Sarcouncil Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies

ISSN(Online): 2945-3658

Volume- 05| Issue- 01| 2026

Research Article **Received:** 20-01-2026 | **Accepted:** 10-02-2026 | **Published:** 25-02-2026

The Trinitarian Image and the Divine–Human Relationship: Christian and Hindu Perspectives on the Human Person

Jimmy Marshal Tambunan[1] Maruhum Simangunsong[2] Darna Situmorang[3] Ryan Stephen Gilbert Sinaga[4] Reni T.L. Purba[5] and Theresnaria Yuliatur Situmorang[6]

[1,3,4,5,6] Sekolah Tinggi Bibelvrouw HKBP, Indonesia.

[2]Sekolah Tinggi Teologi HKBP, Indonesia.

Abstract: Artikel ini membahas relasi ilahi–manusia dalam perspektif Kristen dan Hindu dengan menempatkan *Imago Trinitatis* sebagai kerangka untuk memahami identitas manusia secara relasional. Kajian ini berangkat dari perbedaan pemahaman mengenai kehadiran ilahi, khususnya antara inkarnasi Firman dalam kekristenan dan konsep manifestasi ilahi dalam tradisi Hindu. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui studi kepustakaan dengan pendekatan teologi komparatif. Analisis dilakukan berdasarkan empat aspek, yaitu pemahaman mengenai yang ilahi, hakikat manusia, struktur relasi ilahi–manusia, dan tujuan relasi tersebut. Dalam perspektif Kristen, *Imago Dei* dikembangkan melalui pemikiran Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, dan John Zizioulas menuju pemahaman *Imago Trinitatis*, yang melihat manusia sebagai pribadi yang identitasnya berakar dalam relasi dan persekutuan dengan Allah serta sesama. Perspektif Hindu dikaji melalui Advaita Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, serta konsep *avatāra*. Perbandingan menunjukkan adanya titik perjumpaan dalam perhatian terhadap keterhubungan manusia dengan realitas ilahi dan transformasi kehidupan, tetapi juga memperlihatkan perbedaan mendasar mengenai hakikat yang ilahi, identitas manusia, hubungan antara manusia dan yang ilahi, serta tujuan akhir kehidupan. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa *Imago Trinitatis* memberikan kerangka teologis Kristen yang mempertahankan relasionalitas, persekutuan, keberbedaan antara Pencipta dan ciptaan, serta partisipasi manusia dalam kehidupan Allah. Kerangka tersebut dapat menjadi kontribusi bagi dialog teologis Kristen–Hindu tanpa menghapus perbedaan ontologis dan teologis antara kedua tradisi.

Keywords: *Imago Dei*, *Imago Trinitatis*, relasionalitas ilahi–manusia, inkarnasi, *avatāra*, Kristen, Hindu.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding humanity cannot be separated from its relationship with divine reality. From a theological perspective, this relationship contributes to understanding human identity, purpose, and existence. Each religious tradition has a distinct way of understanding divine reality and humanity's place before it. Therefore, the divine-human relationship is a crucial area for examining how humanity is understood from a Christian and Hindu theological perspective.

In Christian theology, understanding humanity is rooted in the concept of Imago Dei, that is, humanity as the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). This concept relates not only to the inherent characteristics of humanity but can also be understood within the framework of humanity's relationship with God and with one another. Karl Barth placed relationship as a crucial element in understanding human existence, as the Imago Dei is understood in the light of Christ and through encounters with God and one's fellow human beings (Lidums, 2004). This relational understanding was later developed by Jürgen Moltmann through the concept of Imago Trinitatis, which understands humanity as the image of the Triune God and places a relationship of love and fellowship as the foundation for understanding the human person (Moltmann, 1993). Humans are not understood as individuals closed off within themselves, but as individuals open to God, others, and creation, and called to participate in the love and freedom of the Triune God.

From a Hindu perspective, as examined through the Vedānta tradition and the teachings of Bhakti Yoga, the human relationship with the divine can be understood through the connection between Brahman, Ātman, and the personal God, understood in Rāmānuja's thought as Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu (Ram-Prasad, 2022). Brahman is understood as transcendent reality, while Ishvara relates to the world and humans on a more personal level. This understanding of Atman and Brahman is also evident in the Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 through the expression Tat Tvam Asi, which places the true human self in connection with the highest reality (Tika, 2019). The divine-human relationship is also expressed through the concept of avatar in Bhagavad Gita 4:7–8, when Krishna reveals His presence to uphold dharma, protect what is right, and confront adharma (Mukundananda, 2014). This perspective demonstrates that the human relationship with the divine in the Hindu tradition is not only related to transcendent existence, but also to the divine presence in human life and human orientation toward liberation (moksha).

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

***Corresponding Author:** Jimmy Marshal Tambunan

DOI- https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23914367

Building on previous research, this article develops an examination of the divine-human relationship from Christian and Hindu perspectives by positioning relationality as the meeting point between understandings of the divine and human identity. The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to connect the study of divine presence or manifestation with the concept of the Imago Trinitatis within a single comparative framework. The divine-human relationship is not only understood as the relationship between God and humanity but is also analyzed in relation to human identity, existence, and purpose. This approach allows for comparisons between the two traditions while maintaining the fundamental differences in understanding divine and human reality.

