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SOTERIOLOGY ACROSS SPIRITUAL, RELIGIOUS AND PHILISOPHICAL TRADITIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The relevance of the study of soteriological issues is often extremely acute in the period of social trials and material and spiritual tension in the state and the life of an individual. Soteriology, the study of salvation and liberation, plays a central role in various spiritual, religious, and philosophical systems. This article explores the diverse conceptions of salvation across different traditions, examining how each framework addresses human suffering, the nature of the self, and the path to ultimate liberation. By comparing major traditions – including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and existentialist philosophy – this analysis aims to elucidate both the convergences and divergences in their soteriological perspectives, highlighting how these views inform practices and beliefs about the human condition. Soteriology, as one of the oldest spiritual and philosophical teachings of mankind, aims to investigate, explain and understand the mechanisms of the incredibly interesting and rather ambiguous phenomenon of "salvation", as a certain form of human liberation from the complexities of the material world. Soteriology tries to solve two key questions: the final goal to which the adept strives and the ways to achieve it. Each system (both religious and philosophical) tries to reveal this concept in its own way, to explain and clarify the main postulates for its followers. In this article, an attempt is made to compare certain concepts in religious and philosophical systems, since these teachings, by their essence and foundations, often differ significantly, in particular, traditional and Western religious systems can radically differ (regarding the solution of this problem) in their concepts and worldview with ideas existentialism and the foundations of the Eastern religious worldview. A comparativist analysis of these teachings helps to better understand their common ground, and ways to achieve the desired states of spiritual peace and enjoyment. **The research objectives:** explore the ideas and basic foundation of soteriological ideas. Make an attempt to penetrate into the hidden foundations of these ideas. Also, make an attempt at a comparative analysis of a number of religious, philosophical and spiritual teachings and systems. **Research methodology.** The teaching of soteriology is complex and multifaceted. A comprehensive, systematic approach is necessary for the analysis of this topic. Therefore, a number of methods were used in this study: induction, deduction, historicism and system method. **Connection with previous studies.** The problem of soteriology has been of interest to a large number of scientists for a long time. We find research data in the scientific works of such scientists as: Millard, J. Erickson, Murray A. Rae, Paul K. Moser, M. Root, V. Moss and many other researchers. However, this topic remains an inexhaustible source of versatility for new philosophical research.

Key words: soteriology, spirituality, salvation, religion, philosophy, values, sacred.

Presenting main material. Soteriology, derived from the Greek words *soter* (savior) and *logos* (study or discourse), refers to the study of salvation and the mechanisms through which individuals achieve spiritual or existential liberation. Although the specifics of salvation vary significantly across different traditions, the concept remains a pivotal component in understanding human aspirations and existential goals.

Christian soteriology addresses the essential question of how salvation is attained and what it means for human beings. Central to this study are concepts such as original sin, redemption through Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the transformative process of sanctification. This article explores these themes, tracing their development from early

Christian thought through the Reformation and into contemporary Christian theology.

The concept of original sin is pivotal to Christian soteriology. According to Christian doctrine, humanity's fall from grace is rooted in the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This original sin introduced a fundamental rupture between humanity and God, necessitating a process of salvation to restore this relationship. The doctrine of original sin is derived from the Genesis account of Adam and Eve's transgression (Genesis 3). This event is interpreted as the origin of human propensity toward sin and the consequent need for divine redemption. Original sin establishes the need for salvation and sets the stage for the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ's redemptive role. The concept underscores the belief that all humans inherit a sinful nature and are in need of divine intervention to achieve reconciliation with God (J. Calvin, 1960).

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Christian soteriology centers on the belief that Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection constitute the means by which humanity is redeemed from sin and death. Various theories of atonement explain how Christ's sacrificial death reconciles humanity with God. Substitutionary Atonement – this theory posits that Jesus took on the punishment for human sins, satisfying divine justice and offering forgiveness to believers. Christus Victor – this perspective emphasizes Christ's victory over the powers of sin, death, and Satan, restoring humanity's relationship with God. Moral Influence Theory – this view suggests that Christ's life and sacrifice serve as a moral exemplar, inspiring individuals to live righteously and seek reconciliation with God. The resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to Christian soteriology, affirming the promise of eternal life and the victory over death. It is seen as the guarantee of believers' future resurrection and eternal communion with God (K. Rahner, 1975).

