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The Impact of Doctrines of Salvation and Damnation on Economic Behavior and Social Welfare in Christian and Non-Christian Societies

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Abstract

The research focuses on the impact of selected world religions on economic life, specifically examining beliefs, concepts, and attitudes toward work ethic, temperance, and honesty. While recognizing that different motivations may be at play, the study argues that no single religion yields greater economic development benefits than others. Additionally, historical experience suggests that world religions, by their longevity, may contribute to economic outcomes, such as charitable practices, which can be linked to economic success. For instance, the Protestant work ethic emphasizes frugality, hard work, and wealth accumulation, which contrasts with universal charity.

Building on Tawney's insights, this study examines the paradox within religious values — a paradox that Wesley addressed in his success with his Methodist parishioners, who earned middle-class respectability. The paper explores how individuals struggle to reconcile their behavior with salvation benefits, investigating how religious beliefs influence communal actions and economic behavior. Moreover, the study aims to bridge theoretical explanation and practical application by examining the association between religious motivations—rooted in salvific merit or demerit—and pragmatic outcomes. Ultimately, the research seeks to deepen understanding of how salvific theology shapes economic behavior across faith traditions and provides a unique perspective on the socio-economic effects of faith-based motivations.

1.0 Introduction

Religion, economy, and politics as the fields of interactions have interest's social scientists since such works as Weber's Protestant Ethic, Troeltsch, and Tawney's analysis. Modern development in access to data has facilitated versatility in research comparing religion and the behavior of individuals across nations. Peifer (2010)¹ and Robinson(2011)² hypothesized asserting that when real wage rates increase people become less religious. According to their model people with low opportunity cost like women not in the workforce and elderly will spend more time in formal religious activities and prayers. Also, the elderly may also focus on religious involvement, and in case the chances of making it to heaven are expected to be tied to the sum of religious activities exercised throughout one's lifetime. It gets deeper if those late life actions are regarded as the most valuable for salvation this is in line with other practices like the Catholic confession that can cleanse one's sins³.

The religion-market model which has been formulated by Finke and Stark, Iannaccone and other scholars belong categorically to the supply side⁴. Conforming to the theories of Adam Smith, this body of literature implies that the regulation and subsidies set by the government might affect the competition between religious organizations and, therefore, the type of religious services⁵. When state religions are imposed and there are high entry barriers present it will be seen that the quality and variety of the religious goods and services will diminish and ultimately, the population will move away from organized religion. Uniquely, this reduction in attendance does not necessarily indicate lack of faith; as pointed out by Davie, contemporary societies could be characterized by low formal religious participation, but the societies have robust beliefs; believing can trump belonging.⁶

Especially noteworthy is the idea that it is the religious ethic that is held which is determinative of economic factors, not simple membership in an organized religion or prayer⁷. As in personal devotions, religious services and teachings are practically beneficial only in as much as they produce increased belief-strength or a shift of focus toward those beliefs which presage profitable economic action. Therefore, increased investment in religious activities would reduce on economic productivity and in this case GDP. New empirical works performed by Barro and McCleary, such as Economic Growth, State Religion and Political Economy, analyze the effect resulting from religious practice and beliefs on growth⁸.

According to their research, economic development is positively related to selected religious beliefs, including anthropogenic death, the heaven and hell concepts. On the other hand, the study shows that, while belief in the supernatural increases with economic development, people who attended formal religious organizations negatively affect the later through increased participation in these services⁹. Altogether, the

¹ Peifer, J.L., 2010. The economics and sociology of religious giving: instrumental rationality or communal bonding?. *Social Forces*, 88(4), pp.1569-1594.

² Robinson, Z., 2011. Rationalizing Religious Exemptions: A Legislative Process Theory of Statutory Exemptions for Religion. *Wm. & Mary Bill Rts. J.*, 20, p.133.

³ Ekelund, Jr, R.B., Hébert, R.F. and Tollison, R.D., 2002. An economic analysis of the protestant reformation. *Journal of Political Economy*, 110(3), pp.646-671.

⁴ Iyer, S., 2016. The new economics of religion. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 54(2), pp.395-441.

⁵ Stern, Charlotta. "Shopping for a Church and 'We'Instantiation." (2003).

⁶ McCleary, R.M. ed., 2011. *The Oxford handbook of the economics of religion*. Oxford University Press.

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ McCleary, R.M., 2008. Religion and economic development. *Policy Review*, (148), p.45.

⁹ *ibid*

research evidence lends credence to the prior hypothesis that more than mere participation in religious practices; belief is positively associated with the level of economic development.

