

# The Hindu doctrine of salvation evaluated in the light of Reformed theology

**R Kumar**

 **Orcid.org 0000-0001-8474-7790**

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Supervisor: Dr SP Van Der Walt

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Student number: 13126539

# Table of Contents

## Contents

Abstract .....	4
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.1 Formulating the problem .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1.1 Background.....	6
1.1.2 The doctrine of salvation according to Hinduism .....	7
1.1.2.1 Hindu doctrine of salvation and three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.....	7
1.1.2.2 The way of Karma .....	7
1.1.2.3 The way of knowledge .....	8
1.1.2.4 The way of devotion .....	8
1.1.3 Biblical doctrine of salvation .....	8
1.1.3.1 The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the Biblical doctrine of salvation .....	8
1.1.3.2 Karma according to Biblical doctrine.....	8
1.1.3.3 Knowledge according to Biblical doctrine.....	9
1.1.3.4 Devotion according to Biblical doctrine .....	9
1.1.3.5 Doctrine of Salvation within the Reformed Theology .....	9
1.1.4 Evangelising Hindu Believers .....	10
<b>1.3 Problem statement .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.4 Research question .....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.4.1 Central research question.....	10
1.4.2 Secondary research questions .....	10
<b>1.5 Aim and Objectives .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.5.1 Aim.....	11
1.5.2 Objectives .....	11
<b>1.6 Central Theoretical Argument .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.7 Method of Research.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.8 Ethical considerations .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.9 Classification.....</b>	<b>12</b>

<b>The Hindu Doctrine of salvation evaluated in the light of Reformed theology .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.2 Important Points on doing inter-religious comparisons .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2.1 The role of Hindu gods in the doctrine of salvation.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.3 The concept of karma in salvation.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.4 Sacred knowledge and salvation .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.5 The necessity of human endeavours in pleasing God.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.6 Reformed Soteriology .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>2.7 An evaluation of the Hindu concept of salvation from a Reformed Theological perspective. 24</b>	
<b>2.7.1 Evaluation of knowledge .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.7.2 The Evaluation of this devotion.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>2.8 A comparison between Reformed Theology and Hinduism could be summarized by the following table to indicate the similarities and the differences.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2.9 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3.1 Research question .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3.2 Objectives:.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3.3 Results .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Bibliography. ....</b>	<b>37</b>

## ABSTRACT

Abstract

Hindu gods are impersonal while God in Christianity is personal. Furthermore, these Hindu gods are not in agreement with one another while the triune God of Christianity is: - as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They act and function together for the salvation of sinners. In the Reformed theology, they are presented beautifully in regard to the salvation of mankind: - the Father, the Son as Fulfiller, and Holy Spirit as Applier.

The three ways to obtain salvation in Hinduism are: the way of Karma, the way of knowledge, the way of devotion. Salvation in Hinduism is defined as the state of freedom from the cycle of rebirth (samsara). The soul is in bondage because of ignorance, and due to this ignorance, the soul is attached to this world. Its original place is in the spiritual realm that is Brahma. It must return to its original place, and this is the goal of every individual. Such a state is called the union with Brahma.

The first way for Hindus try to reach Brahma through their own work and deeds. However, the salvation doctrine of the Reformed theology describes our total inability to save ourselves since human beings are dead in sin and thus alienated from their creator. Consequently, they are unable to do anything that can bring them close to God. God has to convert such sinners so that they may repent of their sin and have faith in God for their salvation. God justifies them and declares them righteous through His grace. God reconciles such a sinner with Himself. That is when he becomes one with God and he can do good works out of gratitude towards God and his neighbour.

The second way for Hindus to obtain salvation or union with Brahma is through the Knowledge of God and ourselves. However, in Reformed theology, knowledge of God is only possible through the special revelation given by God to mankind where God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. However, our heart is deceitful and our mind is corrupted by nature so that we do not understand and perceive the things of God. God has to renew our hearts and mind to believe this revelation to be true. The Bible proclaims that the Christ is the true revelation of God: through Him we can know God, apart from Him it is impossible to know God and ourselves.

Finally, the Third way of salvation in Hinduism is the way of devotion. It has been also called loving devotion to God. It entails the human effort to please God by loving Him. It is however meaningless to talk about loving God through devotion when one doesn't realize that a person cannot love God out of his own will, for since the Fall, man remains under the curse of sin. Man is unable to love God or to do anything that merits salvation. In fact, man is not by nature a lover of God but rather a hater of God; the Bible describes him as an enemy of God. Our loving God has to love a human- beings first before the human being can

love God. God has expressed His love by sending His only begotten Son to die for mankind in order to make man one with God. Therefore, the salvation of mankind is not in the hands of man but in the hands of God. During evangelization of the Hindu it must be kept in mind that the concept of the grace of God must be the priority in the sharing in the gospel.

Key words: Hinduism, Salvation, reformed, doctrine, evaluation

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Formulating the problem

##### 1.1.1 Background

The attitude of the Christian faith towards other religions has not been very positive in the past. Missionary outreaches were not only aggressive and insensitive towards the religious sentiment of the people of other religions, but they estimated them very negatively and have crudely condemned their gods and beliefs (Saldanha, 2005:22). This also applies to Hinduism. Consequently, many Christians are unaware of the soteriological aspect of Hinduism. The main reason for this is their ignorance and unwillingness to learn about the Hindu faith in order for them to be able to answer a truth-seeking Hindu in the time of need. They also lack the willingness to become acquainted with the Hindus' idea of salvation.

There are basically two Hindu responses that are often heard during the evangelisation discussion in India regarding the idea of salvation. The responses are related to the proclamation of eternal salvation of the human heart. The first response is that there is only one river but that there are many places to bath. It is generally realised by everyone in Hinduism that there are many gods and goddesses but they are aspects and manifestations of One Absolute God (Neuner, 1997:118). According to Hinduism it is meant that all the religions have their spiritual masters in this world and to Hindus Jesus Christ is only one of them (Yamamoto, 1998:48). The second response is that they have also been saved (Moksha) and liberated because they have met their religion's requirements and obtained it by themselves or by their own effort (Yamamoto, 1998:41). Therefore, becoming one with the Absolute is also a self-effort because, according to Hindu belief, a person is truly saved when he or she becomes one with Brahman (Yamamoto, 1998:42) as explained in the following section.

In view of the above, there exists a need for Christian workers to have a full grasp of their understanding of being one with reality. The aforementioned concepts are but a few aspects within the Hindu's idea of salvation. It is therefore necessary that Christian workers thoroughly understand this idea to ensure effective evangelism.

### **1.1.2 The doctrine of salvation according to Hinduism**

In many religions the concept of salvation forms an important aspect of religion. Salvation, broadly defined, deals with the issue of being saved from damnation. Within the Hindu religion, one of the aspects which refers to salvation is the Indian word 'Moksha'. This refers to the final release from the cycle of life and death (Shah, 1996:128). There are three paths of Moksha: firstly the way of action, called Karma-Marga, secondly the way of Knowledge, Jnana-Marga, and finally the way of devotion, called Bhakti-Marga (mann, 1996:48). These three paths will be discussed before a brief explanation of these three paths will be given for it is necessary to understand what Hindus see as the concept of God in Hindu doctrine of salvation.

