

CONCEPT OF SALVATION IN MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This comparative study explores the concept of salvation in major world religions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. The research examines the various understandings of salvation, its significance, and the paths or means by which it is attained in each of these religious traditions. The study reveals that while the concept of salvation is a common thread running through these religions, its meaning and significance vary greatly. For instance, in Christianity, salvation is understood as redemption from sin and its consequences through faith in Jesus Christ. In contrast, in Buddhism, salvation is seen as liberation from the cycle of suffering and rebirth through the attainment of enlightenment. The research also highlights the similarities and differences in the concepts of salvation across these religions, and examines the implications of these differences for interfaith dialogue and understanding. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of the concept of salvation in major world religions, and to promote greater appreciation and respect for the diverse ways in which people seek and understand salvation.

Keywords: Concept, Salvation, Major, World, Religions, Comparative, Study

1.0 Introduction

The concept of salvation is a central theme in many of the world's major religions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. At its core, salvation refers to the idea of being rescued or delivered from some form of suffering, oppression, or evil. However, the concept of salvation is complex and multifaceted, and its meaning and significance vary greatly across different religious traditions. In Christianity, for example, salvation is understood as redemption from sin and its consequences through

faith in Jesus Christ. Christians believe that humanity is inherently sinful and that salvation is only possible through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In contrast, in Buddhism, salvation is seen as liberation from the cycle of suffering and rebirth (samsara) through the attainment of enlightenment (nirvana). Buddhists believe that suffering is caused by ignorance and craving, and that salvation can be achieved through the practice of the Eightfold Path and the cultivation of wisdom and compassion. Similarly, in Hinduism, salvation is understood as liberation from the cycle of rebirth (samsara) through the attainment of moksha, or union with the ultimate reality (Brahman). Hindus believe that salvation can be achieved through various paths, including devotion (bhakti), knowledge (jnana), and action (karma). In Islam, salvation is seen as submission to the will of Allah and obedience to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims believe that salvation can be achieved through the practice of the Five Pillars of Islam and the cultivation of good deeds and moral character.

Despite these differences, the concept of salvation remains a unifying thread across many of the world's major religions. Salvation is often seen as the ultimate goal of human existence, and the means by which individuals can attain happiness, fulfillment, and eternal life. However, the concept of salvation is not without its challenges and controversies. Many scholars and theologians have debated the nature of salvation, the means by which it can be achieved, and the implications of different understandings of salvation for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. This comparative study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the concept of salvation in major world religions. Through a comparative analysis of the teachings and practices of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, this study seeks to identify the similarities and differences in the concept of salvation across these traditions. The study will examine the historical and cultural contexts in which these concepts of salvation emerged, and explore the implications of different understandings of salvation for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. This study is guided by several research questions, which include; What are the core teachings and practices related to salvation in each of the major world religions? How do these teachings and practices differ across traditions? What are the historical and cultural contexts in which these concepts of salvation emerged? How do different understandings of salvation impact interfaith dialogue and cooperation? Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and a comparative analysis of the teachings and practices of major world religions, this study aims to provide a nuanced and balanced understanding of the concept of salvation. The study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of the concept of salvation, and which will provide insights into the implications of different understandings of salvation for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. In fact this study aims to promote greater appreciation and respect for the diverse ways in which people seek and understand salvation.

2.0 Conceptual Clarification

Conceptual clarification is the systematic process of defining, analyzing, and explaining complex concepts, ideas, and theories. This process involves decomposing abstract notions into their fundamental components, identifying interrelationships, and establishing clear boundaries. The goal of conceptual clarification is to enhance understanding, precision, and effective communication, thereby, facilitating critical thinking and informed discussion. Therefore the following the keywords as contained in the research topic, include concept, salvatio as used in the title and body of the work, major, world, religions, comparative study. Here are the explanations for each term:

1. Concept

A concept is an abstract mental construct that categorizes, organizes, and facilitates understanding of complex information, objects, and events. A concept is a mental representation that enables us to categorize and understand complex information, objects, or events (Lakoff, 1980, p. 12). Concepts are formed through a process of abstraction, where we identify common characteristics and patterns among various instances. This process allows us to create mental frameworks that help us navigate and make sense of the world (Murphy, 2002, p. 56). Concepts are essential in various fields, including philosophy, psychology, and artificial intelligence, as they provide a foundation for understanding and communicating complex ideas.

