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The Salvific Function of Religion

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the salvific function of religion and to the different ways of understanding salvation. It seems that in modern times, instead of a soteriology that emphasises the need to refer to a personal Divine Being in order to be liberated from various limitations and to achieve the fullness of humanity, a soteriology that foregrounds human powers and capacities of human self-realisation and fulfilment within the temporal world dominates. A transcendent soteriology is replaced by an immanent one. The article consists of three main parts. In the first one, the various functions performed by religion are indicated, among which the salvific function plays a fundamental role. The second part reflects on the concept of salvation present in the Christian tradition, in which salvation is understood as liberation from existential limitations and the attainment of the fullness of personal being in union with God. In the third part, attention is drawn to main alternative salvific ideas present in other religions.

Keywords: salvation, liberation, fullness of being, religion

Introduction

Religion is a complex phenomenon that attempts to define itself in various ways. However, no definition of religion can encompass all phenomena considered to be religious. There are also no objective criteria for identifying religious phenomena. For this reason, one must be satisfied with a partial definition, conditioned by the given socio-cultural context. A distinction is made between substantive and functional definitions of religion. The former attempts to identify the essence of religion, the latter to highlight its functions.

The purpose of the following analyses is to highlight the salvific function of religion and the different ways of understanding

salvation. Salvation (Greek *soteria*) is often portrayed metaphorically. The word has been used to denote health recovery, a happy return home from a dangerous expedition, redemption from slavery, or various forms of human liberation from oppression and poverty (Hebblethwaite 2007, 209). In the Christian religion it was used to refer to the work done by God towards man. It seems that in modern times, instead of a soteriology that emphasises the need to refer to a personal God in order to be liberated from various limitations and to achieve the fullness of humanity, a soteriology that foregrounds man's natural powers and capacities in the process of self-realisation and fulfilment of his being in temporal conditions is beginning to dominate. A transcendent soteriology is replaced by an immanent one.

The present analyses, mainly of a philosophical nature, consist of three main parts. In the first one, the various functions of religion are indicated, among which the salvific function plays a fundamental role. The second part reflects on the concept of salvation present in the Christian tradition. In the third part, attention is drawn to main alternative salvific ideas present in other religions.

1. The functions of religion

An anti-essentialist approach seems to prevail in the contemporary social sciences and humanities, according to which the search for and apprehension of the essence of things is abandoned and one is content to identify and describe their various functions in the life of the individual and society. This tendency is also evident in religion. In this connection, it is worth looking at what functions it has to fulfil.

Looking at religion from a psychological perspective, some stress that it can play both negative and positive functions. The negative role is to create conditions for the discharge of various mental aberrations and to protect against disorders. The positive function of religion manifests itself in discovering the meaning of life, developing a system of values, helping with self-identification and identification with a group, being a form of therapy and re-socialisation, stimulating transcendence and human actualisation,

nurturing hope and solving life problems (Wnuk and Marcinkowski 2012, 239–43).

From the point of view of sociology, it would be appropriate to articulate the integrative function of religion, which is accentuated by Émile Durkheim, Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Franz X. Kaufmann.

German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, on the other hand, mentions the essential spiritual function of religion and its various auxiliary functions. The spiritual function consists of interpreting and giving meaning to various situations through their reference to the sacred, as well as providing salvific goods. The auxiliary functions, on the other hand, refer to the tasks it fulfils in the economic, educational and political fields (Luhmann 1998, 22–40, 219–33, 252–61).

Some scholars argue that the primary function of religion is to worship (Kaczmarek 2013, 143). It is an essential element of any religion and influences people, because its role is to give meaning to important moments in human life. It is worth mentioning here, for example, the concept of ‘rites of passage’ by the French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep. These are performed, among other things, in the form of religious rituals at critical moments in life, which include birth, reaching maturity, marriage and death.

In this context, the initiatory function of religion, which would be to introduce the individual to a particular form of society and a particular lifestyle, cannot be overlooked. Initiation is the core of any religion (Wierciński 2004, 233). It is worth emphasising that the aim of religious initiation is not so much theoretical teaching and the transmission of knowledge, but rather the introduction into a specific practice of life and the transformation of the person. Moreover, initiation is interpersonal in nature, since it takes place in direct contact with a person who accompanies, supports and introduces the adept to a spiritual experience.

