as righteous duty, is a central ethical principle in Hinduism. Individuals are encouraged to fulfil their dharma according to their social responsibilities, stage of life, and traditional frameworks of order (Klostermaier, 1994). Living in accordance with dharma is regarded as essential for maintaining both personal integrity and cosmic harmony. Bhakti (devotion) represents another key spiritual path, emphasising loving devotion and surrender to a chosen deity. Through this devotional practice, adherents seek to cultivate a personal relationship with the divine, leading to spiritual transformation and, ultimately, liberation. Karma Yoga, or the path of selfless action, similarly stresses spiritual development through action performed without attachment to its fruits (Samuel, 2010). As stated, the doctrine of karma describes a universal moral law of cause and effect that governs the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), binding beings to an ongoing process of transmigration (Eliade, 1963). Accordingly, each individual experiences multiple births, with their circumstances shaped by the moral consequences of past actions (Clare & Spadaro, 2001)

The concept of *māyā*, which as mentioned, thus refers to the illusory or transient nature of the empirical world. Behind this changing reality lies Brahman, the ultimate and absolute reality, while the true self (*ātman*) is understood in many traditions as either identical with or oriented toward Brahman. Some philosophical interpretations describe the highest spiritual goal as liberation (*mokṣa*), characterised by supreme peace, bliss, and release from worldly illusion. Liberation may be pursued through various paths, including Yoga, which provides structured disciplines for spiritual realisation (Hesselgrave, 1991). Practices such as *dhyāna* (meditation and contemplation) are central to Hindu spirituality, in ways that can be broadly compared—though not equated - with the emphasis on prayer and contemplation in Orthodox Christianity, where such practices foster deeper communion with God.

A range of ideas on Faith and World View in Dialogue

Barua (2021) in his work *The mystery of God and the claim of reason: Comparative patterns in Hindu-Christian theodicy*, compares Hindu karma-based explanations of suffering with Christian atonement-based explanations. He contends that both traditions seek to enlighten how suffering can contribute to moral and spiritual transformation. He demonstrates that while Hinduism and Christianity diverge in doctrine they have common concerns on issues relating to justice, evil, and human perfection. He uses comparative theology to categorize both common ground and genuine differences between the faiths.

Dixit (2022) in *The apocalypse as a cosmotheandric communion: A Hindu-Christian dialogue. Religions* Develops a Hindu-Christian dialogue around the future of humanity, ecology, and spirituality. He draws on both Christian and Hindu thought and contends there is a need for a relational understanding of reality linking God, humanity, and the cosmos. He further proposes that contemporary crises such as *inter-alia* pandemics, conflict, ecological breakdown etc., all have an urgent need to necessitate strong interreligious cooperation rather than rivalry.

Vivekananda (2001) in his *The complete works of Swami Vivekananda (Vols. 1–9)*, makes a famed interfaith statement: “Truth is one; sages call it by different names.” He presents Hinduism as being universally inclusive and he respects Christianity but sees it as only one path among many valid paths (*margas*). He had a strong influence on modern religious pluralism and pressing need for interfaith dialogue and sees spiritual harmony and tolerance as needed social ideals.

Radhakrishnan (1939) considers that Hinduism (especially Advaita Vedanta) is seen as a philosophical universalism. He asserts that Christianity is respected but interpreted through a non-exclusive, pluralist lens. Jesus is treated as a great spiritual teacher, not necessarily the only incarnation of God. He stresses that religions are different responses to the same ultimate reality (Brahman). Radhakrishnan views Brahman as the ultimate unity.

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Samartha (1991) discards religious exclusivism ("only Christianity saves"). He promotes Christ-centred pluralism in a multi-religious world and argues that Christ can be present outside the institutional Church. His focus was also on interfaith dialogue as a theological requirement, not as an discretionary ethics. Samartha believes that Christ may be present outside church structures. To him, dialogue is part of doing theology itself. Whereas Radhakrishnan, Vivekananda, and Samartha contend that religions are multiple valid paths. Samartha argues that Christ may be present outside church structures.

Mangalwadi, (2011) in his work *The book that made your world: How the Bible created the soul of Western civilization* offers a robust Christian apologetic stance from an Indian perspective. He argues that Christianity (via the Holy Bible) shaped Western ethics, science, and democracy and he engages Hinduism critically, especially the caste system and philosophical pluralism that exists. In addition he emphasizes that a biblical worldview is socially highly transformative and considers that Christianity has unique truth claims. Thus, for Mangalwadi he considers Christ as revelation of truth in history and as historically and culturally unique, not interchangeable. His main concern is a focus on biblical ethics shaping civilization.

Clooney (2021) scrutinizes Christian understandings of Christ's suffering alongside Hindu reflections on divine suffering. He argues that Christians can learn from Hindu devotional traditions without deserting their Christian doctrine. He thus endorses comparative theology and proposes there is a great need for deeper engagement with other religions so as to enrich one's own theological understanding thus promoting faith and world view in dialogue.

Rambachan (2023) argues that frank dialogue necessitates both Hindus and Christians to speak from their own traditions without reducing differences. A solid Hindu-Christian engagement should then move beyond tolerance toward shared theological learning. For him, Advaita Vedānta and Christianity can enter meaningful conversation on God, salvation, human flourishing, and ethics and religious diversity should be advanced as an opportunity for deeper understanding rather than a problem to be solved. Rambachan argues that Hindu-Christian dialogue is most productive when each tradition remains faithful to its own theological commitments while remaining open to learning from the insights of the other tradition.