Most importantly, these observations provide overall support to the role of religious beliefs beyond social capital resources of religious institutions. Contrary to the views of Cohen and Willis (1985), Putnam Sacerdote and Glaeser, and Skocpol¹⁰, which classify religious organizations as one of many social institution types, the argument here is that while joining a religious group for benefits may promote the development of the beliefs that fosters traits that contribute to productivity, religious organization membership does not by itself foster such belief. This goes against the social capital hypothesis arguing that while carrying out its economic role religion educates people with religious ethical objectives.

I distinguish between moral duties and moral option or quasi-moral option: sincerely supererogatory acts. Morality points out what is right and how to achieve a given end or goal. Prescribed actions are must, and they should be accomplished within a concern of Ethics. When a person omits a prescribed action, he is held guilty and a demerit occurs which can be translated as bad karma or sin. On the other hand the practice of super-erogatory acts is considered acceptable with the believer earning salvific merit while failing to practice the super-erogatory acts does not incur a demerit¹¹.

Promising to do something is another example of the rather ill-defined class of acts that lie between obligatory and supererogatory. ‘Whoever saves a life gains a life; whoever destroys a life creates a demerit.’ Fulfilling a promise is commensurate with salvific merit; failing to do so entails its opposite¹². The economic consequences reflect the perspectives of every day work activities distinguished into productive ones that permanently bring the salvific merit – hard work and saving – and the others not directly related to productivity and occurring through donations to the Sangha or participation in prayers such as al-Jumu’a¹³. In some other circumstances they may also be classified as directly productive forms of philanthropy. Thus, charity can be considered as a kind of offloading of risks by communities; all the more, it is lucrative in societies exposed to higher uncertainty levels. Such connection between the salvific merit and charitable activities is particularly beneficial in situations where the lack of well-ordered, legal insurance and state welfare security system covers vulnerabilities¹⁴. On the other hand, when a market structure and a governmental welfare systems are already in place, it is more in the religions interests for the religion to assign ‘saving’ value to the productive activities such those required in the marketplace: hard work and parsimony as opposed to making charitable contributions¹⁵.

¹⁰ McCleary, R.M., 2007. Salvation, damnation, and economic incentives. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 22(1), pp.49-74.

¹¹ Lambek, M., 2012. Religion and morality. *A companion to moral anthropology*, pp.339-358.

¹² ibid

¹³ Wainwright, W.J., 2017. *Religion and morality*. Routledge.

¹⁴ Scheve, K. and Stasavage, D., 2006. Religion and preferences for social insurance. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 1(3), pp.255-286.

¹⁵ ibid

Table 1: Salvific Merit, Hell and Charity across Religions

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Salvific Merit</i>	<i>Charity</i>
<i>Hinduism</i>	Medium	Supererogatory(Charity to strangers), Obligatory
<i>Buddhism</i>	High	Quasi-supererogatory
<i>Roman Catholic church</i>	Medium	Super-erogatory
<i>Charismatic</i>	High	
<i>Protestant:</i>		
Lutherans	None	Obligatory
Methodist	None	Obligatory
Calvinism	None	Obligatory
Pentecostal	High	Super-erogatory
<i>Islam</i>		
Sunni	Medium	Obligatory
Shiite	Predestination	Super-erogatory
Sufi	high	

Source: Author

2.0 The concept of salvation

Thus, I pay most attention to such major global faiths as Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. Relating to each of these faiths, I provide their doctrinal interpretations of the concept of salvation. I select major religions to convey as broad a range of the religious point of view as possible within each religious system. Religious teaching describes the concept of salvation and how it is obtained. Canonical writings are the scriptures of various religions, including the Vedas, the Qur'an and the Old and New Testaments, bishops, gurus, priests, ministers, and monks; church councils; creeds and confessions; rituals; and traditional exegesis. In addition, Buddhism dissimilar to other key religions of the world does not have a unique essential scripture of which is looked at as divinely inspired word¹⁶.

2.1 Hinduism

In scholarly analysis, the Hindu ideas of mokṣa, samsara, and karma are notably amplified. ¹⁷In Hinduism, salvation is referred to as the liberation of an individual, which involves getting to be with the supreme Brahman, referred to as the unchanging reality living in an enlightened state (mokṣa), in which the individual ceases to exist. Of the six major orthodox Indian philosophies, there exist quite different understanding of the ontological status of the self (atman) in mokṣa. For example, according to Samkhya, there are many selves and there is the Supreme Self (Pluralism), whereas, according to the Vedanta there is one Self and that is God¹⁸.

¹⁶ Solt, F., Habel, P. and Grant, J.T., 2011. Economic inequality, relative power, and religiosity. *Social Science Quarterly*, 92(2), pp.447-465.

¹⁷ Singleton, M. and Byrne, J. eds., 2008. *Yoga in the modern world*. London: Routledge.

¹⁸ Feld, A.N., 2018. Hinduism. *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*, pp.579-595.