In this connection, the British philosopher John Hick accentuates the transformative function of religion, which has the task of transforming human being from a focus on the self to a focus on ultimate reality (Hick 1993a, 119–20, 129–35). An important role is therefore played in initiation by contact with and trust in another person, through which one begins to participate in the sphere of the sacred and to experience the transformation of one’s own being.

Sometimes the mystagogical function is distinguished from the initiatory function. Initiation would consist in the initiation and initiation of religious activity, while mystagogy would consist in its intensification and deepening through the acquisition of a deeper understanding and participation in sacred reality. Man is consequently enabled to discover the spiritual dimension of the world and of his existence, and to find the divine ground of being.

The Polish philosopher of religion Marek Pepliński, on the other hand, distinguishes between specific and non-specific functions of religion. An example of the former is the salvific function, while an example of the latter is to reveal the meaning of life, to provide moral principles, to satisfy the needs of life and to organise human existence (Pepliński 2019, 68–70). In a similar vein, the Dutch religious scholar Jacques Waardenburg emphasises two important functions of religion: salvific and giving meaning to human life (Waardenburg 1991, 31–32). It seems that the salvific function is important in religion because man strives to achieve the fullness of life, which in religious language is called salvation. However, it is not attainable on the basis of human strength and ability, but it is rather conditioned by the relationship with the Absolute and the experience of supernatural power.

Some note that all post-axial religious traditions, even those without the concept of a personal God, presuppose some kind of possibility for the ultimate fulfilment of man by transcending the limitations and randomness of his present condition. In doing so, it is emphasised that the actualisation of this possibility is achieved through the attainment of some kind of unity with Ultimate Reality. Its conceptualisation, in turn, is grasped in various categories, e.g. salvation, redemption, liberation, life, eternity (Salamon 2015, 222–23; Waldenfels 1985, 10, 17, 26, 32–33).

Religion therefore has an essential salvific function. All the more so because salvation is a central religious idea, as emphasised by the German philosopher Max Scheler, the Dutch religious scholar Gerard van der Leeuw, the Belgian philosopher Louis Dupré, the English philosopher John Hick, the American thinker Paul K. Moser, or the Polish philosopher Karol Tarnowski. The question

of salvation is, moreover, in the view of many scholars, the essential element that makes religions similar to each other.

British theorist of religion James Cox points out, for example, that in every religion, alongside beliefs about the nature of sacredness and nature, are also present some views about salvation (Cox 1996, 120).

In the view of the American philosopher John Smith, all religions have a structure composed of three elements: an ideal (a pattern of life), a lack (a defect of existence) and a saviour (a power to remedy the deficiency). The saviour takes various forms: knowledge, laws, a political system or a particular person (Smith 1971, 174–88). In each conception of salvation, therefore, it is possible to distinguish a situation marked by some deficiency and to indicate a method of overcoming it.

German religious scholar Christoph Gellner mentions two fundamental similarities between religions. Firstly, they answer similar fundamental questions about the origin and purpose of the world and man. Secondly, they show concrete paths to salvation, leading from entrapment in evil and suffering to happiness and fulfilment (Gellner 2010, 19–20). It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the answers proposed and the ways indicated are different.

The above conviction is also close to the representatives of so-called ‘religious pluralism’, according to whom human salvation is achieved in each religion and they are equal in this respect. They therefore represent alternative ways of salvation. Consequently, Christianity cannot, in the pluralists’ view, claim salvific exclusivism (Hick 1985, 47; 1987, 22; 1989, 299–303, 377–80; Knitter 1987, 194; Samartha 1987, 77, 79, 81). For pluralists, there is only one Transcendent Reality that acts salvific in different peoples. People access it through concepts and symbols specific to their native cultures. However, the soteriologies of the different religions are equally valuable.

Salvation, according to Hick, takes two fundamental forms: liberation and fulfilment (Hick 1985, 47). Liberation can refer not only to suffering, evil and death, but to the whole present way of life (Judycki 2010, 15). It has to do with the dichotomous image of the world and human life present in every religion. In the ‘lower’ (real) world,

man is entangled in evil and suffering. Because of this, he feels enslaved, dissatisfied, anxious and unfulfilled. This state is surmountable in the 'higher' (ideal) world. The various religious traditions therefore offer specific ways of liberation (Kondrat 2002, 329; Kondrat 2022, 267–68). Salvation is therefore linked, in Dupré's view, to two human attitudes: dissatisfaction with experienced reality and hope for ultimate liberation (Dupré 1991, 22, 359, 365–71, 389–94).