The Orthodox 'Way'

Boldișor (2023) in his work Orthodoxy and interreligious dialogue confirms that Orthodox Christianity should engage seriously with other religions through respectful dialogue. This need not require abandoning Orthodox doctrine but involves encountering others in a spirit of freedom and love. Human dignity and religious freedom must seek to provide a basis for meaningful interreligious engagement and the goal is neither relativism nor conversion alone, but rather uplifting mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. As with Rambachan (2022), Boldișor argues that authentic interreligious dialogue requires participants to remain rooted in their own traditions while remaining open to learning from others. Both scholars reject religious hostility and emphasize dialogue as the only positive means of fostering mutual understanding, although Boldișor grounds this approach in Orthodox teachings on freedom, love, and the Holy Trinity

Orthodox Christian Ethics is based on the inter-connectedness and wholeness of all facets of Christian life. Its ethos inspires one's internal natures, purposes, standards and explicit behaviour and it in many ways enables the "Christian understanding of the wholeness of all things, even in their distinctiveness and uniqueness" (Harakas, 1999: 63). Orthodox Christianity thus shares the notion of seeking a profounder, transformative encounter with the divine. Orthodox meditation repeatedly focuses on scriptural readings, icons, and the Jesus Prayer, which guide one to a deeper contemplation of God's mysteries. Prayer and meditation lead a believer to inner peace, healing traumatic experiences, and also provide inner strength to face life's many challenges (Vassiliadis, 2004). The Church offers direction and sustenance through its liturgical life and the support of spiritual fathers (Lampe, 1961). An Orthodox believer can sits in silence, in the presence of holy icons or without them, and listens to God's voice in silence,

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the divine “language of the Kingdom of heaven” (Saint Isaac the Syrian). This type of meditation, for a person of unceasing prayer, is a “prayer of silence,” with the Jesus Prayer as its only basis. In contemplative prayer and prayerful contemplation, the spirit of a believer becomes one with the Spirit of God (see 1 Corinthians 6.17). Orthodoxy also has meditation techniques, most notably hesychasm (this is a contemplation technique that involves breathing, body control, and intense prayer). Meditation increases one's knowledge of Jesus Christ (Vlachos, 1994),

Christ is the Head, the Body, and the Church (*Ekklesia*) is the people of God (*laos*), and the fellowship of the Saints (Nicolaides, 2010). The people of God are the custodians of truth and Orthodox doctrine. The people of God have been created in God's image. In the Old Testament period, Israel were the people of God, based on God’s covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai and on Abrahamic covenant. In Exodus 19:6 God tells the Israelites “You will become to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation”. Israel was God's cherished possession, a holy nation set apart to attract the people of the world to himself. However, the Incarnate Logos of God, Jesus Christ, established a new relationship with God's *laos* that includes all people irrespective of race through His transfiguration (Nicolaides, 2020). The creation of this *Ekklesia* created a new and exclusive relationship with God’s people that allows all of humanity to enter into the Covenant and to become part of the ‘people of God’ (*Laos tou Theou*) (Nicolaides, 2010). The objectives of Christianity include attaining salvation through Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Christians believe that accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and following His teachings lead to eternal life (Zizioulas, 1993). Christianity also emphasizes the importance of love, compassion, and forgiveness. Christians are encouraged to live in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, showing love for God and love for one's neighbour. Christians are called to be disciples of Jesus, following His example and spreading the message of the Gospel. Evangelism, or sharing the good news of salvation, is a significant objective for many Christians. Christians aim to live morally upright lives in accordance with biblical teachings. The Ten Commandments and Jesus' ethical teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, provide guidelines for ethical conduct. Christianity teaches the concept of believers having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The ultimate objective is to experience unity with God, both in this life and in the afterlife (Zizioulas, 1993; Yannaras, 1972). Humankind seeking cooperation with God is termed *synergeia* (synergy).

Orthodox Christian ethics is grounded in the interconnectedness and wholeness of the Christian life. This ethical vision shapes inner dispositions, intentions, standards, and outward behaviour, reflecting what Harakas describes as “the Christian understanding of the wholeness of all things, even in their distinctiveness and uniqueness” (Harakas, 1999: 63). Within this framework, Orthodox Christianity emphasises a transformative encounter with the divine.

A central aspect of Orthodox spirituality is contemplative prayer, which draws upon Scripture, icons, and most notably the Jesus Prayer, guiding the believer toward deeper participation in the mysteries of God (Nicolaides, 2021). Prayer and meditation are understood to bring inner peace, healing, and strength in the face of life’s challenges (Vassiliadis, 2004). The Church supports this spiritual life through its liturgical practice and the pastoral guidance of spiritual fathers (Lampe, 1961). In this tradition, the believer may sit in silence before holy icons—or even without them—and attend to the presence of God in stillness, what Saint Isaac the Syrian describes as the “language of the Kingdom of heaven.” This form of contemplative practice, often associated with the tradition of hesychasm, involves inner stillness, disciplined breathing, bodily awareness, and continual prayer. At its heart is the Jesus Prayer, understood as a means of unceasing communion with God. Through contemplative prayer, the believer seeks a deepening union with God, in which the human spirit participates in the life of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:17). In this sense, meditation is not merely intellectual reflection but a transformative practice that deepens knowledge of Christ (Nicolaides, 2021; Vlachos, 1994).

Christ is understood as the Head of the Church, while the Church (Ekklesia) is the Body of Christ, comprising the people of God (*laos tou Theou*) and the communion of the saints (Nicolaides, 2010). The people of God are regarded as custodians of Orthodox truth and

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doctrine, created in the image of God. In the Old Testament, Israel is identified as God's chosen people through the covenant established with Abraham and at Mount Sinai. As stated in Exodus 19:6, "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Israel is thus portrayed as a people set apart, called to witness to God among the nations.