This article aims to analyze the divine-human relationship from a Christian and Hindu perspective and examine the contribution of the Imago Trinitatis concept in understanding human identity in its relationship with the divine. Based on this objective, this research is directed at three main questions: how is the human relationship with the divine understood from a Christian and Hindu perspective; what are the fundamental similarities and differences between the two understandings; and how the Imago Trinitatis concept can become a Christian theological framework in reading the human relationship with the divine in a comparative context with the Hindu perspective.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method and a comparative theological approach. The research data were obtained from the Bible, primary sources in the Hindu tradition, theological books, and academic literature related to the Imago Dei, the Imago Trinitatis, divine-human relations, and Hindu thought regarding the relationship between humans and divine reality. The analysis was carried out by reading these concepts based on the theological context of each tradition, then comparing them based on several main aspects, namely the understanding of the divine, the nature of humans, the form of the divine-human relationship, and the purpose of that relationship. The comparative approach was used to find points of intersection as well as fundamental differences between Christian and Hindu perspectives without eliminating the theological distinctiveness of each tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Divine Manifestation to Divine-Human Relationality

Divine Presence in Christian Perspective

From a Christian perspective, God's presence in the world is closely related to the Word or Logos. The Gospel of John states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Word is then declared to be truly present in human life through the statement, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This statement forms the basis of the Christian confession of God's presence among humanity through Jesus Christ. G.C. van Niftrik and B.J. Boland place the confession of Christ in relation to His divinity and His relationship with God the Father (van Niftrik and Boland, 2017). The divine presence in Christ is not understood as a symbol or temporary representation, but as the presence of the Word who truly takes on humanity. J. Verkuyl explains the presence of Christ as the act of God coming to humanity and revealing Himself in a real way (Verkuyl, 2001). John's language about the Word "dwelling among us" indicates that God's revelation takes place in history through the life of Jesus Christ. This presence demonstrates God's closeness to human life while simultaneously positioning Christ's humanity as a concrete space for God's revelation.

This divine presence is related to the unity of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus. The doctrine of the hypostatic union explains that the divine and human natures are united in the one person of Christ (Reiser, 2017). This confession upholds two central aspects of Christian faith: Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man. Therefore, the incarnation is not understood as a temporary appearance of God in human form, but as the presence of the Word who truly took on humanity. God's presence in Christ is also related to the work of salvation, because the present God simultaneously acts for humanity. The presence of the Word in Christ's humanity is fundamental to understanding the relationship between God and humanity as an encounter that occurs in history. This relationship points not only to God's transcendent existence but also to God's self-revelation and presence in human life. This point forms the basis for comparing the Christian understanding of the divine presence with the Hindu tradition's understanding of the manifestation or presence of the divine in relation to humanity.

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

Divine Presence in Hindu Perspective

From a Hindu perspective, the divine presence in the world is understood through various conceptions of Brahman, Īśvara, Ātman, and divine manifestation. In Advaita Vedānta, Brahman is understood as the ultimate reality, while Ātman is essentially indistinguishable from Brahman. Tiwari explains that both have the same essence as Sat, Cit, and Ānanda, and therefore are not two independent realities (Tiwari, 2021). This understanding is emphasized through Tat Tvam Asi in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, which points to the realization of the unity of the individual self with the Absolute. Therefore, Advaita understands the divine through the realization that Ātman is essentially indistinguishable from Brahman. The concept of Īśvara developed in the early history of Advaita Vedānta; According to Andrijanić, Śaṅkara used Īśvara and Parameśvara to refer to the absolute supreme Brahman, while later developments used Īśvara to refer to conditioned Brahman (Andrijanić, 2021).

This difference in understanding is evident in Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita Vedānta. In Advaita Vedānta, Brahman is understood as the highest and only reality at the ultimate level, while mokṣa relates to the realization of the nature of Ātman and its relationship to Brahman (Betty, 2010). Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita recognizes the reality of Brahman, the soul, and the world, and the close and inseparable relationship between the three. Lipner formulated Rāmānuja's idea that "the 'world' is the 'body' of Brahman or God," so that Brahman is present and controls the world without losing His distinction from it (Lipner, 1984). The jīva is understood as aṁsa Brahman, namely, "an essential attribute" that has an inseparable relationship (apṛthak-siddha) with Brahman (Siddharth, 2026). Meanwhile, Dvaita Madhva emphasizes a fundamental distinction between God and the soul: God is the sovereign reality, while the soul is completely dependent on Him. These three schools demonstrate ontological differences in understanding the relationship between God, the soul, and the world in the Hindu tradition.