Another dimension of salvation is the attainment of the fullness of human being. For man cannot, in the conviction of the Hungarian theologian Ladislaus Boros, be considered a finite being. He waits for the fulfilment that consists in direct contact with God and participation in His being. At the same time, he emphasises that every fulfilment is the beginning of an even greater fulfilment (Boros 1971, 13–18, 29–33, 51–55, 130–43). It seems, therefore, that the fulfilment of man's being is not static, but dynamic. It will consist in the infinite development of the subject, whose potentialities will be actualised to a higher degree than in earthly life, but at the same time subject to a process of infinite development in relationship with God.

Man's need for liberation from the various deficiencies and the state of unfulfilment of human existence, which is the fundamental need and goal of human life, is therefore the starting point of reflection on salvation, and making it possible is the main function of religion.

In this connection, Hick will point out that religion is an effective means of reaching the goal of salvation (Hick 1989, 135; 1993a, 119–20, 129–31, 135; 1993b, 136), and effectiveness in fulfilling the salvific function is a fundamental criterion for the hierarchy of the different religious traditions (Hick 1996, 72–79). It can therefore be concluded that the more a particular religion enables man to be liberated from his various deficiencies and leads him to the full development of his natural potentialities, the greater the value it represents and the higher it ranks in the hierarchy of the various religious traditions.

Each religion, therefore, performs a salvific function for its adherents by proposing a specific way of salvation. Moreover, one may venture to say that, despite the different ways of understanding

and achieving it, the proper fulfilment of this function is their fundamental *raison d'être*.

2. The concept of salvation in the Christian tradition

Western European culture, strongly influenced for centuries by the Christian tradition, is dominated by a vision of salvation occurring through the establishment of an interpersonal relationship between man and God. Through it, human beings are liberated from the limitations of their existence and experience the fullness of existence through the actualisation of their nature.

Joseph Ratzinger draws attention to an important point in this context. He emphasises that salvation, presented as the story of the relationship between man and God, is not the work of a religious system. Through religion it is only possible to discover God (Ratzinger 2004, 161, 163–64). Belgian theologian Jacques Dupuis, according to whom God saves, not man or religion, makes a similar statement. To say that religion saves is, in his view, a linguistic abuse. Religion is only a means to an end, conveying the power of salvation (Dupuis 2003, 230–31). It can therefore be said that the source of salvation is God, not a religious system. Religion should only make it possible to establish a relationship with the divine Saviour (Latin *religio* – relationship), to unite man with Him, to see Him ‘face to face’ and to attain the fullness of human being. It is worth bearing in mind that salvation in Christianity consists in communion with the God revealed by Jesus.

The Polish philosopher of religion Ireneusz Ziemiński will furthermore emphasise that it already begins in earthly life, and that mystical experiences are its substitute and precursor (Ziemiński 2013, 114–15, 427, 586, 592–93). It is not a question of union with any God, but exclusively with the God revealed by Jesus. The situation of salvation therefore presupposes not only the possibility of direct contact with God, but also of experiencing Him ‘face to face.’ In this context, however, the intriguing question is the nature of this union and experience.

Indeed, Boros notes that man will never be completely united with God (Boros 1971, 13–18, 29–33, 51–55, 130–43). The question

of a direct view of God is also problematic. The Polish philosopher of religion Piotr Moskal draws attention to the indirect nature of the experience of God, which is related to the human structure of being and cognition. Namely, man is a psycho-physical unity and only objects that exist in matter are suitable for his cognitive powers. God, meanwhile, is not material and, even after death, man cannot by his nature know Him. Consequently, a necessary condition for cognition is the transformation of the human intellect by the ‘light of glory’ (*lumen gloriae*). The expression ‘face to face’ referring to the relationship between God and man should therefore, in Moskal’s opinion, be considered a metaphorical expression (Moskal 2002, 23–34). It seems, therefore, that in the situation of salvation, man’s unity with God will never be complete, and his experience and view will always be mediated in some way.