Justification refers to the declaration by God that a sinner is righteous on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. It is distinct from the process of sanctification and is seen as a legal or forensic act rather than a gradual process.

Sanctification refers to the process of becoming more holy and Christ-like, reflecting the transformative aspect of salvation. In many Christian traditions, sanctification is viewed as a lifelong process of spiritual growth and moral improvement, facilitated by the Holy Spirit. Sanctification involves living according to Christian teachings, participating in sacraments, and engaging in acts of love and service. It is both an individual and communal journey, affecting personal behavior and broader societal interactions (N. T. Wright, 2009).

Christian soteriology offers a rich and complex understanding of salvation, integrating theological doctrines, historical developments, and contemporary concerns. From the early Church Fathers to modern theological debates, the concept of salvation has evolved to address the needs and aspirations of believers.

In Islam, salvation (*najāt*) is fundamentally tied to the concept of eternal felicity in the afterlife. The ultimate goal is entry into Paradise (*Jannah*), where believers experience eternal peace and reward. The Islamic view of salvation integrates theological, ethical, and eschatological dimensions.

Islam emphasizes that salvation is granted through the interplay of divine justice (*'adl*) and mercy (*rahmah*). Allah is both just and merciful, rewarding

the righteous and forgiving the penitent. This duality ensures that salvation is accessible to those who sincerely repent and adhere to divine guidance.

Islamic soteriology holds that both faith (*īmān*) and righteous deeds (*'amal ṣāliḥ*) are essential for salvation. Belief in the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), the Prophethood, and the Last Day is foundational, while righteous actions – including prayer, charity, and ethical conduct – demonstrate the sincerity of one's faith (F. Esack, 2024).

Islamic theology posits that humans are born in a state of innate purity (*fiṭrah*) but are subject to moral challenges. The path to salvation involves adherence to Divine Revelation. The Qur'an, as the primary source of divine guidance, provides a comprehensive framework for living a life that leads to salvation. The Hadith further elucidate the practical applications of Qur'anic teachings. Islam emphasizes the importance of repentance (*tawbah*) and seeking Allah's forgiveness. Sincere repentance involves remorse for past sins, a commitment to change, and the resolution to avoid repeating those sins. Allah's forgiveness is central to the concept of salvation, as it allows individuals to purify themselves and attain spiritual redemption (D. Waines, 1995).

Five Pillars (*arkan al-Islām*) are foundational acts of worship and practice that structure an Islamic life and are integral to achieving salvation: Shahada (Faith) the declaration of faith that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. This belief is the cornerstone of Islamic soteriology. Salah (Prayer), regular prayers are a means of maintaining a close relationship with Allah and seeking His guidance and forgiveness. Zakat (Charity) – almsgiving to the poor and needy is a way of purifying one's wealth and demonstrating compassion and social responsibility. Sawm (Fasting), observing fasting during the month of Ramadan is a means of spiritual purification and self-discipline. Hajj (Pilgrimage), the pilgrimage to Mecca is a profound act of worship and a manifestation of devotion and unity among Muslims (Al-Qur'an, 2021).

Islamic eschatology describes a detailed vision of the afterlife, where individuals face the consequences of their earthly actions: Paradise (*Jannah*) – described as a place of eternal bliss, reward, and closeness to Allah, Paradise is the ultimate goal for those who have lived righteously and fulfilled their spiritual obligations. Hell (*Jahannam*) – contrarily, Hell represents eternal punishment for those who have rejected faith, committed grave sins, or failed to repent. The Qur'an describes various

levels of Hell, with punishments corresponding to the severity of one's actions (I. Ibn Kathir, 2003). The Day of Judgment (*Yawm al-Qiyāmah*) is a central eschatological event in Islam, during which all individuals are resurrected and judged by Allah. This day will determine one's eternal fate based on their deeds and faith. The belief in the Day of Judgment underscores the accountability of human actions and the ultimate justice of Allah.