The concept of avatara provides concrete form for the divine presence in the world. Bhagavad Gītā 4:7–8 links it to the decline of dharma and the rise of adharma, when God appears to protect the righteous, destroy evil, and re-establish dharma. Emanuel explains that avatara is the presence of God in situations of dharmic decline, directed toward restoring the order of life (Singgih, 2020). Hindu tradition recognizes various forms of avatara, including the Daśāvatāra, which depicts the manifestation of Vishnu in different forms and functions (Mariana, 2024). This concept demonstrates that the divine presence relates not only to metaphysical reality but also to the moral and life conditions of humans.

The relationship between humans and the divine in Hindu thought is closely linked to the goal of mokṣa, although its meaning differs in each school of Vedānta. In Advaita, liberation is related to the eradication of ignorance (avidyā) and the realization of the unity of the Atman with Brahman. Tiwari explains that mokṣa is achieved through knowledge that eliminates ignorance, enabling humans to realize a previously unnoticed unity. Betty summarizes Śaṅkara's view by stating, "Moksha is [the Self] becoming identical with Brahman." Viśiṣṭādvaita does not understand liberation as the elimination of the distinction between the soul and Brahman; Rāmānuja maintains the relationship between the two in terms of inseparability, while Dvaita maintains the distinction between God and the soul even in the state of liberation. This distinction shows that the understanding of mokṣa is closely related to the understanding of human beings, their position in relation to God, and the ultimate goal of their existence.

The divine presence from a Hindu perspective can be seen through two interconnected dimensions. Metaphysically, this relationship is evident in the notion of Brahman, Ātman, Īśvara, the soul, and the world; religiously-cosmologically, it is seen through the avatars associated with the restoration of dharma. These two dimensions do not produce a single understanding of the relationship between humans and the divine. Advaita emphasizes the realization of the unity of Ātman and Brahman, Viśiṣṭādvaita the inseparable relationship between Brahman, the soul, and the world, while Dvaita maintains a distinction between God and the soul.

From Imago Dei to Imago Trinitatis: A Relational Understanding of the Human Person

The concept of the Imago Dei is rooted in the testimony of Genesis 1:26–27 that humans were created in the image and likeness of God. This statement places humans in a special relationship with God from creation and serves as a central foundation for Christian theological anthropology. Throughout the history of theology, the meaning of the Imago Dei has been developed through various approaches. Augustine, for example, saw

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

the image of God in the inner structure of humans through memoria, intelligentia, and voluntas (Brachtendorf, 2000), while Thomas Aquinas focused on human rationality as the capacity to know the truth and orient oneself toward God (Taufik, 2020). This approach affirms human dignity but also highlights the problem when the image of God is too closely associated with certain capacities considered inherent to humans. Allen Pangaribuan positions human existence as the image and likeness of God as part of the act of creation itself (Pangaribuan, 2022).

Karl Barth made a significant contribution to the development of this understanding by placing Christ at the center of the understanding of the Imago Dei. For Barth, humans cannot determine the meaning of the image of God solely based on internal characteristics such as reason, morality, or psychological structure. The Imago Dei must be read in light of Christ as the true image of God. Therefore, human existence is linked to encounters and relationships, both with God and with others. This understanding shifts attention from the Imago Dei as something solely possessed by humans to the Imago Dei as human existence formed in relationships (Lidums, 2004).

This relational perspective was further developed by Jürgen Moltmann through the concept of the Imago Trinitatis. Moltmann rejects a static and individualistic understanding of the image of God. He links human identity to the life of the Trinity as the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In The Trinity and the Kingdom, Moltmann asserts that the image of God is sought not only in human individuality but also in human social life (Moltmann, 1993). This view demonstrates that the image of God is not simply understood as an individual quality but also relates to human existence as persons living together and in relationships.

Moltmann's thinking becomes more poignant when he connects the Imago Dei with the Imago Trinitatis. He states that the image of God is not only found in the individual person who has reached its fullness, but also in “the completed community of persons,” which refers to “the community of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.” For Moltmann, human relationality does not originate solely from social needs, but has a theological basis in the life of the Triune God. The relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit becomes the horizon for understanding humans as persons open to God and others. Imago Trinitatis does not mean that humans ontologically become God or that the structure of humans is identical to the structure of the Trinity. The term refers to the understanding that human identity as the image of God has a relational dimension rooted in the life of the Triune God.

The participatory dimension is crucial in Moltmann's thinking. Humans not only exist as images of God but are called to live out that identity in history. Therefore, the Imago Dei has a dynamic dimension: humans reflect God through their involvement in relationships of love and communal life. This framework simultaneously corrects individualism, which understands the person as a completely independent center of action. Moltmann criticized this view, stating, "Without social relations, there can be no personality." Relationality is not simply an ethical consequence of human existence, but is related to how humans understand humans as persons.

John Zizioulas deepens this issue by placing personhood and communion at the center of theological reflection. While Moltmann places strong emphasis on the Trinitarian and participatory dimensions of the Imago Dei, Zizioulas highlights the ontological consequences of this understanding for the existence of the person. In Zizioulas's framework, the person cannot be understood as an individual who first stands alone and then builds relationships with others. Personal existence, instead, takes place in communion. Zizioulas formulates this principle through the idea that personal existence can only be understood in relationships and communion (Lan, 2014). This thinking provides ontological depth to relational anthropology: relationships are not simply human social activities, but are related to how personal existence is understood.