In the New Testament, this covenantal identity is understood as being fulfilled and extended through the Incarnate *Logos*, Jesus Christ, who establishes a renewed covenantal community that includes all peoples, regardless of ethnicity or background (Nicoaides, 2022). The Ekklesia thus constitutes a new form of the people of God (*laos tou Theou*), open to all who enter into communion with Christ (Nicolaides, 2010). The ultimate aims of Christianity include salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Believers affirm that participation in Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection, together with adherence to His teachings, leads to eternal life (Zizioulas, 1993). Christian ethics further emphasise love, compassion, and forgiveness, calling believers to love God and neighbour in accordance with the teachings of Christ. Discipleship involves following the example of Jesus and bearing witness to the Gospel, including through evangelism and the proclamation of salvation.

Christian moral life is also shaped by scriptural and ethical instruction, including the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. Within this framework, Christianity teaches that believers may enter into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, with the ultimate goal of communion with God both in this life and in the life to come (Zizioulas, 1993; Yannaras, 1972). This cooperative dynamic between divine grace and human freedom is described in Orthodox theology as synergy (*synergeia*).

Anti-Christian polemical notions

Some scholars have argued that elements of the Krishna narratives may have influenced early Christian accounts of Jesus Christ. However, the claim that the term "Christ" is derived from "Krishna" is linguistically unfounded, since "Christ" comes from the Greek Christos, meaning "the anointed one," whereas "Krishna" is a distinct personal name within the Hindu tradition.

Some Christian apologists have likewise rejected proposed parallels between Krishna and Jesus, sometimes characterising such comparisons as historically unreliable. Other writers argue that many of the written accounts of Krishna's life were compiled centuries after the time of Christ. It has also been suggested that Christian communities were present in southwest India by around 300 CE, which may have allowed for some awareness of Christian narratives among Hindu authors (Gier, 1977). At the same time, there is evidence of earlier Krishna traditions predating Christianity, including references to Krishna as the son of Devaki in texts dated to approximately 750 BCE. Artistic depictions, such as a 3rd-century BCE bas-relief, also portray narratives resembling the attempted killing of the infant Krishna by Kamsa, which has sometimes been compared to the biblical account of the massacre of the innocents (Gier, 1977).

Comparative studies have noted certain thematic parallels between Krishna and Jesus, including miraculous or extraordinary birth narratives, royal or semi-divine lineage traditions, persecution by hostile rulers, temptation or opposition by malevolent forces, the performance of miracles, and predictions of death followed by a form of ascension or exaltation. However, the nature and theological interpretation of these motifs differ significantly between the two traditions. Differences are also evident in their accounts of death and post-mortem fate. In Christian tradition, Jesus is crucified and bodily resurrected before ascending into heaven. In some accounts of Krishna's departure, he is described as dying after being struck in the foot by a hunter, while in other interpretations this event is understood symbolically or mythologically, with variations in the details of his departure (Doniger, 2022; Mani, 1975). Unlike the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection and ascension, some Hindu traditions describe Krishna's departure in terms that do not emphasise a bodily resurrection.

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Chronological traditions also differ: Krishna is associated in some Hindu calculations with the end of the Dvapara Yuga around 3100 BCE (Dalal, 2014). Within Hindu belief, Krishna is regarded as the eighth *avatāra* of Vishnu, who descends in various ages to restore cosmic order. The ninth *avatāra* is commonly identified as the Buddha, and the tenth, Kalki, is expected to appear in the future as a final restorer of dharma in a time of decline (Dalal, 2014).

Some Common and Contrasting Themes in Orthodoxy and Hinduism

While Hinduism and Christianity differ in their specific theological and soteriological aims, they also share several broad themes, including the pursuit of spiritual development, ethical living, and relationship with the divine. Both traditions offer diverse practices and disciplines through which adherents seek meaning, transformation, and ultimate purpose in life. Certain devotional and ritual practices also display points of comparison, although they arise from distinct theological contexts. Both Hinduism and Orthodox Christianity make use of incense in worship. In addition, both traditions employ prayer beads to support repetitive prayer and meditation. Orthodox Christians commonly use the *komboskini,* a knotted prayer rope used in the recitation of the Jesus Prayer, while Hindus use the *japamala* for counting mantras during devotional practice (Bronkhorst, 1993). The *japamala* typically consists of 108 beads, often made from materials such as sandalwood, and is used in various forms of meditation and mantra repetition, including practices associated with *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. It may also be worn as a devotional object symbolising spiritual protection (Simoons, 1998).

Despite such similarities in practice, the two religions differ significantly in doctrine and worldview. Hinduism is often described as encompassing a wide range of theistic and philosophical traditions, including polytheistic, monistic, and monotheistic interpretations, whereas Christianity is monotheistic, centred on belief in one God. Hindu traditions generally affirm reincarnation (*saṃsāra*) and liberation (*mokṣa*), while Christianity teaches the resurrection of the dead and eternal life. The historical development of the two traditions also differs: Hinduism has no single identifiable founder and has evolved over millennia through diverse cultural and philosophical streams, whereas Christianity traces its origins to Jesus Christ and developed through the early apostolic community and the spread of the Gospel.

In terms of ultimate religious goals, Christianity emphasises loving God, obeying His commandments, and entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, alongside the mission of evangelism. Hinduism, by contrast, presents liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth (*mokṣa*) as a central spiritual aim, understood in various ways across its philosophical schools, and pursued through diverse paths such as devotion, knowledge, and disciplined action.