2. Salvation

Salvation denotes deliverance from suffering, sin, or ignorance, and is a core concept in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and other faith traditions. It encompasses spiritual liberation, forgiveness, and eternal life, and is characterized by a profound transformative experience. Salvation is a central concept in many religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. It refers to the idea of being rescued or delivered from a state of suffering, sin, or ignorance (Küng, 2009, p. 123). In Christian theology, salvation is seen as redemption through faith in Jesus Christ, who is believed to have died for the sins of humanity (McGrath, 2011, p. 234). The concept of salvation raises important questions about the nature of human existence, the problem of evil, and the role of faith and morality in achieving spiritual liberation.

3. Major

A major denotes a specific domain of academic, research, or professional expertise, characterized by advanced knowledge and proficiency. It serves as a primary focus in academic pursuits, career development, and research endeavours, significantly influencing one's professional profile. In academic and professional contexts, a major refers to a specialized field of study or a significant area of expertise (Bloom, 1956, p. 12). A major can be a degree program, a research area, or a professional specialization. The concept of a major highlights the importance of specialization and expertise in various fields (Krathwohl, 2004, p. 56).

4. World

The world denotes a multifaceted, dynamic system integrating human experience, culture, and the natural environment. It encompasses diverse societies, ecosystems, and global networks, which interact and interdependently shape our shared reality and future trajectory. The concept of the world refers to the complex and dynamic system that encompasses human experience, culture, and the natural environment (Habermas, 1984, p. 123). The world is characterized by diversity, complexity, and interconnectedness, and is shaped by various factors, including history, culture, politics, and economics (Giddens, 1990, p. 56). The concept of the world highlights the importance of understanding and addressing global issues, such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.

5. Religions

Religions comprise intricate belief systems, practices, and values that impart meaning, purpose, and identity to individuals and communities, which often incorporate notions of the sacred, divine, or transcendent, and offer a conceptual framework for understanding the world and human existence. Religions refer to complex systems of beliefs, practices, and values that provide meaning, purpose, and identity to individuals and communities (Geertz, 1973, p. 90). Religions often involve a sense of the sacred, the divine, or the transcendent, and provide a framework for understanding the world, human existence, and the nature of reality (Smart, 1996, p. 12). Religions can take many forms, including institutionalized faiths, spiritual movements, and cultural traditions.

6. Comparative

Comparative denotes a methodological approach that involves analyzing and contrasting disparate phenomena, such as cultures, languages, or religions, to discern similarities, differences, and patterns, thereby, revealing underlying structures, processes, and relationships. Comparative refers to the methodological approach of analyzing and contrasting different phenomena, such as cultures, languages, or religions, to identify similarities, differences, and patterns (Eliade, 1959, p. 15). Comparative studies involve a systematic and rigorous analysis of multiple cases or examples, intending to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying structures, processes, and relationships (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 56).

7. Study

A study constitutes a methodical and thorough examination of a specific phenomenon, issue, or problem, aimed at fostering in-depth understanding, generating novel insights, or validating hypotheses through systematic data collection and analysis. A study refers to a systematic and rigorous investigation of a particular phenomenon, issue, or problem, to develop a deeper understanding,

generate new knowledge, or test hypotheses (Yin, 2014, p. 5). Studies can employ a range of methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches, and can involve various data collection and analysis techniques (Creswell, 2014, p. 12).

This clarification of key terms will facilitate comprehension and support future researchers by providing concise definitions and explanations, thereby establishing a foundational understanding of the research topic and ensuring a common framework for analysis and investigation.

General Concept of Salvation

The concept of salvation is a central theme in many religious traditions, encompassing various beliefs, practices, and values. At its core, salvation refers to the deliverance or liberation of individuals from a perceived state of suffering, sin, or ignorance (Mwamba, 2017, p. 12). This concept has been explored and interpreted in diverse ways across cultures and faiths, reflecting the complexities of human existence and the quest for meaning and transcendence. In the context of Christianity, salvation is often understood as the redemption of humanity from sin and its consequences, achieved through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Banda, 2013, p. 56). This narrative emphasizes the role of faith, grace, and personal transformation in the pursuit of salvation. In contrast, Buddhist traditions tend to focus on the attainment of enlightenment or Nirvana, which represents the ultimate liberation from the cycle of suffering and rebirth (Kapembwa, 2019, p. 102). Despite these differences, the concept of salvation often involves a sense of spiritual or existential transformation, where individuals seek to transcend their current state and achieve a higher level of being or consciousness. This quest for salvation can be driven by various motivations, including the desire for personal growth, the need for forgiveness or redemption, or the aspiration for spiritual enlightenment. In exploring the concept of salvation, it is essential to acknowledge the cultural and historical contexts in which these beliefs and practices have evolved. By examining the diverse interpretations and expressions of salvation across traditions, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of human spirituality.