Based on the interconnectedness of the thoughts of Barth, Moltmann, and Zizioulas, the Imago Trinitatis can be formulated as an anthropological framework that understands humans as persons whose identities are rooted in relationships. Barth places Christ at the center of understanding the image of God; Moltmann develops the Imago Dei within the horizon of the life of the Trinity and emphasizes its social and participatory dimensions; and Zizioulas deepens it through the concept of personhood as communion. These three directions are not identical, but can be read as an argumentative sequence that moves from Christ as the image of God, to the Trinity as the basis of relationality, and then to humans as persons living

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

in communion. Within the framework of this article, the Imago Trinitatis is understood not as an equating of humans with the Trinity, but rather as a theological way to explain that human identity as the Imago Dei has a relational dimension rooted in the life of God himself. This framework provides a basis for entering into comparative questions about how humans and their relationship to the divine are understood from Christian and Hindu perspectives.

Divine–Human Relationality in Christian and Hindu Perspectives

The Divine

From a Christian perspective, divine reality is understood as the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is not an impersonal reality standing outside of relationship, but rather a God whose existence is understood in the communion of love. Therefore, the discussion of the Imago Trinitatis in the previous section has direct consequences for Christian anthropology. Humans are understood as the image of God not simply because they possess certain characteristics, but because their existence has a relational orientation rooted in the Triune God. Humanity's relationship with God does not erase the distinction between Creator and creation, but rather enables humans to participate in God's life through love, grace, and communion. This framework makes relationality a theological category related to both God's identity and human identity.

From a Hindu perspective, the term "divine" cannot be treated as a single concept with identical meanings across all Hindu traditions. Advaita Vedānta, for example, places Brahman as the ultimate reality and understands the Atman in a very close relationship with Brahman. Abhinshyam Shankar Tiwari points out that Tat Tvam Asi is one of the important Mahāvākya schools, understood in Advaita within the framework of the identity of Ātman and Brahman. He explains that in the Advaita reading, Brahman is the sole reality, and Ātman and Brahman possess the characteristics of existence, consciousness, and bliss.

This understanding differs from Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita. In Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita, Brahman remains the ultimate reality, but the soul and the world are not viewed as illusions to be eliminated. Paul J. Lipner explains that one of the central themes of Rāmānuja's thought is the idea that the world is the "body" of Brahman, or God. He also describes Rāmānuja's system as a form of monotheism-cum-ontological-dualism, which maintains a close relationship between God and the world while maintaining ontological distinctions. In Dvaita, the distinction between Brahman and the soul is even more firmly maintained. Stafford Betty points out that the three schools of Vedānta have different understandings of Brahman and the soul's relationship to ultimate reality, particularly in the state of mokṣa.

This distinction is crucial for the study of relationality. In Christian theology, humanity's relationship with God stems from the Trinity as a personal and relational God, while in the Vedānta tradition, the terms Brahman, Īśvara, and Ātman can have different meanings depending on the school of thought. Therefore, it is inappropriate to equate the Trinity with Brahman or equate the Imago Trinitatis relationship with the Ātman-Brahman relationship. The point of comparison lies in a more fundamental question: how divine reality is understood and how that understanding determines how humans understand their own existence.

The Human Person

In Christian anthropology, humans are understood as the Imago Dei and, in Moltmann's development of the Trinitarian, as the Imago Trinitatis. Human identity does not stop at individual existence, but is formed in relationship with God and others. Humans are creatures and do not become divine in an ontological sense, but are called to live in communion with God and others. This relationship is integral to understanding the human person because human identity cannot be adequately understood in isolation.

From a Hindu perspective, understanding the human is closely related to the concept of Atman. In the Advaita Vedanta reading, Tat Tvam Asi (That Thou Art) is a crucial statement regarding the relationship between Atman and Brahman. Tiwari explains that one way to understand this statement is through recognizing that Atman and Brahman refer to the same reality. This view produces an anthropological structure fundamentally different from the Imago Trinita. While the Imago Trinita maintains the distinction between humans as creation and God as Creator, Advaita directs the discussion of human identity to recognizing the unity of Atman and Brahman.

Viśiṣṭādvaita offers a different structure. Rāmānuja does not accept the elimination of the distinction between soul and Brahman. Betty explains that for

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

Rāmānuja, love for God does not allow for the final fusion between lover and beloved because "Love demands a distinction between the lover and the beloved." This relationship demonstrates that in Viśiṣṭādvaita, humans retain their distinctness from Brahman, even though their existence is inseparable from Brahman. Dvaita maintains this distinction more strongly by understanding Brahman and soul as distinct realities even in a state of liberation.