#### **1.1.2.1 Hindu doctrine of salvation and three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva**

Any religion has a god and therefore it is necessary to understand some of the concepts of gods in Hinduism and their relation to salvation. In most instances, three levels of gods exist in Hinduism. Only the three gods in the top level are mentioned in this study because all others are incarnated from them (Tirkey, 2003:47). This study focusses on the relation of these three gods to salvation. The three main gods in this level in Hinduism are Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer or transformer of the world and these can be found in Hindu literature (Phohlmann, 1996:7). These gods of Hinduism are known for destroying the sinners, rather than saving them. There has been very little written about saving the life of a sinner as it is with Christianity. Shiva, who is the destroyer, is said not to incarnate like Vishnu, but comes to the aid of man by appearing in different forms and various capacities to alleviate the human suffering. He protects his devotees and kills the wicked (Tirkey, 2003:47-48).

These gods are concerned with salvation and provide the following three paths to their devotees to reach salvation. This is mentioned here to clarify the difference between Hinduism and Christian religion. One needs to understand that these gods provide the ways to reach salvation whereas in Reformed theology it is by God's grace that salvation is given. So in other religions the god is involved in salvation of human being but in Hinduism this is left to mankind.

#### **1.1.2.2 The way of Karma**

Another notable aspect in Hindu belief is that the order of the whole cosmos and the single law of Karma dominates reality. Karma is the Hindu expression for belief in moral order. According to this doctrine, every act executed in this life has moral significance and will influence the fate of the living being in the subsequent incarnation (Schoeps, 1967:125). A man becomes good (*Punya*) by good Karma and evil by evil Karma (Zaehner, 1966:60).

### **1.1.2.3 The way of knowledge**

The Hindu believes that the path to salvation from sorrows and suffering is rooted in sacred knowledge, and this is the knowledge of Brahma (creator) and the knowledge that our true self is nothing less than Brahma (Burk, 1996:22).

“Through realised knowledge one becomes perfect” (Prabhupada, 1990:15). Therefore, if one has perfect knowledge then he or she has obtained salvation.

### **1.1.2.4 The way of devotion**

It is clearly stated in *Bhagavad-Gita* that only by bhakti, or devotional service, one can enter into the Vaikuntha (spiritual/heaven) planetary system (Prabhupada, 1990:82). Therefore, entering into heaven through the devotional service is considered to be salvation. Further explanation indicates the contrast between the Hindu idea of salvation and a Reformed Theological perspective on this doctrine (see below).

## **1.1.3 Biblical doctrine of salvation**

### **1.1.3.1 The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the Biblical doctrine of salvation**

In the Bible, the Triune God is involved in various works of salvation of the sinner but for the same purpose. It begins in God the Father and not in man himself, therefore the salvation of the sinner starts with the Father because He is the originator of our salvation (Ryken, 2006:63). Eternal salvation is the result of the *opera ad intra* of the Triune God, obtained by God the Son being sent by the Father and now presented by God the Spirit (Ryken, 2006:63). In other words, salvation is administered by the Father, accomplished by the Son and applied by the Spirit (Ryken, 2006:62).

### **1.1.3.2 Karma according to Biblical doctrine**

Man is so corrupted that, unless he is renewed, he cannot do any act by which he can obtain God’s approval and answer to the demands of God’s holy law. He cannot change his fundamental desire for sin into love for God. He cannot even make an approach to such a change. In short it can be said that man is unable to do any spiritual good (Berkhof, 1960:247). All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away (Isaiah 64:6). The only way that man can be renewed is by God’s grace, through the internal working of the Holy Spirit.

Man is by nature incapable to do what is truly good. A sinner's work cannot save him. Only God's work can save sinners. God has acted to save us. He is the One that has initiated this work (Palmer, 2007:14).

### **1.1.3.3 Knowledge according to Biblical doctrine**

Man can never approach God out of his own resources, for mankind is helpless to do anything to save himself. This is called the total inability of the human being (Frame, 2006:112). Because of this inability of human being, his knowledge has also been polluted, therefore he is totally unable to know the true God through his knowledge.

However, it is possible from God's side to obtain the true knowledge of Him because he has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and in Scripture (Boice, 1986:23).

The knowledge of God is important because only through the knowledge of God, and the resulting God-given faith, that one can enter into eternal life (Boice, 1986:23). "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Furthermore, the knowledge of God is of importance because it also involves knowledge of ourselves (Boice, 1986:24). If we know God, we can know ourselves, otherwise it is impossible to have knowledge of ourselves.

### **1.1.3.4 Devotion according to Biblical doctrine**

Wiley & Culberstion (1946:172) maintain that sinners' devotion cannot lead them to God because their condition is fatal, for the chief penalty of sin is death. Furthermore, men are dead both physically and spiritually and this is the result of the Holy Spirit's withdrawal from man (Wiley & Culberstion, 1946:172). This happened because of the sin of first human being and the consequences of that sin have affected human being both physically and spiritually. Because the original sin was committed physically and spiritually, therefore the death was also pronounced by God physically and spiritually. Now, any work performed by them, either physically or spiritually, does not have any effect to please God for not only do they lack any spiritual good in themselves but also the ability to do anything good physically. Consequently, they do not possess the ability to approach God in their own strength (Grudem, 1994:497).

### **1.1.3.5 Doctrine of Salvation within the Reformed Theology**

The doctrine of salvation in Reformed Theology is based on the grace of God alone. It is central in all three *Forms of Unity*, namely the Heidelberg Catechism (HC), Belgic Confession (BC) and the Canon of Dort (CD). The fall of man into sin led to an insurmountable severance from God (Answer 7, HC). Consequently, the whole of man's being became corrupted and this condition made him helpless and unable to reach out to God by their own efforts

(Art.14, BC). The solution for salvation of man, from beginning to end, includes the forgiveness of sin, righteousness before God and union with God. All of this is only attributed to the divine act of God's grace (Chapter 1:7,CD). Therefore, the salvation of man is totally dependent on God's grace.

#### **1.1.4 Evangelising Hindu Believers**

Considering the above, it is believed that the following elements of the Christian hope are instrumental when evangelising Hindu believers:

- The hope of true salvation through the knowledge of our lord Jesus Christ
- The hope of true rewards and deeds
- The hope of true identity in Christ Jesus

The Biblical gospel of grace, as expressed by Reformed Theology, gives the hope of true salvation, hope of true deeds and rewards, and hope of true identity in Jesus Christ.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

In light of the above, the problem on which this study will focus, is: How should a selection of Hindu religious doctrines with regard to salvation of salvation be evaluated in light of Reformed theology?

### **1.4 Research question**

#### **1.4.1 Central research question**

The central research question of this study is formulated as follows: How should the Hindu doctrine of salvation be evaluated in the light of reformed theology?

#### **1.4.2 Secondary research questions**

Flowing from this central research question, the following questions arise:

- What is the role of the gods in salvation according to Hinduism?
- What is the effect of Karma in the Hindu concept of salvation?
- Is sacred knowledge attainable and prerequisite for salvation?
- Is it possible for human endeavors to please the true God?
- How would Reformed Theology be characterized and used as a measure to evaluate the understanding of Hindu salvation?

## **1.5 Aim and Objectives**

### **1.5.1 Aim**

The aim of the suggested research is to contribute to the better understanding of the Hindu doctrine of salvation evaluated by the Reformed doctrine, which will enable any Christian to answer a truth-seeking Hindu in India or any part of the world.

### **1.5.2 Objectives**

In order to reach the aim, the following objectives will have to be attained:

- To outline the role of the Hindu gods in salvation.
- To indicate the effect of the concept of Karma in salvation.
- To establish if sacred knowledge is attainable and a prerequisite for salvation.
- To weigh the extent to which human endeavours are able to please God.
- To evaluate the Hindu concept of salvation, with all the relevant issues indicated above, from a Reformed perspective.

## **1.6 Central Theoretical Argument**

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Hindu doctrine of salvation is not based on God's grace, as is the case in the Biblical doctrine formulated within the Reformed Theology. This doctrine of salvation by God's grace need to be taken into account in proclaiming the Gospel to Hindus.