No less intriguing is the question of achieving the fulfilment of man’s personal being. What would it consist in? The epistemologist and philosopher of religion Stanisław Judycki offers an interesting answer to this question. He believes that it can be understood as a transfiguration of consciousness, as a result of which it is raised to a qualitatively higher level of existence and brought to a new way of functioning.

Above all, Judycki emphasises that salvation does not lead to the annihilation of individual existence, but rather to its affirmation and intensification of consciousness. The transfiguration of consciousness consists, in his view, in a radically different way in which man experiences four fundamental realities: oneself (living in accordance with one’s unique personal being and expanding one’s cognitive capacities), one’s own body (perceiving the uniqueness of the link between man and his body and restoring the functional unity of the body), other persons (overcoming egoism and restoring authentic interpersonal communication) and concrete objects (abolishing the opposition between phenomenon and reality, gaining access to the relation between the total and the particular, experiencing the mode of transformation of objects, internalising space, changing the structure of time, abolishing the boundary between the external and the internal world). The transfiguration of consciousness is moreover understood as a situation of abolishing oppositions, which

appear insurmountable in the earthly state of cognition. Judycki also points out that only the reference to God, understood as the most perfect being, can be the answer to the problem of man's existence and the power that actualises his potentialities (Judycki 2010, 15, 86–98, 107–14, 123–39, 143–60, 213–22, 246–47; 2020, 147, 151–52).¹ A similar view is expressed by Smith (1971, 20–25). It can therefore be said that God alone is the guarantor not only of the transfiguration of human consciousness, but also of the actualisation of other capacities of human nature (e.g. volitional, relational) and of the attainment of the fullness of personal being.

Two important points should be noted in connection with Judycki's conception. Firstly, the horizon of his analyses is the concept of man as a rational being, in which consciousness plays a special role. Man is a rational being because he was created in the image of the divine Logos. The fulfilment of human beinghood would therefore be reduced to the actualisation of man's rationality and the new quality of the existence and functioning of consciousness. Secondly, man as the subject of salvation is a dialogical being. He is not an isolated individual, focused only on himself, but an entity open to relationship with others. Speaking in the language of the German thinker Martin Buber, man is called to become a person, that is, to move from a monological lifestyle, marked by experiencing, knowing and using other entities, to a dialogical one, characterised by entering into a relationship with the other, discovering his essence and affirming his unique personality. All the more so because dialogicality is an important aspect of God's image in man. Consequently, salvation is only possible in a dialogical relationship with God, who affirms and transforms the personal human being.

In the view of the philosopher of religion Karol Tarnowski, there are therefore two key issues in the question of salvation. Firstly, reference to a transcendent reality is essential. Secondly,

¹ Peter van Inwagen notes that the essence of man is the brain. Salvation will therefore consist in the transformation of the brain (Inwagen 1978, 114–21). Ireneusz Ziemiński emphasises instead that salvation concerns the structure of the body, which will be stripped of all deficiencies and subjected to the soul (Ziemiński 2013, 226–29).

as a result of salvation, the individuality and personality of man is never removed (Tarnowski 2017, 246–47, 283). These seem to be the essential features that distinguish the Christian conception of salvation from its other visions.

The Italian philosopher and theologian Angelo Scola furthermore draws attention to another important aspect of salvation in Christianity. He emphasises the relationship that occurs between salvation and gratuitousness. Salvation is offered to man as a pure gift. Man is not able to obtain it, but he can only receive it. God's free initiative is therefore met with a free response from man (Scola 2005, 118–22). Man is thus the recipient of the gift of salvation, but he does so voluntarily. God's gratuitousness is thus intertwined with man's freedom.

In the context of Christianity, the concept of salvation by the Italian postmodernist Gianni Vattimo, according to whom it is an endless historical process of man's education by God, is of interest. It involves a reduction of violence from the sacred and a questioning of the claims of objectivist metaphysics. His point of reference is the figure of Jesus, who showed God stripped bare in the event of the Incarnation and suffering death as an innocent victim (Vattimo and Girard 2010, 78–87). Salvation would thus consist, in Vattimo's view, in a permanent and endless process of transformation of the human image of God, which should move away from the concept of God as supreme power, the first cause of being and the fullness of being to a being who renounces power and speaks to man through events. There would thus be a gradual shift away from the strong God of metaphysics to the weak God of biblical revelation. It seems, however, that in this situation it would only take place in earthly conditions and would not require an eschatological dimension.