This comparison demonstrates that the category of "human person" does not have the same structure in both traditions. Within the Christian framework, humans as the Imago Trinitatis are understood as persons who receive their identity from their relationship with the Triune God without losing their status as creatures. In Advaita, the human relationship with the ultimate reality moves towards recognizing the identity of Ātman–Brahman, while Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita maintain a distinction between the soul and the divine reality. Therefore, relationality in both traditions cannot be understood simply on the basis of the similarity of the term "relationship with the divine"; the underlying ontological structure must be kept in mind.

The Structure of Relationship

The structure of the relationship between humans and God in Christianity is built on the distinction between Creator and creation. Humans do not originate from God in the sense that human identity is part of God's essence. Humans are creatures who receive life from God and are called to live in communion with Him. Within the framework of the Imago Trinita, this communion does not erase the distinction between God and humanity, but rather opens up the possibility for human participation in God's love. This relationship is personal, as God reveals himself and calls humans to a relationship characterized by love, grace, and a response of faith.

In the selected Hindu tradition, the structure of this relationship is more diverse. Advaita places knowledge of the identity of Atman and Brahman as a crucial part of the path to liberation. Tiwari explains that mokṣa is related to Atmajñāna, the knowledge of the self that eliminates ignorance. This structure of the relationship differs from the Creator-creature model in Christian theology because the primary concern is not primarily establishing a relationship between two ontologically distinct realities, but rather attaining knowledge that liberates from ignorance about the reality of the self and Brahman.

Viśiṣṭādvaita presents yet another form of relationship. In Rāmānuja's thought, the world and the soul are related to Brahman as the body is to the soul. Lipner explains that the world is understood as the "body" of Brahman, so the relationship between Brahman and the world is intimate, but it does not eliminate the distinction. This view provides a stronger relational structure between divine reality and the world than the Advaita reading, but it is still not comparable to the Creator-creature relationship in Christian theology. Dvaita maintains a clearer distinction between God and the soul, although the relationship between the two remains marked by the soul's dependence on God.

Avatāras also demonstrate another form of relationship between the divine and the human world in the Hindu tradition. Bhagavad Gita 4:7–8 describes the presence of avatars in a context where dharma is declining and adharma is increasing. Avatars are described as the divine presence to uphold dharma and restore balance. This structure demonstrates that the divine relationship with the world is not only discussed metaphysically, but also through divine action in history and the cosmic order. Therefore, avataras are a crucial point in understanding how Hindu tradition depicts the divine's engagement with the human world.

The Telos of Relationship

The goal of the human relationship with God within a Christian framework is related to communion with God, salvation, and the transformation of human life. This relationship does not aim to erase human identity as a creature or to merge humans into the essence of God. Within the framework of the Imago Trinita, the goal of the relational relationship can be understood as a life increasingly directed toward love, communion, and participation in the life of God. Therefore, salvation has not only an individual dimension but also transforms the way humans are with God and others.

In the Hindu tradition, the ultimate goal of human relationship with divine reality is discussed through the concept of mokṣa, although its meaning differs according to the Vedānta school. Advaita understands liberation through the eradication of ignorance and the realization of the identity of the Atman with Brahman. Viśiṣṭādvaita

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

does not understand mokṣa as the final fusion of the soul and Brahman. The relationship between God and the soul remains in a state of liberation, while Dvaita also maintains this distinction permanently. This difference demonstrates that the ultimate goal of the human relationship with the divine is closely related to how each tradition understands human identity and divine reality.

This comparison demonstrates that relationality is a category that can bring together Christian and Hindu anthropological questions, but does not result in doctrinal commonality. Both traditions place a central place on humanity's relationship with a reality beyond itself and link this relationship to transformation or the ultimate goal of life. However, the structure of this relationship and its ultimate goal differ. Within the Christian framework, humanity remains a distinct creation of God and is directed toward communion with the Triune God. In the Hindu tradition studied, humanity's relationship with Brahman or Īśvara takes on different forms according to Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita, while the concept of avatara reveals the dimension of divine involvement in the world through the establishment of dharma. This distinction provides an important foundation for entering into a discussion of the points of intersection and fundamental differences between the two traditions.

Convergences and Fundamental Differences
Convergences

First, humans in both traditions are not understood as completely isolated realities. In Christian theology, humans, as Imago Dei and Imago Trinitatis, gain an understanding of themselves in their relationships with God and others. Moltmann asserts that the image of God is sought not only in human individuality but also in "human sociality." This relationality is rooted in the understanding of the Triune God as the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, human existence cannot be reduced to a stand-alone individuality.

In the Hindu tradition studied, the question of human identity also concerns the relationship between humans and the ultimate reality. Advaita Vedānta addresses this relationship through Ātman and Brahman, while Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita offer different formulations of the soul's relationship with Brahman, or God. Tiwari points out that Tat Tvam Asi is a key statement in reflections on the relationship between Ātman and Brahman. Ramanuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita, on the other hand, maintains a close relationship between the soul, the world, and Brahman without completely erasing the distinction between them. This diversity demonstrates that the question of human identity in relation to divine reality is a crucial concern in the Hindu tradition, although the answers differ across sects.