## **1.7 Method of Research**

1.7.1 The research will be done from a literature study of Hindu scripture, for example *Bhagavat-Gita*, *Mahabharata*, and the ancient Vedas of Hindu religion. The evaluation of all the topics will be done from the Reformed perspective of salvation according to the Christian literature in the field of dogmatics.

1.7.2 The literature study will be done from a systematic theological viewpoint and will endeavour to enter in dialogue with the Hindu faith in a respectful and observing manner, especially to provide necessary data to Christian workers.

## **1.8 Ethical considerations**

This study will adhere to the North West University Ethical guidelines. This study is literature research and therefore poses no risk due to the fact that it does not incorporate human participants.

## **1.9 Classification**

1. Introduction
2. The Role of the Hindu gods in salvation
3. The concept of Karma in salvation
4. Sacred knowledge and salvation
5. The necessity of human endeavors in pleasing God
6. An evaluation of the Hindu concept of salvation from a Reformed theological perspective
7. Conclusion

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The Hindu Doctrine of salvation evaluated in the light of Reformed theology**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The attitude of the Christian faith towards other religions has not been very positive in the past. Missionary outreaches were not only aggressive and insensitive towards the religious sentiment of the people of other religions, but they generally regarded them very negatively and have crudely condemned their gods and beliefs (Saldanha, 2005:22). This attitude also applies to Hinduism. Consequently, many Christians are unaware of the soteriological aspect of Hinduism. The main reason for this is their ignorance and unwillingness to learn about the Hindu faith in order for them to be able to provide an answer to a truth-seeking Hindu in the time of need. They also lack the inclination to become acquainted with the Hindu's idea of salvation.

There are basically two Hindu responses that are often heard during the evangelisation discussion in India regarding the idea of salvation. The responses are related to the proclamation of eternal salvation of the human heart. The first response is that there is only one river but that there are many places to bath. It is generally realised by everyone in Hinduism that though there are many gods and goddesses they are all aspects and manifestations of One Absolute God (Neuner, 1997:118). According to Hinduism it is understood that all the religions have their spiritual masters in this world, and to the Hindus, Jesus Christ is only one of them (Yamamoto, 1998:48). The second response is that they have also been saved and liberated because they have met their religion's requirements and obtained it for themselves by their own effort (Yamamoto, 1998:41). Therefore, becoming one with the Absolute is also a self-effort because, according to Hindu belief, a person is truly saved when he or she becomes one with Brahma<sup>1</sup> (Yamamoto, 1998:42) as explained in the following section. There is a need for Christian workers to have a full grasp of their

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<sup>1</sup> The word Brahma is used in this article for the Hindu god to avoid confusion with the word Brahman for the priestly people group in the Hindi language.

concept of being one with reality. The aforementioned concept is what is being referred to as the Hindu's idea of salvation. It is therefore necessary that Christian workers thoroughly understand this idea to ensure effective evangelisation.

One would need to understand the idea of salvation according to the Hindu religion to compare it to the same concept in the Reformed theology. Only when one grasps the concept of salvation according to Hindu religion would one be able to ensure effective evangelism. This requires one to evaluate the doctrine of salvation according to Hindu religion in the light of the Reformed Theology. The question one would then be able to ask is how the Hindu doctrine of salvation should be evaluated in the light of that of Reformed theology. The following section will provide a discussion on how the evaluation should take place. First of all, an overview of the gods in the Hindu religion and their relationship to salvation will be provided. Furthermore, an explanation of Hindu doctrine of salvation will be provided as well as an explanation of the Reformed doctrine of salvation. An evaluation will then be provided to the reader on how one will be able to evangelise effectively.

To reach this point the following steps will be taken: research from the literature study of Hindu scripture such as *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Mahabharata*, and the ancient *Vedas* of Hindu religion will be done to get a grasp of the Hindu concept of salvation, and its evaluation, which will then be followed by the Reformed perspective of salvation according to Christian literature in the field of dogmatics.

## **2.2 Important Points on doing inter-religious comparisons**

There is important work in any successful studies so it is true in successful comparative study as well the first and most important work is studying of texts, preferably scriptural and theological texts that have preserved anciently. And it has instructed people in their understanding of God, self and other (Clooney,2010:55).

Furthermore, in doing comparative theology, not mere studying of the texts is required but, it is also necessary to know which theological ideas, questions, and claims in the text (or practice or images) are being compared. It is then necessary to high light the similarities and differences involved without raising irrelevant points which may confuse the comparison. Such comparison is useful, with theological good sense, to reach the conclusion that throws

light on the tradition and the theological issues at stake (Clooney, 2001: Ch.6 Par.14).

Several verses of Hindu scripture are at stake in this study. The Hindu community has high regard for these texts and have preserved them throughout the centuries. Since the concern of the present study is the comparison of the Soteriology of Hinduism and Reformed theology, only soteriological verses from sacred books of Hinduism has been considered for study. To avoid confusion, a table of comparison has been inserted in section 2.7 to point out the similarity and the differences in the faiths.

Secondly, in doing comparative theology there must be respect for diversity and tradition, because currently communities are multi-culturally and multi-religiously situated. One therefore needs to study tradition in their particularity and receive truth in this way. The core of comparative theology is to know God better (Clooney 2010:6). Above everything if the purpose of respect and study of diversity and tradition is knowing God better, then comparative theology becomes a manner of learning that takes seriously diversity and tradition, openness and truth allowing neither party to decide the meaning of our religious situation without support of other (Clooney, 2010:6).

Because the chief focus of the comparative theology is to know God better, in this study the concept of God in both Hinduism and the Reformed faith, such as Trimurty of the former and Trinity of later have been compared to give the proper understanding of True God.

Finally, it is not the aim of the comparative theology to point out which religion is the true one, but rather it is a process of learning other religions in such a way as to make known the truth of my faith, in the light of other's faith (Clooney, 2010:13). Similarly, "comparative theology is a practical response to religious diversity read with our eyes open, interpreting the world in the light of our faith and with a willingness to see newly the truths of our own religion in light of another." (Clooney, 2010:67) Therefore, the intention of this study is not to judge Hinduism but rather it is a comparison of reformed Soteriology to Hindu Soteriology to discover the richness of truth presented in Reformed Theology.

### **2.2.1 The role of Hindu gods in the doctrine of salvation**

It is important to understand the concept of god in Hinduism before discussing the doctrine of salvation for there is no religion without a god, including that of Buddhism (Bavinck,

2003:285). As all religions are religions of redemption, all religious doctrines are doctrines of salvation (Bavinck, 2003:286). Therefore, the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) should proceed from the doctrine of God (theology). This study will follow this sequence.

The existence of the Hindu gods usually begins with a scheme found in the *Puranas*, the ancient religious books of Hinduism. The concept of three gods is seen at the heart of Hindu theology (Smith, 2003:139). This idea of the Triad (*Trimurti*) of God was invented by Brahmins<sup>2</sup> in India during the eighth or ninth century A.D. They spoke about the three deities, Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the Preserver, and Shiva as the destroyer (Tirkey, 2003:133; Robson, 2014:152).

This study focuses on only these three gods, invented by the Brahmins and placed at different levels in Hindu religion. Only three gods at the top level are mentioned in this study because all others are incarnated from them (Tirkey, 2003:47). Hindu theology describes their limited works as those of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer or transformer of the world (Pohlmaan, 1996:7).

Hindu scriptures inform us of incidents of destructive works by gods that are greater than the act of the salvation of sinners. Bhagavad Gita says, “Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, O Bharata, and there is escalation of unrighteousness, then I Myself come forth; for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age” (B.G<sup>3</sup>. 4:7-8). Basically, the same nature as that of Krishna<sup>4</sup> is attributed to god Shiva, viz. the destruction of the wicked and protection of his devotees (Tirkey, 2003:47-48).