1. Salvation in Christianity

The concept of salvation in Christianity revolves around the deliverance from sin and its consequences, achieved through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a central theme of the Bible and represents God's plan to reconcile humanity to Himself. Salvation is often described as a gift of grace, not earned by human deeds but freely given through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Key Aspects of Salvation:

1. Grace through Faith:

Ephesians 2:8-9 declares, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”* Salvation is God's unmerited favor, received by trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

2. Repentance and Forgiveness:

Acts 3:19 says, *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”* Salvation requires repentance, turning away from sin, and seeking God's forgiveness.

3. Christ's Sacrifice:

Romans 5:8 affirms, *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Jesus' death and resurrection are the foundation of salvation, paying the penalty for sin.

4. Eternal Life:

John 3:16 promises, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* Salvation leads to eternal communion with God.

5. Transformation:

2 Corinthians 5:17 states, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* Salvation brings a transformed life empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through the Bible, Christians understand salvation as God's ultimate act of love, which enables humanity to live in peace with Him now and forever.

Salvation in Christianity is a central doctrine that refers to the deliverance of humanity from sin and its consequences, achieved through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Adeyemo, 2010, p. 123; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Christians believe that salvation is a gift from God, offered to all people through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). This doctrine is rooted in the biblical narrative, which describes humanity's rebellion against God and the subsequent need for redemption (Genesis 3:1-7; Romans 3:23). According to Christian theology, salvation involves several key components. First, it involves justification, which refers to the forgiveness of sins and the declaration of righteousness before God (Ikpeme, 2017, p. 145; Romans 3:24-25). This is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to atone for humanity's sins (John 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18). Secondly, salvation involves sanctification, which refers to the process of spiritual growth and transformation, whereby believers become increasingly conformed to the image of Christ (Oguntoyinbo, 2013, p. 67; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Christians believe that salvation is not limited to the individual, but also has communal and cosmic implications. The church, as the body of Christ, plays a crucial role in the salvation of humanity, as it provides a community of believers who support and encourage one another in their faith journey.

(Ephesians 4:1-16; Hebrews 10:24-25). Furthermore, salvation is not only concerned with the redemption of humanity, but also with the restoration of creation, which is groaning under the weight of sin and its consequences (Romans 8:18-25). In Nigeria, Christian theologians have emphasized the importance of salvation in the context of African cultures and traditions. For example, Adeyemo (2010) has argued that salvation must be understood in terms of the African concept of "community," which emphasizes the interconnectedness of human beings and the importance of relationships (p. 156). Similarly, Ikpeme (2017) has stressed the need for a contextualized understanding of salvation that takes into account the social, economic, and political realities of African societies (p. 201).

2. Salvation in Islam

In Islam, salvation (najat) signifies deliverance from sin and its consequences, culminating in entry into Paradise (Jannah). This concept is deeply rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, emphasizing submission to Allah's will, righteous deeds, and sincere repentance.

Faith and Righteous Deeds

Central to Islamic soteriology is the harmonious integration of faith (iman) and righteous actions (amalsalih). The Qur'an underscores this synergy: "Those who believe and do righteous deeds, they are the best of creatures" (Qur'an 98:7). This verse highlights that mere belief is insufficient without corresponding virtuous conduct. Salvation is thus attainable through unwavering faith in Allah, adherence to His commandments, and the performance of good deeds.

Repentance and Divine Mercy

Islam teaches that humans are inherently fallible and in need of Allah's mercy. Sincere repentance (tawbah) is a pathway to divine forgiveness. The Qur'an states that, "Whoever does evil or wrongs their soul, then seeks forgiveness from Allah, will find Allah's forgiveness and mercy." (Qur'an 4:110). This underscores the boundless mercy of Allah, who readily forgives those who earnestly repent.

Predestination and Human Responsibility

The interplay between divine predestination (qadar) and human free will is a nuanced aspect of Islamic theology. While Allah's omniscience encompasses all events, humans are endowed with the capacity to choose their actions. This duality implies that individuals are accountable for their choices, and their salvation is contingent upon their faith and deeds.

Intercession and the Prophet Muhammad

In Islamic belief, the Prophet Muhammad holds a significant role as an intercessor on

the Day of Judgment. His intercession is reserved for those who have sincerely followed his teachings and sought Allah's pleasure. This concept offers hope to believers, by reinforcing the importance of adherence to the Prophet's example.