Second, both traditions allow for a transcendent dimension in understanding human life. In Christianity, human life does not end with earthly existence because humans are understood as God's creations called to communion with God. In Hinduism, mokṣa indicates that human life is directed toward liberation from attachments that hinder the attainment of spiritual goals. Advaita links liberation with knowledge of the Atman and Brahman, while Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita offer different understandings of the soul's state of liberation.

Third, both traditions allow for the idea that the divine is interconnected with human life. In Christianity, this takes on a powerful form in the recognition of the Logos becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. John 1:14 states that the Word “became flesh” and dwelt among humans. In the Hindu tradition, the concept of avatara demonstrates divine involvement in the world through a divine presence in a particular form. Bhagavad Gita 4:7–8 links this presence to the decline of dharma and the rise of adharma. Both traditions, in their respective structures, focus on the divine action or presence in relation to the human world.

Fourth, humanity's relationship with the divine has consequences for life transformation. In Christianity, the relationship with God is directed toward salvation, renewal of life, love, and fellowship. In the Hindu tradition, the relationship with the divine is related to dharma, spiritual practice, bhakti, knowledge, and mokṣa, depending on the tradition. Betty points out that the differences between Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita in understanding mokṣa are closely related to their respective differences in understanding Brahman and the soul. Therefore, spiritual goals cannot be separated from an understanding of humanity's relationship with divine reality.

This space of encounter can be defined as a convergence at the level of inquiry and relational orientation. Both traditions raise questions about who humans are in relation to a reality beyond themselves, how divine reality relates to human life, and how this relationship relates to life's

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

transformation. This point of encounter is significant enough to open a theological dialogue, but not enough to conclude that there is an ontological or doctrinal similarity between the two traditions.

Fundamental Differences

The first difference lies in the understanding of divine reality. Christian theology understands God as the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's life is understood in personal relationships and loving communion. Therefore, the Imago Trinitatis departs from the relationality inherent in God's life itself. In the Hindu tradition, the terms Brahman, Iśvara, and the concept of the divine do not have a unified understanding. Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita offer different explanations of ultimate reality and its relationship to the soul. This distinction underlies the differences in the anthropology and soteriology of the two traditions.

The second difference concerns the relationship between God and humanity. In Christian theology, there is a fundamental distinction between Creator and creation. Humans are the image of God, but not part of God's essence. The relationship with God occurs through grace, communion, and participation, without erasing the ontological distinction between God and humanity. In Rāmānuja's thought, the relationship between Brahman and the world has a different structure. Lipner points out that the world is understood as the "body" of Brahman, so the relationship between God and the world is very close, but still maintains a form of identity-in-difference. Advaita goes further in understanding the relationship between Atman and Brahman through identity, while Dvaita maintains a more explicit distinction between God and the soul.

The third difference concerns human identity. Within the Imago Trinitatis framework, humans gain identity as individuals created in the image of God and understood in relation to God and others. This identity does not imply that humans possess a divine essence. In Advaita, the discussion of human identity is directed toward recognizing that Atman and Brahman share the same identity at the highest level of reality. Viśiṣṭādvaita maintains the distinctness of the soul from Brahman in an inseparable relationship, while Dvaita maintains this distinction more strongly. Therefore, the term "relationality" refers to different structures in each tradition.

The fourth difference is seen in the concepts of salvation and the final destiny. In Christianity, salvation is not understood as the loss of human identity to the essence of God. The salvific relationship leads to communion with God and the transformation of humankind as a creature. In Advaita, mokṣa is associated with knowledge that eliminates ignorance and leads to the realization of the identity of Atman and Brahman. Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita maintain a distinct form of the soul and Brahman in a state of liberation. This distinction demonstrates that the ultimate goal of humanity's relationship with the divine follows the ontological understanding of each tradition.

The fifth difference concerns the meaning of the divine presence in the world. In Christianity, the incarnation of the Logos is understood as a unique act of God in history through Jesus Christ. In Hinduism, avataras are situated within the framework of divine manifestations related to the restoration of dharma. Bhagavad Gita 4:7–8 explains that the avatara's presence relates to a situation where dharma declines and adharma increases. This comparison does not mean that incarnation and avatara are identical concepts. Both need to be situated within their respective theological systems for the function of the divine presence to be properly understood.

This comparison demonstrates that the interface between Christianity and Hinduism lies primarily in the question of human connection to divine reality, while the fundamental differences lie in the ontological and theological answers offered. Relationality in both traditions does not have an identical structure. In Christianity, human relationality is rooted in the life of the Triune God and manifests in the distinction between Creator and creation. In the Hindu tradition studied, the human relationship with the divine takes on different forms through Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, and the concept of avatara. These differences actually make comparative dialogue more productive because it is not based on eliminating differences, but on understanding how each tradition constructs the relationship between divine reality, human identity, and the ultimate purpose of life.