Additionally, the fighting and destructive work of gods among themselves are also found in Hindu scriptures. According to one of the myths, Shiva cut off Brahma's fifth head in anger. To create the world, Brahma had incestuous intercourse with his daughter. Again *Padma Purana*<sup>5</sup> says that Shiva cut off Brahma's upper head because he grew inflated with self-glorification at his own creation (Rodrigues, 2006:191). Next, once Brahma and Vishnu were fighting about the existence of linga, the male genital form, it appeared before them like a column from top to bottom. Shiva appeared before them and said, “Be not confused. We are

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<sup>2</sup>People of priestly group in India also known as Brahman in Hindi language.

<sup>3</sup>Bhagvad Gita Hindu religious book 400 B.C.

<sup>4</sup>One of the gods of Hinduism.

<sup>5</sup>Religious book of Hinduism written around 300 A.D.-650 A.D.

all three parts of the same entity. We are one and the same though having different forms. While Brahma is the creator, Vishnu is the preserver, I am the destroyer” (Chaturbedi, 2005:12). Finally, it is easy to conclude that the gods of Hinduism are engaged more in their own affairs rather than being involved with the saving of the lives of people.

Contrary to the role of Hindu gods in Hindu salvation, Reformed Theology describes the work of the triune God in salvation. There is perfect unity and agreement within the Triune God in the work of salvation. According to Ryken (2001:62) salvation is administered by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Spirit. This unity is further explained in the work of salvation by Pink & Bavinck (1998:73;2006:571) in the salvation of man where the three persons of godhead are involved; God the Father elected certain human beings to salvation, God the Son died for the same elect, and God the Spirit quickens the heart of the same elect. The persons in the Trinity have different works but one purpose to save the life of sinners. Furthermore, according to Palmer (2007:50), Spykman (1992:337) and Ryken (2006:61) the Bible teaches a unity in the work of the three Persons of the Trinity: portrayed by the Father’s election, the Son’s atonement, and the Spirit’s indwelling.

According to Upadhyay (quoted by Karkkainen, 2016:150) there are vast differences between the Trimurti of Hinduism and the Trinity of Christianity. Trimurty is only a phenomenal aspect of the divine. There is a big difference from the Christian confession. When one looks at it through the eye of the cyclical worldview of Hinduism, at the cosmic dissolution the existence of Trimurti vanishes, whereas the Trinity is God’s own inner identity, eternal and unchanging.

Finally, the Belgic Confession presents the work and activities of the triune God in the salvation of human beings as follows. “Furthermore, we must note the particular works and activities of these three persons in relation to us. The Father is called our Creator, by reason of His power. The Son is our Saviour and Redeemer, by His blood. The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier, by His living in our hearts.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus disagreement and disunity among Hindu gods show their lack of interest to save sinners which is unlike the God of the Bible, according to Reformed theology. The biggest difference between Christianity and Hinduism on the concept of God is that the former presents a personal God and the latter an impersonal God. According to Penumaka (2002)

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<sup>6</sup>Belgic confession article 9.

“it is a core advaitic<sup>7</sup> realization that Brahma has no attributes.”

### 2.3 The concept of karma in salvation

Like all religions of the world Hinduism also seeks to answer the question:-how is one's relationship with god made right? The Hindus call this *Moksha*. Moksha, from a soteriological (salvation) perspective, means liberation, emancipation, release from the death-rebirth cycle of reincarnation. According to Largen (2006) “in Hinduism, the idea of salvation is most closely linked to the concept of Moksha that is, liberation from the endless cycles of death and rebirth, known as samsara, by overcoming ignorance”. Shah (1996:128) asserts that the state of salvation ( *Moksha*) is to be in the Ultimate and Highest Being, that is, Brahma. The union of the human soul (atman) with the world spirit (Brahma) is the goal of Salvation (Schoeps, 1966:149). This union only takes place when a person is out of, or is removed from, the cycle of life. According to Tirkey (2003:96) the ultimate aim of Hindu religion is to achieve liberation (*Moksha*)that is to break free from the cycle of rebirth. In Hinduism the bondage of the soul and its release is explained by Sharma (2004:76) and Robson (2014:71) as follows: every individual's spirit is a part of the Divine Spirit (Brahma) and it must return to it again. Meanwhile it is in bondage through its union with the body or with matter, and the great aim of every individual should be to free his spirit from this union, so that it may again be at liberty to join the Supreme Being.

According to D'Souza (2002:3) in the whole Gita, the first path to realization is the path of Karma. The word Karma comes from the Sanskrit root /kr (“to do”) and indicates the “doing” of the sacrificial ritual (Tull, 1990:6). According to Singh (2005:120) the law of Karma or action is one of the main beliefs of Hinduism. The basic meaning of this term is that every good thought, word or deed creates a similar reaction which affects our next lives and every bad thought or evil deed comes back to harm us in this life or the lives to come. Our bondage and liberation are very much dependent on our actions (Sunirmalananda, 2005:317)

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<sup>7</sup> One of the School of thoughts of Hindu Religion.

In the Hindu mind, the Vedas and the Upanishads are the same and they contain the best exposition of Karma and rebirth (Schoeps, 1966:150). In the *Chandogya Upanishad*<sup>8</sup> the law of Karma is stated for the first time as retribution- causality in connection with reincarnation. According to this script everyone leading a pious life will be reincarnated into one of the higher castes, for instance priests, warriors or tradesmen, while those with impious lives are fated to be reborn as dogs, swine or humans without a caste (Hardo, 2006:4). Every Hindu endeavours by good deeds to ensure a better reincarnation for himself in the next life. His caste- position depends on that, assuming that his sins are not so grave that he must atone in the next rebirth by reappearing on earth as a plant or animal (Schoeps, 1966:153).

The caste system has an important role in Karma. To know the place of karma in caste enhances better understanding of salvation in Hinduism, because it is said that overcoming of caste is part of salvation (Post, 1989:91). “The Caste is an institution to preserve the purity of tribe and class by preventing (the contamination of the) purity of blood” (Robson, 2014:89). According to Glaserapp (cited by Schoeps, 1967:153), “A caste is a group of people who practise the same traditional occupation and are linked to one another by inherited rights, duty, and customs”.

The four classes of people were created from the different parts of Brahma’s body. At their creation they were given the deeds and duties promoting the faithful performance which would provide them with salvation. *Rig Veda* 10.90<sup>9</sup> says that from his head Brahma created Brahmins, the priestly group, the intellectuals with the duties of learning and teaching the Vedas, performing religious rituals and helping others to perform these, and giving and receiving gifts. The second class he created from his arms- the kshatriyas who were called to be warriors, soldiers or fighters authorized to look after the people’s welfare. The third group were the Vaisyas who were created from Brahma’s belly or stomach - they were merchants, industrialists, and from the business class. They were given the duty of taking care of animals, usury or engaging in agriculture. Finally the fourth group were the Sudras, the unskilled, the servants or slaves who were created from Brahma’s feet to serve the other three castes (*varnas*) in their respective tasks (Ramachandran, 2013:188).

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<sup>8</sup>Hindu religious book 650-400 B.C.

<sup>9</sup>Rig Veda is the oldest Hindu scripture 1800-1000 B.C.

Dharma and Karma have a close connection with each other. Tirkey (2003:130) explains the inter-relation of these two. Dharma is followed very closely by the doctrine of karma, and the so-called action has one goal: the highest possible personal happiness. Dharma is the key word in Hinduism and means duty, right, virtue, morality, law, truth and righteousness. It is the way that leads to salvation (*Moksha*) or liberation (Tirkey, 2003:20; Singh, 2005:114).