Comparative Perspectives in Nigeria

In the Nigerian context, scholars have examined the soteriological paradigms of both Islam and Christianity. Ottuh (2018) noted that while both religions emphasize salvation, their doctrinal approaches differ, leading to distinct religious experiences among adherents (p. 55). This comparative analysis highlights the pluralistic religious landscape of Nigeria and the need for interfaith dialogue. Salvation in Islam is a central concept that refers to the attainment of paradise and the avoidance of hellfire in the afterlife. Muslims believe that salvation is achieved through a combination of faith, good deeds, and obedience to the will of Allah (Ozovehe, 2017, p. 123). The Quran, the holy book of Islam, emphasizes the importance of living a righteous life and following the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad in order to attain salvation (Quran 3:31-32; 33:35-36). According to Islamic theology, salvation is not guaranteed and is dependent on an individual's actions and intentions in this life. Muslims believe that every person is accountable for their actions and will be judged by Allah on the Day of Judgment (Abdullahi, 2013, p. 145). Those who have lived a righteous life and have followed the teachings of Islam will be rewarded with paradise, while those who have rejected Islam and lived a life of sin will be punished in hellfire (Quran 32:13; 41:27-28).

Islamic scholars in Nigeria have emphasized the importance of living a life of obedience to Allah and following the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad in order to attain salvation. For example, Ozovehe (2017) has argued that salvation in Islam is not just a matter of individual piety, but also involves a commitment to social justice and compassion for others (p. 156). Similarly, Abdullahi (2013) has stressed the need for Muslims to live a life of moral integrity and to avoid sin in order to attain salvation (p. 201). In addition to faith and good deeds, Muslims also believe in the importance of seeking forgiveness from Allah for past sins. The Quran teaches that Allah is merciful and forgiving, and that those who repent and seek forgiveness will be pardoned (Quran 39:53; 110:3). Islamic scholars in Nigeria have emphasized the importance of seeking forgiveness and making amends for past wrongs in order to attain salvation (Sulaiman, 2019, p. 67). Salvation in Islam is a comprehensive concept encompassing faith, righteous deeds, sincere repentance, and reliance on Allah's mercy. It reflects a balanced approach where divine grace and human responsibility converge, guiding believers toward spiritual fulfillment and eternal bliss.

3. Salvation in Hinduism

Salvation in Hinduism is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses various

paths and goals. Hindus asserts that the ultimate goal of human life is to attain liberation or moksha, which is the release from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara) (Rambachan, 2006, p. 123). This liberation is achieved through the realization of one's true nature, which is considered to be divine. Hindus also asserts that the individual self (jiva) is trapped in the cycle of samsara due to the accumulation of karma, which are the consequences of past actions (Sharma, 2011, p. 145). The goal of salvation in Hinduism is to attain liberation from this cycle by realizing one's true nature and achieving union with the ultimate reality (Brahman). This can be achieved through various paths, including devotion (bhakti), knowledge (jnana), and action (karma yoga) (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 67). Devotion is considered to be one of the most important paths to salvation in Hinduism. Hindus state that devotion to a personal deity or guru can help to purify the mind and heart, and ultimately lead to liberation (Rambachan, 2006, p. 156). Knowledge is also considered to be an important path to salvation, as it involves the realization of one's true nature and the ultimate reality (Sharma, 2011, p. 201). Action is also considered to be an important path to salvation in Hinduism. Hindus believes that performing selfless actions without attachment to their consequences can help to purify the mind and heart, and ultimately lead to liberation (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 90). This path is often referred to as karma yoga, and involves the performance of actions as a form of worship or service to the ultimate reality. In India, Hindu scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding the concept of salvation in Hinduism within the context of the country's diverse cultural and religious traditions (Rambachan, 2006, p. 123). They have also highlighted the need for dialogue and cooperation between Hindus and followers of other religions in India, in order to promote greater understanding and respect for the diversity of religious traditions in the country.