It seems, therefore, that salvation in Christianity consists in an interpersonal relationship between man and God, as a result of which the potentiality of nature is actualised, the fullness of personal being is achieved, and divinisation takes place. It is worth emphasising that man does not lose his subjectivity and individuality in the process. Indeed, salvation is a form of dynamic relationship between two autonomous and free persons in dialogue

with one another. Moreover, it must be considered in terms of a gift and not of merit.

3. Alternative ideas of salvation

It is worth bearing in mind that the Christian idea of salvation outlined above is not the only one. Other religions present different concepts of salvation, the essential types of which will be presented below. At the same time, it must be emphasised that it is not a question of their comprehensive elaborating, but of showing only their essential features. An exhaustive discussion of the various projects of salvation is impossible mainly because of the intrinsic diversity of the particular religions, which are often sets of differentiated beliefs or collections of diverse denominations, with the related pluralism of visions of salvation, which often differ in minor nuances. Thus, their exact analysis is inevitably limited, just as the capacity of this text is restricted. One more important issue is the conceptual scheme for salvation that we have within our culture, which sometimes differs significantly from the conceptual categories used in other cultures and are difficult to translate unequivocally. Religion and culture are, after all, dependent on each other.

The pluralism of salvific ideas found in different religions is a consequence of different conceptions of ultimate reality. Indeed, different religions present different visions of the divinity and different types of salvation. It can be understood as liberation from some limitation, eternal preservation in divine being, the reign of divine values on earth and ultimate sanctification in the life after death. Salvation also articulates the need for God to liberate man from sin. In doing so, this sin is understood in different ways, as it can be ecological (exploitation of nature), social (undermining of human rights), economic (ideology of infinite development) and political (crisis of democracy) (Griffin 2003, 105–8). Alternative visions of salvation to the Christian conception further include the idea of continuing to exist in the lives of successive generations or one's works, liberation from conscious individual life and the 'dissolution' of individual consciousness, the breaking of the chain of incarnations and the return to unconscious matter.

In this regard, some scholars speak of salvation in the plural, i.e. there are many goals and forms of fulfilment of the human being. He can therefore attain various goals through which he gains the ultimate fulfilment of his life. These goals are shown to him by different religions. Each form of fulfilment corresponds to the fullness of God that is manifested in it. The pluralism of the forms of salvation and the paths leading to it is an expression of the Christian dogma of the Trinity, that is, an expression of the diversity of God himself, and serves the fullness of his glory (Heim 1995, 158–84, 227–29).

It is noteworthy that such conviction is especially close to scholars belonging to the philosophical and theological trend of so-called the religious pluralism. From a philosophical point of view, it is acceptable, because in different types of philosophy we are confronted with different concepts of the Absolute, of human being and of the purpose of life. From the point of view of a particular theology, however, which is especially a rational interpretation of Christian revelation with its claims to the uniqueness and finality, the above conviction is at least questionable, if not wrong. Indeed, there is a prevailing tendency in theology towards inclusivism, in which only one revelation, one religion and one form of salvation is recognised as true, although the possibility of finding elements of truth in other religions as well is admitted, rather than towards pluralism, in which all religions have a partially true revelation, and none of them can claim to have the ultimate truth, and all religions are equally effective ways of salvation. Religious pluralism is, moreover, the source of many problems, among others: the truthfulness and equal falsity of all religions, the reconciliation of the mutually exclusive contents present in the various religions, the related difficulties of human commitment to a particular religion, and, above all, the possibility of personal and salvific contact between man and the inaccessible God.

In this regard, the German religious scholar Christoph Geller draws attention to the fundamental difference between the vision of salvation present in the West, mainly of Christian provenance, and its alternative conceptions. In the former, salvation is described in the 'language of being' as the development and fullness of existence,

while in the latter, it is described in the ‘language of emptiness’ as the extinction and annihilation of the subject (Gellner 2010, 215). In this situation, however, the question arises whether it is possible to speak of the salvation of man at all, since he ultimately tends towards annihilation.