According to Hardo (2006:6) the unequivocal karmic law reads that goodness leads to higher knowledge, while passion incurs renewed reincarnation (B.G. 14.14). According to Yadlapati (2011) "Karma meant a commitment to performing one's given duties purely and without regard to reward or punishment". Based on the aforementioned, the law of Karma indicates man's effort to obtain salvation by his own good work. In the law of Karma, human beings are in their own hands, God has no place in the salvation and has to do everything to obtain salvation for himself.

## **2.4 Sacred knowledge and salvation**

Hinduism prescribes the second way to salvation, which is the path of Knowledge (*Jnanamarga*); it is also called the way of deliverance, or the salvation by knowledge. The way of knowledge suggests the belief that the cause of human misery is ignorance (Shah, 1996:135; Tirkey, 2003:43). Knowledge is a greater force than Karma, because Karma is performed to acquire knowledge (Shah, 1996:135). The promotion of the way of knowledge presents one of the most popular and intellectual schools of Indian philosophy, Vedanta, which is based on the Upanishadic teaching. It has been emphasized that the way of knowledge is the best way to reach the final goal of life (Sharma, 2004:75).

It is through knowledge that one can know Brahma, the Absolute God. A person who knows the Brahman is a wise (*Jnani*) man; however, Brahma himself is not knowledge, for he is beyond human understanding. Even though he is beyond human understanding, there is still a possibility of knowing the Brahma. The sage, Patanjali<sup>10</sup> and later AdiShankaracharya,<sup>11</sup> say that it is possible to know Brahma (Ramachandran,2013:102). This possibility of knowing Brahma is presented in one of the poems in *Upanishad*:

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<sup>10</sup>One of the schools of thought in Hinduism.

<sup>11</sup>Adishankaracharya commentator on Hindu scriptures.

“It is known when understood through realization (awakening) then one gains the state of immortality. One gains power through one’s soul (Atman); one gains immortality through knowing” (Kena Upanishad 2:4).

By comparing the commentary on this verse (Dass & Sutton, 2017:141-142) with that of (Paramananda,2017:100-101), it is clear that one cannot know Brahma through ordinary means of acquiring knowledge but through awakened knowledge that is a higher state of knowledge. This awakened state does two things: liberation is gained and all other states of one’s awareness become enlightened. For the full realization of Brahma, different means of knowledge are required, which is called the higher means of knowledge of Brahma. In Hindu theology the spirit and the Supreme Spirit (Brahma) are part of one unity. Therefore, to know Brahma is to know ourselves. After knowledge of Brahma, one obtains the power from this self-knowledge that gives immortality.

Next, such knowledge is received from the Hindu scriptures because knowledge about Brahma (the Supreme Being) and Dharma is the subject and object of all Hindu scriptures (Tirkey, 2003:52; Kumar, 2008:11). The Vedas come into this category because the word Veda itself means ‘holy knowledge’ (Tirkey, 2003:51; Kumar, 2008:15). They are amongst the oldest scriptures of the Hindu religion. Dr. Kumar in his book called ‘Know the Vedas at a glance’ (2008:7), says that “when god created man, the Vedas were revealed for his guidance.” These are eternal truths for humankind. They teach the knowledge of god, and lay down work as a means to acquire that knowledge. It is said that when through work, Hindus’ hearts are purified, they are ripe for divine knowledge (Tirkey, 2003:52).

That knowledge is the realization that the spirit (Atman) is the part of Brahma and when it is merged in Brahma, they both become one in a state is called liberation (Moksha). This state is gained only through knowledge because Atman itself is not able to reach Brahma because of ignorance. Atman assumes the world as real, which it is not (Prasoon, 2009:114). Only the wise men know through knowledge how to be free from the illusory (Maya) world and to remain detached from it. This is the way of knowledge, which shifts one from illusion and elevates one to the domain of Brahma (Sharma, 2004:76-77).

## 2.5 The necessity of human endeavours in pleasing God

The third way of salvation is presented in Bhagavad Gita Chapter 7 to 12, and it is called the path of devotion (*Bhakti*). The devotion (*Bhakti*) is faith in a specific god (Ramachandra, 2013:129). According to Yadlpati (2011), "Bhakti meant a commitment to love god fully with one's whole being." According to Hanshaw (2008) "the term Bhakti, then, refers to a particular way of being and a specific understanding of the nature of the divine. At its heart, the term Bhakti implies much about the very nature of God". This way of salvation is attainable by all and it is an easy way to obtain salvation. It is said that knowing the Brahma that resides in the sky is infinitely more difficult than knowing the Brahma that lives in one's body. Both are the same; it is a lot easier to discipline the bodily organs and the minds. Therefore, one can focus easily on the Brahma, or more appropriately, the soul. It is done by meditation through which one can discover the inner self or soul (Ramachandran,2013:102). According to Hanshaw (2008) Rāmānuja<sup>12</sup> is considered the father of the modern devotion (*Bhakti*) movement in India". This devotion movement arose during 1017 to 1137 A.D. it is centered mainly around two deities, the gods Vishnu and Shiva (Tirkey, 2003:132). Ramanuja regarded devotion (Bhakti) to hold a higher place than the way of knowledge (Sarma,2000:43). Tirkey (2003:133) gives a few reasons for the rise of the devotion movement in India. The way of knowledge was not suitable for all, and Karma, the path of work, has often been exclusive. Therefore, it is not surprising that the path of devotion (Bhakti) enjoyed great popularity. Secondly, the teaching in Upanishads on the concept of three gods was so philosophical and metaphysical that it was hard to understand for common people. Instead, the way of devotion (Bhakti) was the easy way to follow. Thirdly, Brahmins failed to explain the equal dignity of three gods, so the common people preferred to focus on one great god Vishnu or Shiva to gain favour or comfort (Tirkey,2003: 132-133). It seems the failure of Brahmins to explain their Trinitarian concept was due to the adaptation of this concept from Christianity. According to Robson (2017:73,153), there is a possibility that the idea of Trinity was carried to India either by Judeo-Grecian philosophy or by the influence of Malabar Christians in South India.

Devotion (Bhakti) is an expression of love, devotion and faith centered upon the supreme person, focusing on the characteristic of one specific god rather than the nature of many

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<sup>12</sup>Ramanuja was the founder of devotion (Bhakti) movement in India.

gods and goddesses. It became a popular folk movement which was very strongly opposed by the Brahmins as it disregarded traditional Vedic rituals, ignored caste differences and placed devotion over knowledge. It became the religion of the great masses of India for it enabled the individuals to approach the divine directly and become part of his all-encompassing love (Singh, 2005:108).

One can truly understand god and merge in him only through devotion, says Bhagvad Gita. Through devotion, devotees can know Brahma in essence and through this knowledge, they can merge into him. The superiority of the way of devotion is also supported in Shiv Purana. Dass & Sutton (2017:157) comment on one of the poems in Shiv Purana concerning devotion (Samhita, Sati Khanda 23:16-17) that the true path to enlightenment is the way of loving devotion. Not only Shiva is pleased by this way of devotion in the love of his devotees, but he is also rendered subservient to them.