Imago Trinitatis as Christian Contribution to Comparative Dialogue

A comparison of Christian and Hindu perspectives demonstrates that the relationality of humans to the divine is a subject that can be a space for encounter, but it cannot be separated from the

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

ontological differences underlying each tradition. Therefore, the contribution of the Imago Trinitatis to comparative dialogue lies not in finding a direct equivalent between Christian and Hindu concepts. Its contribution lies in the Imago Trinitatis's ability to provide a Christian anthropological framework that understands humans as relational persons, while maintaining the distinction between God and humanity. Within this framework, humans are not understood as individual substances complete in themselves, but as persons whose identity is directed toward communion. This understanding is a consequence of the relationality of the Triune God as the theological foundation for human existence.

The concept of the Imago Trinitatis also affirms that human relationality is not simply an ethical demand to live with others. Relationality has a theological basis in the life of God himself. Moltmann connects the image of God with the life of the community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and rejects the limitation of the Imago Dei to human individuality (Siwecki, 2024). Within this framework, humans, as the image of God, are understood in relation to God and others. Zizioulas places a more ontological emphasis on the person as a community. The sources used in Zizioulas's discussion emphasize that the Church cannot be reconciled with individualism because it is a relational community in the Holy Spirit. Relationality is therefore not an addition to human identity but a crucial category for understanding personal existence.

A discussion with a Hindu perspective both clarifies and challenges the limits of this concept. Advaita Vedānta focuses on the relationship between Atman and Brahman through Tat Tvam Asi, while Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita maintain different forms of distinction between the soul and divine reality. This comparison demonstrates that the term "relationality" cannot be used as a neutral category that automatically carries the same meaning. In Advaita, the question of human identity is related to the realization of Atman and Brahman; in Viśiṣṭādvaita, the soul retains its close relationship with Brahman without losing its distinction. Dvaita, on the other hand, maintains a more explicit distinction between God and the soul (Pranoto, 2019). This distinction helps clarify that the Imago Trinitatis is not simply a theory about human connectedness to something transcendent.

In comparative dialogue, the Imago Trinitatis can be defended as a paradigm that understands humans not as isolated substances, but as relational persons whose identity is oriented toward fellowship. This paradigm has two implications. First, humans gain their identity not through absolute independence, but through relationships with God and others. Second, this relationship does not erase the distinction between humans and God. Humans remain creatures, while God remains Creator. This distinguishes the Imago Trinitatis from anthropological models that understand liberation through the identity between Atman and Brahman. At the same time, dialogue with Hinduism demonstrates that Christian anthropology needs to pay serious attention to the question of how humans' relationship with ultimate reality shapes their understanding of the human self.

The next contribution lies in the understanding of fellowship. The Imago Trinitatis does not stop at asserting that humans are social beings. Its foundation lies in the life of the Triune God as a fellowship of love. In this paradigm, mutual relations, openness, and participation are essential elements in understanding human life as individuals in communion. Trinitarian interpersonal relations are understood not as relationships of domination, but as a life of love that opens up space for participation. This understanding provides the foundation for an anthropology that views difference not as a threat to unity, but as something that can exist within communion. At the level of interreligious dialogue, this principle allows for the preservation of Christian and Hindu differences without using them as a reason to eliminate the possibility of encounter.

Dialogue with Hinduism also provides an opportunity to clarify the theological meaning of the term "participation." In the Christian tradition, human participation in the life of God does not mean that humans become ontologically identical with God. Participation means that humans receive God's life and love and are drawn into communion with Him. This differs from the Advaita reading of the realization of Ātman-Brahman, but it also does not equate to an absolute separation between humans and God. Christian relationality exists in the tension between difference and communion: humans remain creatures, but are called to a life with God. This tension is one of the essential characteristics of the Imago Trinitatis as a relational anthropology.

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

Based on this, the Imago Trinitatis' contribution to comparative theology can be formulated in three ways. First, the Imago Trinitatis provides a theological foundation for understanding humans as relational persons. Second, this concept maintains the connection between relationality and the ontological distinction between Creator and creation. Third, this concept opens up space for dialogue with the Hindu tradition without erasing the differences regarding Brahman, Ātman, the Trinity, salvation, and the ultimate destiny of humans. The dialogue is not aimed at proving that both traditions share the same doctrine, but rather at demonstrating how each tradition understands humanity through its relationship to divine reality. Within this framework, the Imago Trinitatis can serve as a Christian contribution to comparative theology, offering an anthropology that places relationality, communion, otherness, and participation within a unified theological framework.

Ultimately, the dialogue with a Hindu perspective not only reveals the differences between the two traditions but also helps sharpen the Christian understanding of what it means to be human as the Imago Trinitatis. This comparative encounter demonstrates that Christian relationality cannot be reduced to the general idea that humans need others or have a relationship with God. This relationality is rooted in the recognition of the Triune God as a God who lives in a communion of love. Therefore, humanity as the Imago Trinitatis is understood as a person whose identity is formed in relationship, directed toward communion, and remains within the distinction of creation. This is a point that can be carried forward into interreligious dialogue: not the elimination of differences, but rather an encounter that allows each tradition to more clearly explain how its understanding of the divine shapes its understanding of humanity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Christian perspective understands the relationship between humans and the divine through the Imago Dei, developed within the Imago Trinitatis framework, namely humans as relational individuals living in communion with God and others. From the Hindu perspective, this relationship takes various forms through the understandings of Advaita Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, and Avatara. This diversity demonstrates that the relationship between humans and the divine in the Hindu tradition cannot be reduced to a single understanding.