Soteriology in Islam provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of salvation, emphasizing the interplay of faith, righteous deeds, divine justice, and mercy. Through adherence to the Five Pillars, ethical conduct, and sincere repentance, Muslims strive to attain salvation and eternal felicity in the afterlife. The Islamic view of salvation is deeply rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, while also adapting to contemporary challenges and interpretations. Understanding Islamic soteriology offers valuable insights into the broader human quest for meaning, justice, and spiritual fulfillment.

Soteriology in Buddhism explores the pathways to liberation and enlightenment, central to Buddhist teachings and practices. Buddhist soteriology addresses the profound quest for liberation from suffering and the attainment of enlightenment. Central to this exploration are the concepts of suffering, the nature of liberation, and the practices leading to spiritual awakening. In Buddhism, the understanding of suffering (*duḥkha*) is foundational to soteriology. According to the Four Noble Truths, suffering is an intrinsic aspect of human existence that must be understood and transcended. The First Noble Truth – suffering is an inherent part of life, encompassing physical and emotional pain, impermanence, and dissatisfaction. The recognition of *duḥkha* is essential for initiating the path toward liberation. Buddhist texts describe various forms of suffering, including *duḥkha-duḥkha* (suffering due to pain), *vipāka-duḥkha* (suffering from the consequences of past actions), and *samskāra-duḥkha* (suffering from the nature of existence itself) (G. Buddha, 2006).

Liberation, or *nirvāṇa*, represents the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, signifying the cessation of suffering and the realization of enlightenment. *Nirvāṇa* is described as the extinguishing of the flames of desire, hatred, and delusion. It is a state of profound peace and freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsāra*). Achieving *nirvāṇa* involves a direct experiential realization of the true nature of reality. This state is beyond conceptual thought

and linguistic description, often characterized as ineffable and transcendent (P. Harvey, 2013).

The Eightfold Path (*āryāṣṭāṅgika-mārga*) provides the practical framework for achieving liberation, outlining ethical, mental, and wisdom-based practices: right understanding (*Sammā-Diṭṭhi*), cultivating insight into the Four Noble Truths and the nature of reality. Right Intent (*Sammā-Saṅkappa*), developing intentions of renunciation, non-ill will, and harmlessness. Right Speech (*Sammā-Vācā*), engaging in truthful, harmonious, and beneficial communication. Right Action (*Sammā-Kammanta*), acting ethically by refraining from harm, theft, and sexual misconduct. Right Livelihood (*Sammā-Ājīva*), choosing a profession that does not cause harm to others and is ethically sound. Right Effort (*Sammā-Vāyāma*), making effort to abandon unwholesome states and cultivate wholesome ones. Right Mindfulness (*Sammā-Sati*), practicing mindfulness to maintain awareness of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. Right Concentration (*Sammā-Samādhi*), developing deep states of meditative absorption to attain mental clarity and insight (T. Hanh, 1999).

The concepts of karma and rebirth are integral to Buddhist soteriology, influencing the understanding of suffering and liberation: Karma, refers to the law of moral causation, where intentional actions have consequences that shape future experiences. Understanding karma helps practitioners recognize the impact of their actions on their spiritual journey. The cycle of rebirth (*samsāra*) is driven by karma and continues until enlightenment is achieved. Breaking free from this cycle requires the cessation of craving and ignorance (W. Rahula, 1974).

Soteriology in Buddhism provides a rich and multifaceted understanding of liberation and enlightenment. Through the exploration of suffering, the path to *nirvāṇa*, and the practical framework of the Eightfold Path, Buddhism offers profound insights into the nature of human existence and the means of achieving spiritual awakening. Soteriology in Hinduism involves the study of salvation, focusing on the ultimate goal of liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsāra*). Central to Hindu soteriology are the concepts of *mokṣa* (liberation), *karma* (action and its consequences), and *dharma* (duty or righteousness). In Hinduism, liberation (*mokṣa*) is considered the highest goal of human life, representing freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsāra*). Nature of Mokṣa is described as the realization of one's true self (*ātman*)

and its unity with the ultimate reality (*Brahman*). It is a state of eternal bliss, knowledge, and freedom from suffering and worldly attachments. Different schools of Hindu thought interpret mokṣa in various ways. For example, Advaita Vedanta views mokṣa as the realization of non-duality between the self and Brahman, while the Bhakti tradition emphasizes loving devotion to a personal deity as the path to liberation (W. Doniger, 1990).