## **2.6 Reformed Soteriology**

The basic principle of all Reformed theology is this: that God is central in salvation. Salvation is of the Lord. It is the divine work of divine God. God the Father has formed and fashioned it, God the Son has accomplished it, and God the Holy Spirit has applied it. All three persons of the divine Trinity are in eternal harmony on the plan of redemption and its execution (Sproul, 1997:189). Reformed Soteriology is based on God's grace. Salvation is not a human work but it is God's work. It is all gracious work of God. This is called the doctrine of grace, because it teaches that, in salvation God does for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. This is true of every step in the salvation process. As we are unable to choose for God, God the Father has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the earth. In our inability to remove our guilt, the Son died for our sins. We were powerless to come to God in faith, the Spirit pulled us by his irresistible grace. This doctrine of grace thus requires the sinner to accept God's sovereignty in salvation (Boice & Ryken, 2002:189). Therefore, the Reformed Soteriology from beginning to end is based on God's grace.

Secondly, Reformed Soteriology is not universal but rather it is to a specific category of people. This does not undermine the value of Christ's atonement which is the basis of the salvation. Christ's atonement is sufficient to cover the sins of the whole fallen race. The

value of His sacrifice is unlimited. His credit is sufficient to cover the faults of all who sins, Limited in this context means that the atonement is efficient only for some (Sproul, 1997:191-192) viz those person accepting Christ's atonement in faith – faith which is not earned, but given to the elect.

## **2.7 An evaluation of the Hindu concept of salvation from a Reformed Theological perspective**

According to Augustine (quoted by Bavinck, 2011:473) "All religions seek a way of salvation; all human beings long for happiness because the human heart is created for God and it is restless until it finds Him." Hinduism is one of these religions for it presents the law of Karma, which is the way to seek god by one's own effort. As Sharma (2004:77) says, Karma is a substantial approach to seek god. "The history of Hinduism is the history of man's search for reality, and truth, the Ultimate truth" (Tirkey, 2003:40).

It is the way that seeks god, to be one- with- him through good Karma. First, there is great difference in the Hamartiological concept between Hinduism and Reformed theology. According to Alamu (2009) Hinduism does not realize the concept of sin against a holy God. The acts of violation of God's standard are not done against any God but are simply a result of ignorance. These evils can be overcome by following faithfully the principles of one's caste and way of salvation. On the contrary, Christianity sees sin as a real act of rebellion against a perfect, sinless and holy God. Reformed theology says that, due to fall, our whole person is corrupted by sin (Sproul, 1997:138; Boice & Ryken, 2002:71). Because the law of Karma does not accept radical inability of man , it is surely not possible for such a person who is dead in trespasses and sins, whose mind is in enmity with God, who is not able to do any work that pleases God to be right with God. (Murray, 1979:95; Palmer, 2007:15).

Furthermore, Boettner (1957:62) illustrates the fallen state of the sinner as a bird with broken wings which is free to fly yet not able to do so. Sin has affected the human being to such an extent that man is unable, and has been disabled to do any good works, and he is wholly inclined to do all evil<sup>13</sup>(Romans 8:8). Furthermore, the Reformed confession explicitly provides the hope for the human being to escape from this situation. "But are we so corrupt

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<sup>13</sup>Canon of Dort 3&4.Article 3.

that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil”? Answer. “Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God”(H.C.<sup>14</sup>Q.A 8). Before one can take even the smallest step towards God, God has to intervene first (Boice & Ryken, 2002:70). Augustine had a phrase for this fundamental human inability: non posse non peccare, which means “not able not to sin” (Boice & Ryken,2002:81)If a person can only sin how can he then do good work? The good God (Mark 10:18) must do a good deed in the sinner’s heart. This is called regeneration and it is totally the work of God (Murray, 1979:106), or the special work of the sovereign God in man (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:586). This is called being born again with the Spirit of God. God has to make him a new creation (John 3:8) on the basis of His grace. According to Baura (2010) “one of the central themes in the Christian understanding of grace is that the personal relationship between God and human beings is ruptured because of their fault, and they are not self-sufficient to restore it through their own efforts but require divine aid to do so.”

The Spirit of God has to regenerate him by changing his mind and heart radically (Murray, 1979:96; Boice & Ryken, 2002:191; Bavinck, 2008:29). Scripture says this about those who are regenerated, “They are not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband’s will but born of God”(John 1:13). According to Augustine (quoted by Bavinck, 2008:14) the act of regeneration is done by internal grace, a grace of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the sinners. It is a divine act by which the sinner is supplied with the new spiritual life, and by which the principle of that new life is first called into action (Berkhof, 1996: 467).

There are two results coming forth from this regeneration: faith and repentance. Grudem (1994:709)and Ryken (2001:160) assert that the Christian life starts with faith and repentance. These both are the result of regeneration. Firstly, the Holy Spirit creates new spiritual life in the mind, the heart, and the will of the sinner. This enables the sinner to confess his sins, (repentance), and to trust in Christ (faith). Calvin (Institute III.3.iii) asserts that, on repentance and faith after the man is regenerated, man dies to himself and may begin to live unto God. These two elements, repentance and faith are missing in Hindu theology of salvation. Because it does not realize the reality of sin, consequently it does not have faith. They cannot please God. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrew 11:6).

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<sup>14</sup>Heidelberg catechism.

The question as to how to be right with God, is answered in the Reformed theology. When a sinner's status is right with God then he can become one with Him. This question of 'how' is solved in the doctrine called 'justification by faith alone'. "Justification is God's action in pronouncing sinners to be righteous in his sight" (Erickson, 2013:883). This was the chief question of the reformation: how do I appease a gracious God? How can I have right standing before God? This is indeed the important question which was asked by Luther. How does man once again become a man of God? How does he regain his status before God, free from his guilt and stain? In short, how does the relationship between God and man become good (Van Genderen & Velma, 2008: 607; Erickson,2013:883). Hinduism tries to solve these issues by law of Karma by its own merit whereas Reformed theology asserts that this occurs through God's grace given to sinners through Christ.

Justification is based on Christ's work and it is obtained through faith which is an instrument for receiving justification, but is not the ground of justification. Only Christ can provide the grounds for justification. Faith is what receives the grace of God in Christ (Frame, 2013:969). Faith is given by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8). God justifies the ungodly at the cost of Christ's sacrificial death. He died in the sinner's place and therefore, God declares sinners innocent just as if they had never sinned (Frame, 2013:966).

Justification is the main hinge on which salvation turns (Calvin, institute,III.11.i). This is what Martin Luther meant when he spoke of an 'alien righteousness'. Since there is no righteousness in us, we can be justified only by a righteousness that comes from somewhere outside ourselves (Ryken, 2001:196). It is from Christ alone. "Our justification thus comes by our trusting in Christ rather than by our working" (Ryken, 2001:203). God's grace is the central point in the Reformed theology for the salvation of the human -being. It starts with grace, continues with grace, it ends with the grace in the work of salvation. It is completely free from any human merits (Bavinck, 2006:579).

Furthermore, according to Augustine (quoted by Boice & Ryken, 2002:82), apart from only through grace, no one can be saved. Therefore, all the credit for the salvation of the human-being goes to God alone who saves through His grace. Boice & Ryken (2002:189) maintain that the doctrine of grace teaches that, in salvation, God does for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. This is true for every step of the way. Long before we could choose for God, the Father chose us in Christ. When we were incapable for putting away our guilt, the Son

died for our sins. And when we would not come to God in faith, the Spirit brought us by His compelling grace. The doctrines of grace thus require the sinner to accept God's sovereignty in salvation (Boice & Ryken, 2002:189).

The doctrine of justification is not explained anywhere better than in the Heidelberg catechism Question 60: "How are you righteous before God?" Answer: "Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments, of never having kept any of them, and of still being inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift with a believing heart."