Concerning salvation and the afterlife, Hindu understandings of *moksha* (liberation) vary across different traditions (Bharati, 2005). Some schools emphasise liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) as the ultimate spiritual goal, while others place greater emphasis on devotion to a personal deity as the primary means of attaining spiritual fulfilment.

Christian theology, by contrast, understands salvation as being made possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Within this framework, heaven and hell are central concepts, with the afterlife understood as being determined by one's relationship with God.

Within Hindu thought, Jesus is often regarded by some adherents as a revered teacher or spiritual figure among many others, reflecting Hinduism's broader openness to diverse expressions of wisdom and spirituality. In essence Jesus would be respected as a holy teacher who realized God and his teachings on love, forgiveness, compassion, and devotion would be admired. However, the claim that Jesus is the only incarnation of God would usually not be accepted (Radhakrishnan, 1939; Parasram, 2022).

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At the same time, Hindu traditions generally understand human existence as being conditioned by the cycle of *karma* and rebirth (*saṃsāra*), within which liberation from this cycle is the ultimate spiritual aim (Bharati, 2005). Upon death, an individual is believed to be reborn into another life form, with the nature of that rebirth determined by the moral quality of actions performed in previous lives. This ongoing cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) may be transcended through various means, including virtuous action, the pursuit of spiritual knowledge, and devotional practice. As Patra further explains:

> There is the concept of Brahmana, the essential spirit of Enlightenment and the spiritual base of everything; the Atman, the Individualized aspect of the Universal Enlightenment and the Shakti or the Divine Mother Who/Which is the active, energizing principle underlying everything that exists. So from this perspective the Heavenly Father in Hinduism is Brahmana; the Son is the Atman and the Shakti is the Holy Ghost. So we find how the concept of Father and Son in both Hinduism and Christianity assumes an allegorical, metaphysical, multidimensional and multifaceted significance which is too hard to put in plain words and the individual conception of the Father or the Son becomes simply impossible as none of them can be realized without the realization of the other. The core idea underlying these concepts is purely relational in nature and not material and physical by any stretch of imagination. (Patra, 2021)

One traditional approach to liberation involves purification of the self through devotion and adherence to the Vedas, regarded as the most ancient sacred texts of Hinduism. Through prayer, daily meditation, ritual offerings, and other devotional practices, adherents seek to cultivate a close and reflective relationship with their chosen deity. The Vedas and Upanishads are classified as *śruti* ("that which is heard"), understood as divinely revealed knowledge, in contrast to *smṛti* ("that which is remembered"), which refers to texts based on tradition and human transmission. The Vedic corpus is understood within tradition to have been received by inspired sages who were receptive to divine revelation (Hesselgrave, 1991).

A second path to liberation is the *way of knowledge* (*jñāna mārga*), which emphasises the realisation that the individual self is ultimately identical with Brahman, the absolute reality underlying all existence. This path involves the transcendence of individual ego and the attainment of liberating insight into the nature of reality. *Jñāna* refers to sacred or liberating knowledge, through which one comes to understand both the self and ultimate reality. Within this framework, knowledge is closely linked with dharma, encompassing ethical conduct, self-purification, discernment, and self-realisation. It may arise through accumulated merit (*puṇya*) from previous lives, divine grace, intellectual effort, disciplined study, or intuitive insight grounded in reflection on sacred texts.

A third path is the *way of devotion* (*bhakti mārga*), in which the devotee surrenders to a personal deity in loving worship. Through devotion, the individual seeks liberation from the cycle of karma and rebirth (*saṃsāra*), understood as the moral law of cause and effect that governs existence. Liberation is therefore conceived as a state of freedom from rebirth and union with the divine, characterised by peace and bliss.

Within Christianity, God is understood as the Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - emphasising divine unity in three Persons. In contrast, Hindu philosophical traditions include a range of interpretations, including monistic perspectives in which only Brahman ultimately exists, and pantheistic or panentheistic perspectives in which all reality is understood as expressing or participating in the divine. Within this diversity, different traditions emphasise various deities such as Krishna or Shiva, both of whom are venerated within distinct theological frameworks. Some schools affirm both the transcendence and immanence of the divine.

The *Nāsadīya Sūkta* (Rigveda 10.129), also known as the Hymn of Creation, is a philosophical hymn consisting of a series of verses that explore the origin of the cosmos. It reflects on creation

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arising from a primordial state beyond conventional categories of existence and non-existence, stating: “Then there was neither existence nor non-existence.” The hymn contemplates the mystery of cosmic origins without providing a definitive explanation, presenting creation as ultimately enigmatic and beyond complete human comprehension. It also evokes imagery of a primordial undifferentiated state preceding the emergence of the ordered universe.

Moral and Ethical Conduct

Viewed through an ethical lens, both Hinduism and Christianity place strong emphasis on moral and virtuous conduct. In Hinduism, ethical life is grounded in the concept of *dharma*, which provides guidance for righteous living in accordance with one’s duties and responsibilities. In Christianity, ethical teaching is prominently expressed in the New Testament, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, which highlights values such as love, compassion, forgiveness, and humility. Both traditions therefore emphasise compassion: in Hinduism this is expressed through concepts such as *bhakti* (devotion) and *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), while in Christianity it is expressed through the command to love one’s neighbour and even one’s enemies.