The concepts of karma and rebirth are integral to Hindu soteriology, influencing the understanding of spiritual progress and the attainment of mokṣa. Dharma, or righteous duty, plays a crucial role in the Hindu understanding of soteriology. It encompasses ethical behavior, social responsibilities, and spiritual practices. Adhering to one's dharma involves fulfilling one's duties according to one's caste, stage of life, and personal inclinations. Living a life of righteousness and duty contributes to good karma and supports the journey towards mokṣa (Bhagavad Gita, 2024). Hindu life is traditionally divided into four stages (*ashramas*): Brahmacharya (student), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (hermit), and Sannyasa (renunciant). Each stage has specific duties and practices that align with dharma and spiritual development.

Hinduism offers various paths to mokṣa, each emphasizing different aspects of spiritual practice and realization. Karma Yoga (Path of Action), this path emphasizes selfless action performed in accordance with dharma without attachment to the fruits of one's actions. The Bhagavad Gita extols Karma Yoga as a means to purify the mind and attain liberation. Bhakti Yoga (Path of Devotion) centers on devotion and surrender to a personal deity. This path emphasizes the cultivation of love, devotion, and surrender as the means to attain mokṣa, and it is prominent in traditions such as Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Jnana Yoga (Path of Knowledge) involves the pursuit of wisdom and the realization of the self's unity with Brahman through meditation and philosophical inquiry. Advaita Vedanta, founded by Adi Shankaracharya, is a key school that advocates this path. Raja Yoga (Path of Meditation), outlined in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, emphasizes meditation and mental discipline as the means to attain self-realization and spiritual liberation. It includes practices such as concentration, meditation, and the cultivation of inner stillness (G. Feuerstein, 2003).

Contemporary Hindu thought continues to engage with traditional soteriological concepts

while addressing modern issues. Modern scholars and practitioners reinterpret classical soteriological ideas to address contemporary concerns, including social justice, environmental ethics, and interfaith dialogue. Hindu soteriological practices, including yoga and meditation, have gained global prominence, influencing various aspects of wellness and personal development (C. Sharma, 2002). Soteriology in Hinduism offers a multifaceted understanding of liberation and self-realization, integrating concepts such as mokṣa, karma, dharma, and the diverse paths to spiritual fulfillment. Soteriology, traditionally a theological concept, also plays a significant role in philosophical inquiry. Philosophical soteriology explores how different philosophical traditions conceptualize and attain ultimate human fulfillment or salvation.

Ancient Greek philosophy offers a range of perspectives on salvation, primarily focusing on the concepts of virtue, wisdom, and the harmonious life. Socrates' emphasis on self-knowledge and ethical living reflects a soteriological view where salvation is achieved through the cultivation of virtue and understanding one's true nature. Socratic dialogues often explore how knowledge and ethical behavior lead to a flourishing life. Plato's theory of Forms, particularly the Form of the Good, represents an ideal state of existence. For Plato, salvation involves the soul's ascent from the realm of appearances to the realm of the Forms, culminating in the vision of the Good, which leads to ultimate fulfillment. Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* (flourishing) is achieved through the practice of virtue and the development of rational capacities. Aristotle's soteriology is embedded in his ethical theory, where living a life of virtue and reason constitutes the path to the highest human good (Aristotle, 1999).

Augustine of Hippo's soteriology revolves around the notions of original sin and divine grace. According to Augustine, salvation is achieved through the grace of God, which redeems humanity from the fall and restores the possibility of eternal life (Augustine of Hippo, 1950). Thomas Aquinas integrates Aristotelian ethics with Christian doctrine, emphasizing the role of divine grace and the natural law in achieving salvation. Aquinas's soteriology involves the interplay between faith, reason, and moral virtue in the pursuit of eternal happiness. The Protestant Reformation introduced new soteriological ideas, particularly the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin argued that salvation

is attained through faith in Christ, rather than through human works or ecclesiastical mediation.