The teaching of Jesus in essence had this understanding that man's righteousness is not good enough to please God (Matthew 5:20) (Frame, 2013:946). Without the gracious aid of God in man, he only does evil (Matthew 12:33-35; 19:16-26; John 6:63-65)(Frame, 2013:946). The parable of Luke 18 on the prayer of two people is a great example for the doctrine of justification. Our Lord explained in this doctrine that the Pharisee could not understand that he can be saved only by grace; instead he expected to be saved by works. The Pharisees was depending on his own merits whereas the 'publican' was begging for God's mercy (Ryken, 2001:106-107). Jesus concluded by saying, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God". (Luke 18:14). We are told, that apart from the grace of God we are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-3). This means that in and of ourselves, we can do nothing to please God (Frame, 2013:945). According to Calvin (in Boice & Ryken, 2002:91) salvation begins in the eternal past in God's determination to save a people for himself, and it continues into the eternal future.

Does that then mean that there is no place for good works in Reformed theology? Does it promote passiveness instead of doing good work? Certainly not! In fact, just the contrary: The Reformed confession (H.C. Lord's Day 34) talks of good works. The good works are secondary; first, we need to have a good relationship with God, then we can have a good relationship with our neighbours by doing well to them. We cannot do anything good to God. Likewise Question 93: "How are these commandments divided?" Answer: "They are divided into two tables. The first has four commandments, teaching us how we ought to live

in relation to God. The second has six commandments, teaching us what we owe our neighbour. “ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10NIV); “who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquities, and purify unto Himself a special people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14KJV). The good work must have the right goal, standard, and motive. It needs to seek the glory of God; it has to act according to the standard of God’s law, and the motivation should be godly faith and love, otherwise even our best works are sinful. (Proverb 30:20; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Timothy 4:2) (Frame, 2006:111). “Let your Light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”(Matthew 5:16 KJV). Thus, both Hinduism and Reformed theology accept the importance of good works. However, in the former these are done prior to salvation to obtain the salvation, whereas in the latter they are done after the salvation in gratefulness to the Lord for great salvation.

### **2.7.1 Evaluation of knowledge**

In Hinduism, the law of knowledge requires two things to obtain salvation is; to know ultimate reality (Brahma) and to know ourselves. According to John Stott (in Boice, 1986:201; Ryken, 2006:36), it is very important for the human being to know God and have a personal relationship with him, for it is that very same reason that he was created. “Knowledge of God is always redemptive or salvific in nature.” (Erickson, 2013:134). Penumaka (2002) says, “The central tenet of Shankara’s<sup>15</sup> soteriology is that knowledge (*vidhya, jnana*) alone is capable of destroying ignorance (*avidhya*) and overcoming suffering.” But there is a huge problem which Hinduism doesn’t seem to realize: that human beings don’t want to understand God (Romans 3:10-12). By their nature, they are haters of God (Sproul, 1997:149). Ryken (2001:52) comments on Romans 8:7 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:14, that the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so because the mind itself is hostile to God so it never thinks to come to know God. According to Erickson (2013:121), “the effect of sin prevents the unbelievers from coming to knowledge of God.” John Calvin said that the human mind is like ‘a perpetual forge of idols’ (Calvin, institute.I.11.xiii.). He meant that we are all continually distorting the nature of God

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<sup>15</sup>AdiShankaracharya commentator on Hindu sacred books

in our mind, making the Father of Lights out to be less than he is, and devilish (Reeves, 2012:91).

Our knowledge of God depends on his disclosure of himself. He must make himself perceivable to us by revealing himself (Bavinck, 2011:63; Erickson, 2013:122). God was not obliged to do this, but out of pure grace he has revealed himself to sinners. The greatest need of the human - being in knowing God therefore is the need of divine revelation, to know God and understand themselves in their situation before God in His world (Bavinck, 2011:63). Man can never achieve true self-knowledge unless he has previously contemplated the face of God, and down after such contemplation to look into himself (Calvin, Institutes I.I.ii).

Hinduism strives to know God which is an excellent objective! For truly to know God is eternal life. But alas! One cannot know God directly; it has to be through Christ. According to Barth (quoted by Erickson, 2013: 133) humans are unable to know God apart from the revelation in Christ. Christ is the heart of all revelation as Scripture describes it. The aim must be to know God through Christ. "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinth. 4:6) (Van Genderen & Velema, 2013:121). For the very same reason our Lord Jesus prayed to his Father, "now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3) (Frame, 2006: 4). Such knowledge of God is found in special revelation. This revelation involves God's particular communications and manifestation of Himself to particular persons at particular times (Erickson, 2013: 122). It reflects a personal relationship, a real personal tie; and it is entirely assured, because it comprises knowledge of truth (Van Genderen & Velema, 2013:199). In addition to this, the gracious work of the Holy Spirit has to make one understand this divine revelation, for without this aid it is impossible to perceive this revelation (1 Corinthians 2:14). Furthermore, knowledge and faith go hand- in- hand, to the extent that they do not coincide, they belong together (John 6:69; 1John 4:16). Essential knowledge of God is knowledge that is based on revelation and faith. To know God also means to love Him (1 John 4:7-8), to live with Him, to live in communion with Him, to live eternally (John 17:3) (Van Genderen&Velema, 2013:199).

The Apostle John says regarding the knowing of God, “ We know also that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in Him who is true-even in His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” 1John 5:20 (Van Genderen & Velema, 2013:121). Again he writes, “No man has seen God.”(John 1:18). Jesus said “he who hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9) (Van Genderen & Velema, 2013: 119). Such knowledge of God is given to us by Christ and the Holy Spirit: “no man cometh to the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matthew 11:27; 1Corinthians. 2:9-11; Eph. 1:15-21) (Van Genderen & Velema, 2013:120). Finally, “grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Lord Jesus. His divine power hath given us everything we need for life and godliness, through our knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and goodness” (2Peter 1:2-3). Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians Christians about the wisdom of God, “it is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom of God- that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption” (1Corinthians 1:30). In Christianity the person of Christ has such real significance; since he fully and uninterruptedly participated in communion with God, he is in a special sense the revelation of God (Bavinck, 2011:64). Peter says, that through the knowledge of Christ “(is) unto us exceeding great and precious promise, that by them you might be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) (Calvin, Institutes III.II.x). What a precious promise has been given through Jesus Christ. Hinduism’s search is met in the offer given by Christ be to be the partakers of divine nature.

Before the law of knowledge can know God, it must strive to know the radical depravity of the human- being. For such knowledge draws one close to Christ and it helps people to depend on the grace of God alone for their salvation (Boice & Ryken, 2002:89). The message of salvation is God’s answer to the sinfulness of our nature. If that is true, then sin helps to make sense of salvation. Indeed, the doctrine of sin shows what kind of salvation is required (Ryken, 2001:31). Therefore, Hinduism and Reformed theology both require the knowledge of God and ourselves. They are together on this matter but they also differ. In Hinduism man is left alone to gain the knowledge of God and himself. It is human effort to seek God through knowledge. In Reformed theology, it is believed that all knowledge of God is perverted by sin (Kooi & Brink, 2017:185). Therefore, God has to give the knowledge of himself to His people. He does it through the Holy Spirit. This is an act of pure grace of God.

## 2.7.2 The Evaluation of this devotion

Both religions, Hinduism and Christianity, teach that salvation is the prime end of man (Robson, 2014:187). According to Alamu (2009) “Both religions talk about salvation though the approach differs.” In Hinduism, liberation is sought in deliverance from personal existence; in Christianity, the deliverance is from sin (Robson, 2014:187). However, as Christianity and Hinduism differ in the soteriological view, they also differ in devotional view. It is a matter of prior and after. In Christianity as it is formulated in Reformed theology, devotion is displayed in the expression of gratitude. It is not something that one can do to gain the favour of God for salvation but rather, it comes after the person is saved that he works for God in gratitude. In Hinduism, the devotion is performed to get merit to please God. The law of devotion gives the best example of ; when one talks about loving devotion but one forgets that a person cannot love God (out of his own will) for since the Fall, man rests under the curse of sin; he is actuated by wrong principles, and he is wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation (Boettner, 1957:61).