Within Hindu metaphysical thought, spiritual truth and personal development are closely connected. Brahman is understood as the ultimate, unchanging reality, the Cosmic Principle underlying all existence. While the empirical world is characterised by change and plurality, Brahman is considered eternal and constant. The phenomenal world is often interpreted through the concept of *māyā*, which denotes the transient and conditioned nature of worldly perception (Gough, 2001). In many Hindu traditions, there is no permanent notion of hell in the Christian sense; instead, souls are understood to undergo repeated cycles of rebirth in accordance with karma, with the ultimate aim of returning to or realising Brahman (Bhagavad Gītā 8:5–27; 15:7). In this framework, all souls are ultimately grounded in Brahman, yet remain bound to the cycle of rebirth due to the moral consequences of their actions (Edgerton, 1952).

Liberation is understood as the removal of these karmic conditions, allowing the self to realise or reunite with ultimate reality (Bharati, 2005; Krishnananda, 1980). Ethical living, therefore, is closely tied to dharma, since moral action directly shapes karma and influences one’s spiritual trajectory. Dharma refers to the appropriate way of life, encompassing both personal integrity and responsibility toward others (Bhagavad Gītā 2:50; 2:72; 3:22; 3:25).

Rituals and Worship

When examining ritual and worship practices, Hinduism exhibits considerable diversity across regions, sects, and traditions. Practices may include offerings, prayer, meditation, participation in festivals, and a wide range of devotional acts. Christian worship likewise involves structured forms of devotion, including prayer, sacraments such as baptism and communion, and communal liturgical gatherings. Christianity is historically rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, whereas Hinduism does not have a single identifiable founder, having developed gradually over millennia. Within Hindu thought, those who follow the Vedas are sometimes described as *ārya* (noble) (Krishnananda, 1980).

Hinduism possesses a vast and diverse body of sacred literature. Its scriptural corpus includes the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and texts such as the Bhagavad Gita (Isaeva, 1993). These are broadly classified into *śruti* (revealed knowledge) and *smṛti* (tradition-based texts). The Vedas are regarded as foundational and divinely revealed. The Bhagavad Gita, part of the Mahābhārata, forms chapters 23–40 of Book 6 (Bhishma Parva) (Badrinath, 2007). The Rāmāyaṇa, attributed to Valmiki, is another major epic (*itihāsa*), recounting the life of Prince Rāma of Ayodhya (Hiltebeitel, 2002). In many Hindu traditions, Rāma is regarded as an *avatāra* of Vishnu, sent to restore *dharma*. The narrative includes the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, king of Lanka, and her eventual rescue by Rāma, symbolising the triumph of righteousness over evil (Isaeva, 1993). The Dharmaśāstras constitute an important body of legal and ethical literature in Hinduism, forming a foundation for traditional Hindu jurisprudence and social ethics (Banerji,

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1999). They address moral conduct, family life, social duties, caste-related obligations, and broader ethical principles governing society.

In Christianity, scripture is centred on the Holy Bible, comprising the Old and New Testaments. Orthodox Christianity further incorporates Holy Tradition, including the Nicene Creed, the decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, writings of the Church Fathers, liturgical texts, and canonical law (Tatu & Nicolaides, 2021).

Both traditions affirm the existence of the soul, though they interpret it differently. Hinduism emphasises the *ātman* and its continuation through cycles of rebirth governed by karma. Christianity emphasises the soul's relationship with God and its eternal destiny. In Hindu thought, celestial realms such as *svarga* and lower realms such as *naraka* are generally understood as temporary states within the cycle of rebirth, after which the soul returns to *saṃsāra*. There is no eternal hell in the same sense as in Christian theology. Liberation (*mokṣa*) is understood as release from this cycle (Fowler, 2012).

Hindu philosophical traditions often evaluate truth claims through criteria such as *satyam* (truth), *śivam* (goodness), *sundaram* (beauty), and *śānti* (peace). These principles reflect an emphasis on rational coherence, ethical integrity, aesthetic value, and social harmony. While these ideas are sometimes used in interpretive or evaluative frameworks, they are not universally applied as formal criteria of doctrinal validity across all Hindu traditions.

Christian clerical structures include deacons, priests, pastors, bishops, archbishops, patriarchs, and in some traditions the pope (Harakas, 1979; Karmiris, 1994). Hinduism does not have a single unified clerical hierarchy but includes various religious specialists such as gurus, rishis, pandits, Brahmins, yogis, monks, and ascetics. Both traditions make use of sacred imagery: Orthodox Christianity employs icons within churches and homes, while Hindu worship often involves murtis (sacred images) in temples and domestic shrines.

Christianity is structured around sacraments and liturgical feasts, including Easter and Christmas, along with saints' commemorations. Orthodox Christianity recognises seven sacraments, including baptism, chrismation, Eucharist, marriage, holy orders, penance, and anointing of the sick (Nicolaides, 2010; Ware, 1973). Hinduism observes numerous festivals such as Diwali, Holi, and Ram Navami, alongside daily devotional practices (*puja*, *japa*, meditation, and scriptural recitation). Worship may occur in both temples and domestic shrines and often includes offerings, ritual gestures, chanting, and symbolic acts of reverence.

Hindu ritual life includes practices such as *yajña* (fire sacrifice), mantra recitation, *prasāda* (consecrated offerings), and *sevā* (selfless service). Pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*) to sacred sites such as Varanasi, Haridwar, and Ayodhya is also significant. Life-cycle rites (*saṃskāras*) mark key stages from birth to death. Similarly, Christian life is structured around sacramental participation, scripture, prayer, and ethical living within the church community.

Yoga, meditation, and contemplative practices play an important role in Hindu spirituality, particularly in disciplines aimed at liberation (*mokṣa*). These practices emphasise bodily discipline, breath control, and mental concentration, and are often understood as methods of achieving both physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Christian theology, by contrast, centres on salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Orthodox Christianity emphasises Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King, and affirms the Incarnation as the unification of divine and human natures (John 1:14). Salvation is understood as participation in divine grace through faith, sacramental life, and communion with God (Nicolaides, 2010).