These concepts are sometimes tried to be organised according to specific criteria. Polish philosopher Kazimierz Kondrat, when comparing the main world religions, takes into account at least the following five criteria: the source of salvation, its medium, its causative power, purpose and scope. The source of salvation can be transcendent (God in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism) or immanent (man in Buddhism and Taoism). The medium of salvation is personal (Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism) or impersonal (science and technology in Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism). The causative power of salvation can be understood as an internal factor (disposition, knowledge, effort of will) or external (grace). All religions basically accept the first factor, and some also the second (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). The goal of salvation is to achieve a better level of earthly life, afterlife, or both. The salvific ideas of the main religions basically combine these two goals (Hinduism – liberation from cyclical rebirths and achieving unity with Brahman; Buddhism – liberation from suffering and Nirvana; Taoism – unification with Tao and immortality; Judaism – material-spiritual prosperity and unification with God; Christianity – internal spiritual transformation and unification with God). In terms of the scope of salvation, two things should be distinguished: the group of people called to salvation (the universalism of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity and the particular-universalist Judaism) and the real possibilities of achieving it guaranteed by religion (Kondrat 2002, 351–55; Kondrat 2022, 267–68). It is clear, therefore, that despite certain similarities, we are dealing with significant differences between religions in terms of the source of man’s salvation, the purpose of his life, the means leading to it and the causative power.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the typology of mysticism by the Polish philosopher of religion Jan Kłoczowski. He distinguishes three basic varieties: ecstatic, instatic and dialogical. In the first case, the mystic tries to transcend time and space in order

to achieve unification with the Absolute, dissolve his own self in the original Whole and annihilate his individual existence. In instatic mysticism, the path to unification with the Absolute leads deep into man. It is accompanied by a long process of initiation, in which man breaks away from the illusory world and learns the truth about his own nature, which is identical with the divine. In the case of dialogical mysticism, the basic experience is the discovery of a personal God entering into a relationship with man and unification with Him in love (Kłoczowski 2001, 20–27). There seems to be a certain analogy between the above types of mysticism and various visions of salvation. In religions of a monistic nature, salvation consists in the immersion or dissolution of the individual in divinity (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism). In religions of a prophetic nature, on the other hand, its essential feature is the experience of an interpersonal relationship with God, while maintaining full awareness of the differences between both partners in the existential dialogue.

There are certain similarities, but also differences, in the matter of how to achieve salvation. In every religion, a person must accept and fulfil certain conditions in order to achieve fulfilment of their existence or liberation from its limitations. They usually assume that a person must make a specific effort. In Judaism, this is obedience to and practice of the Torah. In Christianity, the necessity of accepting the teachings of the Gospel is emphasised. In Islam, respect for the Koran and the five pillars is emphasised. In Hinduism, attention is drawn to the path of knowledge (studying the books and intuitive vision), action (making offerings and fulfilling duties designated by a specific social class) and devotion (service with love). In Buddhism, one must accept the four noble truths (about suffering, its cause, cessation and the path leading to it) and follow the eightfold path (right understanding, thinking, speaking, acting, earning a living, striving, concentration and meditation). In Taoism, one must purify oneself using various techniques (contemplative, sexual and alchemical) (Kondrat 2002, 329–51; Kondrat 2022, 267–68). However, it should not be forgotten that, as mentioned above, the causative power of salvation can be not only an internal factor (disposition, human effort, practice), but also an external one (grace, mercy). All religions basically accept the first factor, and some also the second

one (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). There are therefore two basic attitudes in religions. The first pays attention to a specific activity on the part of man, while the second mainly emphasises the action of a supernatural agent. Thus, man does not so much achieve salvation by virtue of his own deeds and merits, as he experiences it as a result of God's intervention and action.