Existentialist philosophy addresses soteriological questions through the lens of individual meaning and authenticity. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism focuses on the creation of meaning in a world devoid of inherent purpose. Salvation, for Sartre, involves the embrace of personal freedom and responsibility, creating one's own values and meaning through authentic choice (J.-P. Sartre, 2022). Martin Heidegger's existential analysis of being explores the notion of authenticity and the confrontation with *nothingness*. For Heidegger, salvation involves the realization of one's true self through an authentic engagement with existence and the acknowledgment of mortality (M. Heidegger, 1962).

Postmodern and critical theories offer alternative perspectives on salvation and liberation. Michel Foucault's examination of power and subjectivity challenges traditional notions of salvation, emphasizing the need for self-examination and resistance against oppressive structures. Liberation, in this view, involves critically engaging with power dynamics and transforming one's subjectivity. The Frankfurt School's critical theory explores the intersection of social justice and liberation. Thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas emphasize the role of rational discourse and the pursuit of an egalitarian society as pathways to human flourishing and liberation.

Philosophical soteriology has profound implications for personal and collective well-being. Understanding and applying soteriological concepts can guide individuals toward personal growth, ethical living, and a deeper sense of purpose. Philosophical teachings on salvation often emphasize the creation of harmonious societies through ethical conduct, social justice, and collective responsibility. The New Age movement, emerging in the late 20th century, represents a diverse and eclectic amalgamation of spiritual beliefs and practices aimed at personal and collective transformation. Central to New Age soteriology is the notion of spiritual liberation, often conceptualized in terms of personal awakening, holistic health, and cosmic consciousness. This article explores New Age soteriological concepts, including the paths to spiritual enlightenment, the role of personal empowerment, and the integration of various spiritual traditions.

A primary focus of New Age soteriology is the attainment of spiritual awakening and self-realization. New Age teachings emphasize the importance of personal transformation as a path

to spiritual liberation. This transformation involves awakening to one's higher self, recognizing one's divine nature, and transcending limiting beliefs and societal conditioning. The New Age movement integrates physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, promoting the idea that true liberation encompasses a holistic approach to health and self-care. Practices such as meditation, yoga, and energy healing are commonly employed to facilitate this awakening (W. J. Hanegraaff, 1998).

New Age soteriology often includes the concept of cosmic consciousness and the realization of unity with the universe. Many New Age teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings and the universe. Achieving a sense of cosmic consciousness involves recognizing and experiencing this unity, leading to a sense of oneness with the cosmos and all forms of life. The notion of transcending dualistic perceptions (e.g., good and evil, self and other) is central to New Age spirituality. This transcendence is viewed as essential for achieving spiritual liberation and integrating with the universal consciousness (S. Pike, 2004).

Personal empowerment and the ability to manifest desired outcomes are key aspects of New Age soteriology. The Law of Attraction, popularized in New Age thought, posits that individuals can attract positive or negative experiences into their lives through their thoughts, beliefs, and intentions. This principle suggests that personal empowerment and intentionality play crucial roles in achieving spiritual and material goals. New Age teachings often include practices aimed at enhancing personal power and self-realization. Techniques such as affirmations, visualization, and goal-setting are employed to manifest personal aspirations and create desired life changes (S. Pike, 2004).

Soteriology in New Age teachings represents a modern adaptation of traditional concepts of salvation and liberation, incorporating elements from various spiritual and philosophical traditions into a contemporary framework. By examining key soteriological themes such as spiritual awakening, cosmic consciousness, and personal empowerment, this article provides an overview of how New Age teachings approach the quest for spiritual fulfillment. The integration of eclectic spiritual elements and the emphasis on holistic well-being reflect both the strengths and challenges of New Age soteriology in addressing contemporary spiritual needs and aspirations.