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While Hindu traditions include the concept of divine incarnations (*avatāras*), these are generally understood differently from the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Hindu theology includes diverse understandings of ultimate reality, including monistic interpretations of Brahman and the distinction between nirguna (formless) and saguna (with attributes) Brahman (Gough, 2001).

Finally, Christian eschatology affirms eternal life in heaven or hell following judgment, whereas Hindu cosmology emphasises cyclical rebirth until liberation is attained. Despite these differences, both traditions contain internal diversity, with multiple schools and denominations shaping belief and practice within their respective frameworks.

Communicating Christ within Hindu Contexts: Points of Contact with Krishna Traditions

There are limited but useful points of conceptual contact when considering how Christian theology might be communicated within Hindu contexts. Christianity affirms salvation as grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, particularly through His death and resurrection. Hindu traditions, by contrast, articulate liberation (moksha) through a range of philosophical and devotional frameworks, including the ideal of renunciation (sannyāsa). While these concepts both address ultimate human fulfillment, they are grounded in distinct metaphysical assumptions and should not be treated as equivalent.

In Christian theology, Jesus Christ is understood as the unique mediator between God and humanity. As stated in 1 Timothy 2:5–6 (KJV), “there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.” This mediatory role is grounded in the doctrine of the Incarnation, in which the eternal Son assumes full human nature while remaining fully divine. Within this framework, Christ functions as revealer, redeemer, and reconciler, and His role is considered unique and unrepeatable within salvation history.

In Hindu traditions, Krishna is understood primarily within Vaishnava theology as an avatāra of Vishnu, whose narratives are embedded in a broader cosmological and cyclical understanding of time. Texts such as the Vishnu Purāṇa include accounts of Krishna’s extraordinary birth and divine activity, which function theologically rather than as historical biography (Boslooper, 1962). In many Hindu interpretive frameworks, Jesus is received through existing categories of religious authority, and may be understood as a guru, a holy person, or in some traditions as an avatāra or manifestation of divine reality (Schouten, 2008). These interpretations reflect Hinduism’s inclusive and plural hermeneutic framework rather than a direct doctrinal equivalence with Christian Christology.

Comparative religion scholarship sometimes identifies thematic parallels between Hindu epics such as the Mahābhārata and Bhagavad Gītā and the Gospel narratives. However, such parallels are best understood as typological or phenomenological rather than historical or doctrinal correspondences. Both traditions include figures associated with divine mission, moral order, and the restoration of righteousness, but the underlying theological meanings differ substantially, particularly in relation to incarnation, revelation, and salvation.

Similarly, while both Jesus and Krishna are associated with extraordinary or non-ordinary birth narratives, these function within distinct symbolic universes and should be interpreted within their own theological and literary contexts rather than mapped onto one another as direct equivalents.

> Family tradition upheld that Jesus descended from royalty, but his ancestors had not occupied the throne of Judah for nearly 600 years before he was born. Krishna, on the other hand, was born into an active ruling family. Both were guided by wise men and shepherds following a star. “Wise men” only attended the birth of Krishna because there were intellectuals among the court of his grandfather. It’s not like Magi from a distant country saw a star and followed it the baby Krishna. “Shepherds” only attended the birth of Krishna in the form of his uncle Nanda Baba, a chief among the Gowari

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> caste. And they weren't shepherds, they tended cattle. Both were targeted by the ruling despot, both families were warned by an angel, and both families fled. Graves adds that Mary and Joseph fled to Muturea, while Devaki fled to Mathura. (Fernandes, n.d.)

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Krishna states: "I am the father of this universe, the mother, the support and the grandsire" (Bhagavad Gītā 9:17). Within the devotional context of the text, Krishna is presented as the sustaining reality underlying all existence, exercising sovereignty over creation and guiding the cosmos through its cycles. This self-disclosure functions theologically within Hindu tradition rather than as a historical or philosophical claim in the same sense as Christian doctrinal discourse.

Comparative studies sometimes note thematic similarities between Hindu and Christian scriptures, particularly in relation to the nature of the soul and divine identity. For example, the Bhagavad Gītā (2:20–24) describes the soul (ātman) as eternal, unborn, and indestructible. A similar expression appears in Matthew 10:28, where Jesus states: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." While such parallels are frequently cited, they operate within distinct metaphysical frameworks: in Hindu thought, the ātman is often understood in relation to reincarnation and karma, whereas in Christian theology the soul is understood in relation to resurrection and final judgment.

Further parallels are sometimes drawn between texts such as John 14:6—"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"—and passages in the Bhagavad Gītā that describe Krishna as the ultimate source and goal of all existence (e.g., BG 9:17–19; 10:32–33). However, these statements function within different doctrinal systems: in Christianity, Christ's mediatorship is exclusive and grounded in the Incarnation, whereas in Hinduism, divine ultimacy is expressed through multiple theological and philosophical interpretations, including both personal and impersonal conceptions of Brahman.

Similarly, Revelation 22:13—"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End"—is sometimes compared with Hindu descriptions of Krishna as encompassing origin, sustenance, and dissolution. These comparisons highlight shared symbolic language of divine totality, but do not indicate theological equivalence (Clooney, 2010; Ratzinger, 2004).

Within Hindu traditions, Jesus is interpreted in diverse ways depending on theological orientation. Some regard him as a revered spiritual teacher, while others interpret him within categories such as avatāra or as an expression of divine reality. These interpretations reflect Hinduism's plural and accommodative framework rather than a single doctrinal position.