A comparison of the two perspectives reveals a common ground in the focus on human connectedness with divine reality, life transformation, and human destiny. The differences lie in the fundamental understanding of the nature of the divine, human identity, the structure of the human relationship with God, and the ultimate purpose of life. These differences demonstrate that relationality in the two traditions stems from distinct ontological and theological frameworks. In the context of comparative dialogue, the Imago Trinitatis provides a Christian framework that understands humans as relational individuals oriented toward communion, while maintaining the distinction between Creator and creation. The encounter with the Hindu perspective clarifies the limits and specificities of this understanding. Therefore, Imago Trinitatis can contribute to comparative theology by bringing together relationality, communion, otherness, and participation without erasing the theological differences between the Christian and Hindu traditions.

REFERENCES

1. Andrijanić, I. "The development of the terms māyā, īśvara, and saccidānanda in the early Advaita Vedānta." *Asian philosophy* 36.3 (2026): 292-306.
2. Betty, S. "Dvaita, Advaita, and Viśiṣṭādvaita: Contrasting Views of Mokṣa." *Asian Philosophy* 20.2 (2010): 215-224.
3. Brachtendorf, J. "The Structure of the Human Mind According to Augustine: Self-reflection and Knowledge of God in De Trinitate." (2000).
4. Lidums, G. “The doctrine of Imago Dei and its relation to self-transcendence in the context of practical theology.” *Diss. Helsingin yliopisto*, (2004).
5. Elwood, D. J. "Teologi Kristen Asia: Tema-tema yang Tampil ke Permukaan (terj.)." *Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, cet. ke-5* (2006).
6. Lipner, J. J. "The World as God's ‘body’: In Pursuit of Dialogue with Rāmānuja." *Religious Studies* 20.1 (1984): 145-161.
7. Mariana, M. “Mengenal Sanatana Dharma: Kumpulan tanya jawab renungan di tepian Rub Al-Khali.” *Stiletto Book*. (2024)
8. Moltmann, J., & Kohl, M. “The Trinity and the kingdom.” *Augsburg Fortress Publishers*, (1993).
9. Mukundananda, S. “Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 4, verse 7.” https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/4/verse/7 (2014a).

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher

10. Mukundananda, S. “Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 4, verse 8.” https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/4/verse/8 (2014b).
11. Niftrik, G. C. van, & Boland, B. J. “Dogmatika masa kini.” *BPK Gunung Mulia*. (2017).
12. Allen Pangaribuan, M. T. “Rancangan Allah Menciptakan Manusia “Menurut Gambar Dan Rupa Kita” Dalam Kejadian 1: 26-27.” *Penerbit Andi*, (2022).
13. Pranoto, M. M. "Kebangkitan Studi Teologi Patristik: Doktrin Trinitas (Perikhoresis)." *Jurnal Amanat Agung* 15.1 (2019): 55-76.
14. Ram-Prasad, C. "The Happiness that Qualifies Nonduality: Jñāna, Bhakti, and Sukha in Rāmānuja’s Vedārthasaṃgraha." (2022).
15. Espín, O. O., & Nickoloff, J. B. (Eds.). “An introductory dictionary of theology and religious studies.” *Liturgical Press*, (2007).
16. Tiwari, A. S. "Absolute and Identity Statements: Some Observations." (2021).
17. Siddharth, S. "The universe as aṁśa of Brahman: towards a Viśiṣṭādvaita existence-cosmopsychism." *Religious Studies* (2026): 1-21.
18. Singgih, E. G. “Dari ruang privat ke ruang publik: sebuah kumpulan tulisan teologi kontekstual Emanuel Gerrit Singgih.” *PT Kanisius*, (2020).
19. Siwecki, L. "John Zizioulas’ Trinitarian Ecclesiology." *Collectanea Theologica* 94.2 (2024): 29-59.
20. Taufik, M. "FILSAFAT BARAT ERA SKOLASTIK (Telaah Kritis Pemikiran Thomas Aquinas)." *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin* 19.2 (2020): 185-199.
21. Tika, P. D. "Tat Twam Asi Dan Solusi Masalah Study Chandogya Upanisad." *Jurnal Yoga Dan Kesehatan* 2.1 (2019): 85-98.
22. Verkuyl, J., & Soegiarto. “Aku Percaya: uraian tentang Injil dan seruan untuk percaya.” *BPK Gunung Mulia*, (1995).

Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:
Tambunan, J. M., Simangunsong, M., Situmorang, D., Sinaga, R. S. G., Purba, R. T. L. & Situmorang, T. Y. “The Trinitarian Image and the Divine–Human Relationship: Christian and Hindu Perspectives on the Human Person." *Sarcouncil Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 5.1 (2026): pp 26-36.

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s): This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) International License

Publisher: SARC Publisher