Conclusion. The comparative study of soteriological concepts across these diverse

traditions reveals both unique insights and common threads. While Christian and Hindu frameworks often involve a theistic or transcendent dimension, Buddhism emphasizes an impersonal liberation from suffering through enlightenment. Existentialist thought, by contrast, addresses the human quest for meaning in the absence of inherent cosmic purpose. Despite these differences, a common theme emerges: the pursuit of a deeper understanding or liberation from fundamental existential concerns. Each tradition provides distinct pathways, whether through divine grace, personal enlightenment, selfless action, or existential authenticity, reflecting

a shared human aspiration to transcend limitations and achieve a form of ultimate fulfillment. A comparative analysis of soteriological concepts reveals both convergences and divergences. Many traditions share a common goal of overcoming suffering and achieving a higher state of fulfillment or realization. Common themes include the pursuit of virtue, wisdom, and self-transcendence. Different traditions offer varied paths and interpretations of salvation, reflecting diverse cultural, metaphysical, and ethical perspectives. These differences highlight the pluralistic nature of philosophical approaches to human fulfillment.

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СОТЕРІОЛОГІЯ КРИЗЬ ПРИЗМУ ДУХОВНИХ, РЕЛІГІЙНИХ ТА ФІЛОСОФСЬКИХ ТРАДИЦІЙ: КОМПАРАТИВІСТСЬКИЙ АНАЛІЗ

Анотація

Актуальність дослідження сотеріологічної проблематики, часто, вкрай гостро постає в період соціальних випробувань та матеріально-духовної напруги у державі та житті окремого індивіда. Сотеріологія, наука про спасіння та звільнення, яка відіграє центральну роль у різних духовних, релігійних і філософських системах. Дане дослідження розглядає різноманітні концепції спасіння в різних традиціях, аналізуючи як кожна традиція розглядає людські страждання, природу особистості та шляху до остаточного звільнення. Порівнюючи основні вчення, включаючи християнство, буддизм, індуїзм та філософію екзистенціалізму, цей аналіз має на меті з'ясувати як спільні риси, так і розбіжності у їх сотеріологічних перспективах, підкреслюючи, як ці погляди впливають на практики та способи становлення особистості. Сотеріологія, як одне з найдавніших духовно-філософських вчень людства ставить за мету дослідити, пояснити та зрозуміти механізми неймовірно цікавого та досить неоднозначного явища «спасіння», як певної форми звільнення людини від складнощів матеріального світу. Сотеріологія намагається ставити перед собою вирішення двох ключових питань: кінцева мета до якої прагне адепт та шляхи її досягнення. Кожна система (як релігійні так і філософські) намагаються розкрити це поняття по своєму, пояснити та прояснити основні постулати для своїх адептів. В даній статті здійснено спробу порівняти певні концепції у релігійних та філософських системах, так як дані вчення за своєю суттю та основами, часто вагомо відрізняються, зокрема традиції ні західні релігійні системи можуть кардинально відрізнятися (щодо вирішення даної проблематики) у своїх концепціях та світосприйнятті із ідеями екзистенціалізму та основами східного релігійного світобачення. Компаративістський аналіз цих вчень допомагає краще зрозуміти їх спільне підґрунтя, та шляхи для досягнення омріяних станів духовного спокою та насолоди. **Завдання дослідження:** дослідити ідеї та базові основи сотеріологічних ідей. Спробуйте проникнути в приховані основи цих ідей. Також зробіть спробу порівняльного аналізу ряду релігійних, філософських і духовних вчень і систем. **Методологія дослідження.** Викладання сотеріології складне і багатогранне. Для аналізу даної теми необхідний комплексний, системний підхід. Тому в даному дослідженні використовувався ряд методів: індукція, дедукція, історизм і системний метод. **Зв'язок з попередніми дослідженнями.** Проблема сотеріології вже давно цікавить велику кількість вчених. Дані досліджень ми знаходимо в наукових працях таких вчених як: Міллард, Дж. Еріксон, Мюррей А. Рей, Пол К. Мозер, М. Рут, В. Мосс та багато інших дослідників. Проте ця тема залишається невичерпним джерелом багатогранності для нових філософських пошуків.

Ключові слова: сотеріологія, духовність, спасіння, релігія, філософія, цінності, сакральне.

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