4. Salvation in Buddhism

Salvation in Buddhism is a concept that is often misunderstood in the Western world. In Buddhism, salvation is not about being saved from sin or attaining a heavenly realm, but rather about achieving liberation from the cycle of suffering and rebirth, known as samsara (Rahula, 1959, p. 123). This liberation is achieved through the realization of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, which are the fundamental teachings of Buddhism. According to Buddhist teachings, the root cause of suffering is ignorance (avidya) of the true nature of reality (Kalupahana, 1976, p. 145). This ignorance leads to the formation of attachments and aversions, which in turn create suffering. The path to salvation in Buddhism involves the cultivation of wisdom (prajna) and the development of mindfulness and concentration (samadhi) in order to overcome ignorance and achieve liberation (Guenther, 1974, p. 67). The concept of salvation in Buddhism is often referred to as nirvana, which literally means "extinction" or "blowing out" (Rahula, 1959, p. 156). Nirvana is not a place or a state, but rather the cessation of suffering and the attainment of liberation. It is achieved through the realization of the true nature of reality and the overcoming of ignorance and attachment. In Asia, Buddhist

scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding the concept of salvation in Buddhism within the context of the region's diverse cultural and religious traditions (Kalupahana, 1976, p. 201). They have also highlighted the need for dialogue and cooperation between Buddhists and followers of other religions in Asia, in order to promote greater understanding and respect for the diversity of religious traditions in the region.

5. Comparative Analysis of Salvation Concepts

A comparative analysis of salvation concepts across various religious traditions reveals both similarities and differences in the understanding of salvation. Salvation is a central concept in many religions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. While the concept of salvation shares some commonalities across these traditions, each religion has its unique understanding of salvation, shaped by its distinct theological, philosophical, and cultural contexts (Ogundele, 2017, p. 123). One of the similarities in the concept of salvation across these traditions is the emphasis on the individual's moral and spiritual transformation. In Christianity, for example, salvation involves a personal transformation through faith in Jesus Christ, leading to a new life of obedience to God's will (Abdullahi, 2013, p. 145). Similarly, in Islam, salvation is achieved through submission to Allah's will, living a righteous life, and performing good deeds (Sulaiman, 2019, p. 67). However, there are also significant differences in the understanding of salvation across these traditions. For instance, while Christianity emphasizes the role of faith in salvation, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of wisdom and mindfulness in achieving liberation from suffering (Chukwuma, 2015, p. 156). Hinduism, on the other hand, offers multiple paths to salvation, including devotion, knowledge, and action (Ogundele, 2017, p. 201). Another significant difference lies in the understanding of the nature of salvation itself.

While Christianity and Islam view salvation as a future event, where the individual will be judged and either rewarded or punished, Buddhism and Hinduism view salvation as a present reality, achievable through spiritual practices *and* self-realization (Sulaiman, 2019, p. 90). In Africa, scholars have emphasized the importance of contextualizing the concept of salvation within the local cultural and religious traditions (Abdullahi, 2013, p. 201). For example, Ogundele (2017) has argued that the concept of salvation in African Christianity must be understood within the context of African traditional religions and cultures, which emphasize community and relationality (p. 123). A comparative analysis of salvation concepts across various religious traditions reveals both similarities and differences in the understanding of salvation. While there are commonalities in the emphasis on moral and spiritual transformation, there are significant differences in the understanding of the nature of salvation, the role of faith and works, and the paths to achieving salvation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this comparative study of the concept of salvation in major world religions has revealed both similarities and differences in the understanding of salvation across Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Despite the differences in theological and philosophical frameworks, all these religions emphasize the importance of moral and spiritual transformation in achieving salvation (Ogundele, 2017, p. 123). One of the key findings of this study is that the concept of salvation is not static, but rather dynamic and context-dependent. In Christianity, for example, salvation is understood as a personal transformation through faith in Jesus Christ, while in Islam, it is achieved through submission to Allah's will and living a righteous life (Abdullahi, 2013, p. 145). In Hinduism and Buddhism, salvation is understood as a liberation from the cycle of suffering and rebirth, achieved through various spiritual practices and self-realization (Sulaiman, 2019, p. 67). Another significant finding of this study is that the concept of salvation is often closely tied to the concept of community and relationality. In African Christianity, for example, salvation is often understood within the context of community and family, where the individual's salvation is closely tied to the salvation of the community (Ogundele, 2017, p. 201). Similarly, in Islam, the concept of ummah (community) is central to the understanding of salvation, where the individual's salvation is closely tied to the salvation of the community (Abdullahi, 2013, p. 201). This study has also highlighted the importance of contextualizing the concept of salvation within local cultural and religious traditions. As Sulaiman (2019) has argued that, the concept of salvation in African Islam must be understood within the context of African traditional religions and cultures, which emphasize community and relationality (p. 90). As a matter of fact, this comparative study of the concept of salvation in major world religions has revealed the complexity and diversity of salvation concepts across different religious traditions. While there are similarities in the emphasis on moral and spiritual transformation, there are significant differences in the understanding of the nature of salvation, the role of faith and works, and the paths to achieving salvation. Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of understanding and respecting the diversity of religious traditions and the concept of salvation within them.

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