A key theological distinction lies in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Christian orthodoxy affirms the once-for-all historical Incarnation of the Logos (Galatians 4:4–5; Luke 2:1–7), whereas Hindu traditions describe divine manifestations (avatāras) as recurring across cosmic ages, associated with a cyclical understanding of time. These differing temporal frameworks shape fundamentally different understandings of divine descent into the world.

Orthodox Christianity also maintains a strict distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ, united without confusion or mixture. By contrast, certain Hindu philosophical interpretations of avatāra theology allow for more fluid conceptions of divine manifestation.

Finally, Christian texts such as Matthew 11:28—"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"—are often understood in terms of spiritual rest and salvation through communion with Christ. Within Hinduism, liberation (moksha) is similarly associated with release from the cycle of rebirth and the attainment of ultimate peace, though the means and metaphysical assumptions underlying this liberation differ significantly between traditions.

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Points of Tension in Hindu and Orthodox Christian Thought and Practice

Hinduism and Orthodox Christianity, like all major religious traditions, encounter a range of contemporary challenges, though these are experienced and interpreted in different ways across contexts. A key shared issue is that of religious pluralism and secularism. In increasingly diverse societies, both traditions must negotiate the maintenance of religious identity while coexisting alongside other faith communities. This often raises complex questions around religious freedom, public life, and interfaith relations. A further challenge concerns cultural and social change brought about by modernisation and globalisation. Long-standing beliefs and practices are frequently reassessed in response to shifting social norms, technological development, and changing patterns of authority. Hinduism, as a diverse and historically evolving tradition, continues to engage with how to preserve its religious and cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary conditions. Similarly, Orthodox Christianity in regions such as Greece and other traditionally Orthodox-majority countries faces questions about how to sustain liturgical and theological continuity in rapidly changing societies.

In the Hindu context, the legacy of the caste system remains a significant social and ethical challenge, particularly in relation to issues of equality and social justice. Efforts to address discrimination and promote inclusivity form part of ongoing internal reform and debate. More broadly, questions of gender roles and social practice have also become areas of discussion within both Hindu and Orthodox Christian communities, with varying perspectives on tradition, interpretation, and reform.

Interfaith engagement presents both opportunities and challenges for both traditions (Nicolaides, 2022; Arinze, 1997). While dialogue can foster mutual understanding and cooperation, it also requires sustained attention to theological differences and differing worldviews (Küng, 1993). Finding meaningful common ground while respecting doctrinal boundaries remains a continuing task in pluralistic societies (Rambachan, 1994). It is also important to recognise that neither Hinduism nor Orthodox Christianity is monolithic. Each encompasses a wide range of theological interpretations, cultural expressions, and institutional forms. As a result, responses to contemporary challenges vary significantly within each tradition, with many individuals, scholars, and religious communities actively working to engage constructively with these issues while remaining rooted in their respective faith commitments (Cornille, 2013; Küng, 1993).

Fostering Greater Understanding Between Hinduism and Orthodox Christianity

It is evident that *avataras* are in ways similar to the Christian incarnation of Jesus Christ. Each religion says that God has come to earth to assist and save humanity. Then grace is there in both so that God has manifested on earth to help people to save themselves. *Avataras* are based less on historical reality than theological story. Hinduism has ten incarnations, whereas in Christianity there is only one, in Jesus. In addition, Christian grace is different to *bhakti* grace where it is an impersonal law of the cosmos (*karma*), which even gods are unable to alter. In Christianity, Jesus is the author of the law, and he has cancelled the power of the law over humanity. Krishna forgives sins at no cost to himself whereas Jesus was sinless and provides grace only by an infinitely painful atonement and grace cost him everything (McDermott, 2011).

In Hinduism, human nature is considered to be divine, whereas in Christianity it is sinful. The human problem is based on intellectual ignorance in Hinduism, but in Christianity it is based on immorality and sinful behaviours. Resolving the problem for the Christian is through Christ's sacrifice at Golgotha, but for a Hindu, human effort and at time grace are needed, without any cost to a deity. Hinduism does offer an escape from the human condition, but Christianity offers freedom from guilt, sin and the devil (McDermott, 2011).

A balanced view recognises that individuals within both Orthodox Christian and Hindu communities, as with any religious or non-religious tradition, may be motivated by a range of

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dispositions, including altruism and, in some cases, self-interest. Many adherents in both traditions seek to live meaningful and ethically grounded lives, contributing to the well-being of their communities and embodying values such as compassion, justice, and love (Clooney, 2001). Within Christianity, such commitments are often shaped by the teachings of Jesus Christ and expressed through charitable action, pastoral care, and social outreach. In Hinduism, similar expressions are found in the principles of dharma and *sevā* (selfless service), which inspire engagement in education, humanitarian work, and community development across local and global contexts.

Recognising the constructive and ethical dimensions present within diverse religious traditions can provide a foundation for mutual respect and understanding. Emphasising shared moral concerns and common human aspirations may assist in fostering cooperation and peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies (Dhavamony, 2002; Dupuis, 2002). Developing meaningful relationships between Hindu and Orthodox Christian communities, as well as between other religious traditions more broadly, requires attention to several key principles. A primary element is interfaith dialogue, understood as open and respectful communication between traditions. Such dialogue enables participants to explore both shared values and theological differences in a constructive manner (Cracknell, 1986). As Christodoulakis (2022) observes, the Christian narrative itself contains a dialogical dimension, reflected in Christ's engagement with a wide range of individuals and groups, including the marginalised and those outside dominant religious frameworks. Closely related to this is the principle of respect for diversity. Both Hinduism and Christianity encompass significant internal diversity in belief, practice, and cultural expression. Avoiding generalisation and stereotyping is therefore essential, as is recognising the plurality of voices within each tradition. The Orthodox Christian understanding of the Church as the body of Christ, for example, emphasises both gathering and transformation, as reflected in scriptural imagery of spiritual renewal and divine life (Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, para. 1).