However, it seems that nowadays the first attitude is beginning to dominate in human life, often liberated from institutional religion, and thus a change in the way of salvation is observed. Its external source is questioned, and attention is drawn to the need for self-salvation understood as the discovery by man of the unknown core of his nature, its comprehensive development and self-improvement by means of a specific type of activity (Dyczewska and Pasek 2021, 45–46, 50). The transcendent God is reduced to some form of impersonal and immanent sacred, the original depth of reality and the meaning of life. Instead, the human subject with his inner experiences, personal searches and the need for self-realization plays an important role. The emphasis is placed on his emotions, the integration of personality and healing (Mariański 2010, 201–20; 2013, 154–62). According to the French philosopher Chantal Delsol, salvation is now identified with regaining health (Delsol 2018, 121; 2020, 82). The French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger also points out that the place of salvation has changed. It should take place in this world and be directed towards the temporal benefit of the individual (Hervieu-Léger 1999, 188–89). It is therefore clear that reference to the Absolute and eternal life in the world to come, which is usually discussed in religions, is now beginning to be lacking. Soteriology is changing into autosoteriology, and transcendence into immanence. The only form of transcendence in this situation is the ability to transcend the biological nature of human being and the external conditions of earthy existence by means of its own activity or scientific and technical achievements.

In this context, the German religion researcher Max Seckler, distinguishing between the theological concept of religion as a relationship with God and the sociocultural concept of religion as a doctrinal-ritual system, emphasises that not every reference to God is religion, but only a relationship of a saving nature. Religion is

therefore a saving bond with God and as such is possible only as theosoterics, not as autosoterics (Seckler 2000, 131–48). Salvation, therefore, cannot consist in the self-perfection of an individual based on his or her own abilities and strengths, but must take place in a relationship with a personal God and as a result of experiencing His power.

Conclusions

The purpose of the above analyses was to draw attention not only to the salvific function of religion, but also to the way of understanding salvation. It seems that in modern times, instead of soteriology, which emphasises the need to refer to a personal God in order to liberate from various limitations and achieve the fullness of personal existence, soteriology is beginning to dominate, in which only human powers and possibilities are emphasised in the process of self-realization and fulfilment of man within the temporal world. Soteriology of a transcendent nature is therefore replaced by soteriology of an immanent nature.

Salvation takes two basic forms: liberation and fulfilment. Liberation refers to various limitations and deficiencies of human life marked by the experience of evil, suffering and death. Fulfilment, on the other hand, is related to the potentialities of the spiritual-corporeal nature of man, which is directed towards the discovery of truth through reason, the free choice of the highest good, the interpersonal bond of love and the integration of corporeality. Therefore, it seems that salvation cannot consist in the annihilation of the human subject, but in its affirmation and actualization. Moreover, a human person cannot find fulfilment in contact with any kind of thing and relying solely on its own strength, but only in a dialogical relationship with another person, especially a divine person, and in an attitude of openness to its transforming power. The consequence will be a transformation of the entire human being, which is sometimes referred to as spiritualization or divinization. Salvation should therefore have a personalistic character, because the personal structure of man requires it. It also seems that it is not possible in terrestrial conditions and on the basis of the finite human

forces, which requires a specific support from another being with greater power and a different dimension of reality.

The fundamental function of religion and the reason for its existence is therefore not only to help make man aware of his limitations and shortcomings, but above all to lead him to existential transformation and to achieve full existence as a result of establishing a relationship with God. In fulfilling this function, nothing and no one can replace religion, and disregarding and marginalizing this task deprives religion of its reason for existence.

Zbawcza funkcja religii

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na zbawczą funkcję religii oraz na różne sposoby rozumienia zbawienia. Wydaje się, że w czasach współczesnych zamiast soteriologii, w której akcentuje się potrzebę odniesienia do osobowego Bytu Boskiego w celu wyzwolenia z różnych ograniczeń i osiągnięcia pełni człowieczeństwa, dominuje soteriologia, w której wysuwa się na pierwszy plan ludzkie siły oraz możliwości samorealizacji i spełnienia się człowieka w ramach świata doczesnego. Soteriologia o charakterze transcendentnym zostaje zastąpiona soteriologią o charakterze immanentnym. Artykuł składa się z trzech zasadniczych części. W pierwszej wskazano różne funkcje pełnione przez religię, wśród których zasadniczą rolę odgrywa funkcja zbawcza. W części drugiej została podjęta refleksja nad koncepcją zbawienia obecną w tradycji chrześcijańskiej, w której jest ono rozumiane jako wyzwolenie z egzystencjalnych ograniczeń i osiągnięcie pełni bytu osobowego w zjednoczeniu z Bogiem. W trzeciej zwrócono uwagę na alternatywne idee zbawcze obecne w innych religiach.

Słowa kluczowe: zbawienie, wyzwolenie, pełnia bytu, religia

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