On the radical depravity of the human being, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy long ago on this matter, and he describes human beings as “lovers of themselves, lovers of money...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:2-4)(Reeves, 2012:47). Our first and greatest need is not that we love God but God’s love for us. First God has to love us, then we can love God- vice versa is impossible. A person who is dead in sin does not know what love is. Consequently, He cannot gain favour by displaying loving devotion to God. Commenting on Romans 3:10-11, Boice and Ryken (2002:76), indicate that this is a serious, indeed a devastating picture of the race, because it portrays the human being as unable to do even a single thing, either to please, understand, or seek after God. Sin corrupts the heart, the mind, and the will. The inability of our heart mind and will explains why salvation must come by divine grace rather than by human effort (Ryken, 2001:179).

The Hindu doctrines of salvation Karma, knowledge and specially the law of devotion puts the work of salvation in the hand of man because it is open to everyone. “One of the main characteristics of Reformed theology is that it has the same point of departure than that of the Scriptures: God” (Van Wyk, 1995:3) so it places the salvation in the hand of God. The sovereign God is the originator and the fulfiller of the great salvation. According to Calvin (in Boice & Ryken, 2002:91), salvation on the one hand originated in the eternal past in God’s

determination to redeem a people for himself, and on other hand, it continues into the eternal future through God’s final perseverance with his redeemed. The good news is that, although we are unable to save ourselves from our sin, God saves us by the grace he gives in Jesus Christ (Ryken, 2001:60). The concept of a loving God is seen in both Hinduism and Reformed theology. However, they have different view on the concept. In Hindu Soteriology, devotion is done to show love toward God. In the Reformed view man doesn’t have ability to love God; rather he is hater of God. God has to love first before anyone could love Him.

**2.8 A comparison between Reformed Theology and Hinduism could be summarized by the following table to indicate the similarities and the differences.**

<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
Both Hinduism and Reformed Christians believe in the existence of God	Hinduism: impersonal God, Reformed: personal God.
Both have the Trinitarian or triune concept of God.	Hinduism: Trimurty is portrayed as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.  Reformed <u>theology</u> : The Trinity consists of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.
The salvation is the prime end of man.	Hinduism: salvation by human effort Reformed theology: salvation by grace alone.
Both provide the way to salvation.	Hinduism: three ways to salvation. Reformed theology: only one way to salvation.
Human beings are in bondage and need deliverance. The realization of great need of salvation.	Hinduism: deliverance from personal existence Reformed theology: deliverance from sin.

<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
Salvation is for all.	Salvation is for a select few.
Work has an important place in Hinduism as well as in Reformed theology.	Hinduism: Work is done to obtain the salvation Reformed theology: Work is the fruit of salvation.
Both Hinduism and Reformed theology require having knowledge of God for salvation.	Hinduism: man gains the knowledge of God for salvation Reformed theology: God gives knowledge to His people by the Holy Spirit.
Devotion plays a central role in Hinduism and Reformed theology.	Hinduism: It is done to please God to gain his favour. Reformed theology: It is expression of gratitude.

## 2.9 Conclusion

The gods of Hinduism are impersonal therefore the salvation in this religion is anthropocentric. One can see this in all three ways of salvation; Karma, knowledge and devotion are done from the human side towards God. Karma tries to receive merit to reach God, the law of knowledge strives to know God without God's revelation, and the law of devotion pursues to please God by its own effort. Secondly, because the concept of sin and its consequence is not recognised in this religion, it is fully human approach to God for salvation.

Contrary to it, Reformed theology is theocentric. It accepts God's grace in everything from top to bottom. It provokes to do good works because first God does good works in the heart of human-being. It encourages to know God because God has made Himself possible to know him in the Holy Scripture. It encourages to love God in devotion and gratitude for God has loved us first.

During evangelization to Hindus, one needs to explain the hamartiological concept before explaining the soteriological. This act will eradicate the reliance on these three ways to salvation and will enable one to trust God for his salvation. The concept of grace will become meaningful to him after realizing the reality of helplessness of his own effort.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Summary

#### 3.1 Research question

**The research question of this study was formulated in 1.1 as follows:** How should the Hindu doctrine of salvation be evaluated in light of reformed theology?

#### 3.2 Objectives:

**Forth flowing from this research question, the following objectives were stated:**

- To outline the role of the Hindu gods in salvation.
- To indicate the effect of the concept of Karma in salvation.
- To establish if sacred knowledge is attainable and a prerequisite for salvation.
- To weigh the extent to which human endeavours is able to please God.
- To evaluate the Hindu concept of salvation, with all the relevant issues indicated above, from a Reformed perspective.

#### 3.3 Results

**The objectives, as stated above, have been reached as follows:**

The focus of this study is to answer the question; how the doctrine of salvation according to Hindu religion should be evaluated in the light of Reformed theology. To solve such a question four headings has been considered: the role of Hindu gods in salvation, concept of karma in salvation, the place of sacred knowledge in salvation and human endeavours to please God.

Hindu gods are impersonal while God in Christianity is personal. Furthermore, the gods in Hinduism are not in agreement with one another while the three Persons of the triune God

of Christianity is fully in agreement: - as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They act and function together for the salvation of sinners. In the Reformed theology, they are presented beautifully in regard to the salvation of mankind: - the Father as....., the Son as Fulfiller, and Holy Spirit as Applier.

The three ways to obtain salvation in Hinduism are: the way of Karma, the way of knowledge, the way of devotion. Salvation in Hinduism is defined as the state of freedom from the cycle of rebirth (samsara). The soul is in the bondage because of ignorance, and due to this ignorance, the soul is attached to this world. Its original place is in the spiritual realm that is Brahma. It must return to its original place, and this is the goal of every individual. Such a state is called the union with Brahma. The Hindus try to reach Brahma through their own work and deeds. However, the salvation doctrine of the Reformed theology describes our total inability to save ourselves since human beings are dead in sin and thus alienated in from their creator. Consequently, they are unable to do anything that can bring them close to God. God has to convert such sinners so that they may repent of their sin and have faith in God for their salvation. God justifies them and declares them righteous through His grace. God reconciles such a sinner with Himself. That's where he becomes one with God and he can do good work out of gratitude towards God and his neighbour.

In Hinduism, through the knowledge of god and ourselves we can be in union with Braham. In Reformed Christianity, knowledge of God is only possible through the special revelation given by God to mankind where God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. But our heart is deceitful and our mind is corrupted by nature so that we do not understand and perceive the things of God. God has to renew our hearts and mind to believe this revelation to be true. The Bible proclaims that the Christ is the true revelation of God: through Him we can know God, apart from Him it is impossible to know God and ourselves.

Finally, the third way of salvation in Hinduism is the way of devotion. It has been also called loving devotion to God. It in entails the human effort to please God by loving Him. However, in Reformed theology it is meaningless to talk about loving God through devotion while one doesn't realized that a person cannot love God out of his own will, for since the Fall, man remains under the curse of sin. Man is unable to love God or to do anything that merits salvation. In fact, man is not lover of God but rather a hater of God; the Bible describes him an enemy of God. Our loving God has to love a human being first before the human being can love God. God has expressed His love by sending His only begotten Son to die for mankind in order to make man one with God. Therefore, the salvation of mankind is not in hands of man but in the hands of God. During evangelization the Hindu must keep in mind that the concept of the grace of God must be the priority in the sharing in the gospel.

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