Identifying areas of common ethical ground can further support constructive engagement. Many religious traditions, including Hinduism and Christianity, affirm values such as compassion, justice, and love, which can serve as points of convergence for cooperation and dialogue (Bharati, 2005). Initiatives that promote intercultural learning, including educational exchanges and institutional programmes, may further strengthen understanding between communities (UNESCO, 2013; Deardorff, 2006).

Interfaith initiatives also play a significant role in fostering cooperation on shared social concerns, including peacebuilding, poverty alleviation, and social cohesion (Acharuparambil, 1996). The Orthodox Church, for example, has affirmed the importance of continued interreligious dialogue in the contemporary world, emphasising universal values such as reconciliation, love, and peace (Christodoulakis, 2021: 774).

While there are those who suggest that interreligious dialogue is not workable (Cornille, 2013), educational engagement remains a further key dimension of interreligious understanding. Broader awareness of religious traditions can help reduce misunderstanding and encourage more informed and tolerant social attitudes. As has been noted in discussions on social transformation, meaningful change is often linked to shifts in both individual consciousness and public life (Mische and Merkling, 2001, cited in Castro, 2004).

In similar fashion, interreligious declarations and initiatives by religious leaders highlight the responsibility of faith communities to promote peaceful coexistence grounded in human rights and social justice (Tsombanidis, 2014: 738).

While theological differences between traditions remain significant, this need not preclude peaceful coexistence or constructive cooperation. Sustained dialogue, mutual respect, and openness to learning from one another provide a viable basis for positive interfaith relations in diverse societies (Knitter, 2002; Pattison, 2007).

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Conclusion

The concept of the "people of God" is understood differently across religious traditions and is interpreted in diverse ways within those traditions themselves. In Christian theology, this concept is primarily associated with those who have faith in Jesus Christ and participate in the life of the Church, understood as the body of Christ. Many Christian traditions emphasise that membership in this community is grounded in faith rather than ethnic or cultural identity. From this perspective, individuals from any background, including those of Hindu origin, may enter the Christian community through faith and incorporation into the life of the Church. At the same time, such theological claims are received and interpreted differently depending on confessional and personal perspectives.

In this context, interfaith dialogue becomes an important means of fostering understanding and respectful engagement between religious traditions (Panikkar, 1999; Race, 2001). It allows for both the clarification of doctrinal positions and the development of constructive relationships between individuals and communities. Those interested in engaging another faith tradition may do so through dialogue with religious leaders or informed practitioners, which can assist in clarifying both belief and practice.

Hinduism and Christianity differ significantly in their theological foundations, historical development, and ritual expressions. Nevertheless, both traditions contain ethical teachings that emphasise moral responsibility, compassion, justice, and the pursuit of righteous living (Clooney, 2001; Cracknell, 1986). While these ethical convergences are noteworthy, they arise within distinct doctrinal and metaphysical frameworks and should not be assumed to indicate theological equivalence.

Within Orthodox Christian theology, salvation is understood as God's initiative in reconciling humanity to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is grounded in the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ, through which humanity is offered participation in divine life by grace. Orthodox theology further emphasises *synergeia*, the cooperation between divine grace and human freedom, expressed through repentance, ascetic practice, and participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

In contrast, Hindu traditions articulate multiple understandings of liberation (*moksha*), most commonly associated with release from the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) governed by *karma*. Classical Hindu sources such as the Upanishads present diverse pathways to liberation, including knowledge (*jnana*), devotion (*bhakti*), and selfless action (*karma yoga*). These approaches vary across philosophical schools and devotional traditions, reflecting Hinduism's internal plurality rather than a single unified soteriology.

Although both traditions address questions of ultimate human destiny, they do so within fundamentally different theological and metaphysical systems. Careful attention to these differences is essential in comparative discussion, as it prevents the reduction of distinct doctrines into simplistic equivalences. At the same time, interfaith engagement remains a constructive space in which dialogue, mutual respect, and shared ethical concern may be developed, even in the absence of doctrinal agreement.

There are some limitations in this study. Firstly, it is primarily based on existing theological, philosophical, and academic texts rather than primary fieldwork (e.g., interviews with Hindu and Orthodox practitioners). This then limits the ability to capture lived, contemporary, and local variations in belief and practice. Secondly there is interpretive and comparative bias since any comparative work between Hinduism and Orthodox Christianity involves interpretation. Because both traditions are internally diverse, there is thus a risk of overgeneralising or simplifying complex theological positions into broad categories.

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Future research could expand this study by incorporating empirical fieldwork, such as interviews, surveys, or ethnographic observation among Hindu and Orthodox Christian communities. This would provide insight into how theological ideas are actually understood and lived in contemporary contexts, rather than only how they are represented in texts. Further studies could also explore grassroots interfaith engagement, examining how Hindu and Orthodox Christian communities interact in multicultural societies such as South Africa, the United Kingdom, or India, where both traditions coexist in highly pluralistic environments. Another possible useful direction would be a focus on youth and interfaith identity formation, investigating how younger generations from both traditions perceive religious difference, shared values, and spiritual identity in increasingly globalised and secular settings.

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