In the two systems of Samkhya and Vedanta, acquisition of salvation requires the knowledge of metaphysical principles or divine reality. The conflict between these two kinds of knowledge is produced by the introduction of the Yoga doctrine, referring to the ideas about gaining contemplative knowledge by means of meditation, control of the mind, and ecstasy¹⁹. However, Yoga which originated as a part of the Practical Yoga, has come to describe the path to salvation in terms of asceticism through contemplation and denial of the self²⁰. There are the four paths of Mokṣa- Brahmacharya, wherein one just renounces desires and weans himself off sensual pleasures; Garhasthya, Vanaprastha, and samnyasin paths of life where one becomes a detached householder, an ascetic, and a world-renouncing hermit respectively²¹. Consequently, Hindu salvation, as said before, refers to liberation, release or deliverance (Mukti) from the states of the world²².

Sanskara or enlightenment is a slow process of decision making and rebirth through various forms of life samsara. In the process of reincarnations the soul gets repeated experiences of the perfection in different physical bodies and the mind gains progression towards the mukti. Perfection is considered as mokṣa²³. The law of karma holds that even if an individual is at least partly or not at all responsible for his present condition, the causes of that condition lie within his previous lives; the only one to blame is the individual himself. Therefore, based on the Hindu view of karma, which can only be viewed as retrospective, present actions are aversive responses to past conduct²⁴. According to Keyes, free choice is limited by the karma because people have to punish those who wronged them in the past²⁵, this belief requires that actions incurred consequences that will be faced in future lives. Since, people cannot know of their past incarnations, it is “Ignorance, not sin therefore, which lies finally between man and his soul”²⁶. People actively look for sin explanations to redeem them ethically in this world. Finally, moral conduct (dharma) decides the fate of the soul, whether it would go to heaven or hell- its sink or swim on its own.

In such a system, help from others, beyond the completion of one’s caste and stage-of-life related obligations, are deemed theologically unwarranted. The only way in which one can help another to transmute negative karma is by sharing good karma, which is created an act of supererogation. Nevertheless, this kind of help is normally considered as secondary within Hinduism, which is discussed by O’Flaherty. Sin or bad karma is possible where one does not perform thirty obligatory duties or dharma in accordance with one’s station or stage of life, commits five forbidden acts, or pursues pleasure. The notion of the Christian God or the forgiveness of sins, or even the interference with the mechanisms of Karma that occurs in Hinduism is an inconceivable idea. While there is no such conception as a unique and saving savior in Hinduism, the exchange of

¹⁹ ibid

²⁰ Bordaş, L., 2011. MIRCEA ELIADE AS SCHOLAR OF YOGA. A historical study of his reception (1936-1954). *New Europe College Stefan Odobleja Program Yearbook*, (2010+ 11), pp.21-73.

²¹ Crawford, J., 2016. *Colorectal Cancer Screening Behaviours of South Asian Immigrants in Canada: An Exploratory Mixed Methods Study*. University of Toronto (Canada).

²² ibid

²³ Dwivedi, A.V., 2022. Solipsism (Hinduism). In *Hinduism and Tribal Religions* (pp. 1503-1504). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ Keyes, C.W., 1935. The Greek letter of introduction. *The American Journal of Philology*, 56(1), pp.28-44.

²⁶ ibid

karma between the living creatures is considered, as it was mentioned in the later books Purāṇas²⁷

Therefore karma relates personal moral actions; one's actions in each life determines one's rebirth in the next. The Vedic-Dharmasastras tradition together with the post-Vedic texts such as Bhagavad Gita identifies the Hindu morality (dharma) with the progressive sequence of liberation from worldly bonds. Completing the vocations makes one transcend to other heavenly realms while defaulting on the roles leads to rebirth in other temporary, middle hellish realms. Voluntary acts of merit are said to provide the doer with karmic (salvific) merit that allows him to move up to a higher level of heaven. On the other hand, forgetting dharma leads to demerit and sends the believer down to a stage of a hell. Hell reincarnation is the process through which people can offload their negative karma and make progress towards mokṣa²⁸.

2.2. Christianity

Contemporary Christianity is often examined through the lens of three main doctrinal traditions: We have Roman Catholic Christianity, Protestant Christianity and Pentecostal Christianity. In this context, Pentecostal together with Charismatics and neo Pentecostalism are sub categories though the two later can be in either independent or denominational churches. Pentecostalism concerns certain denominations and churches that originated from a particular epoch of the American religious experience and then went international²⁹. It is necessary to note doctrinal discrepancies between Christianity and two non-Christian religions – Buddhism and Hinduism before providing an analysis of each of the Christian traditions. In Christianity, as the scholars of comparative religion indicate, the merit that warrants positive consequences originates causally from Christ's crucifixion, between which "he died for our sins" (Smart). This is quite the opposite of Buddhism and Hinduism where a person gains merit based on one's own actions³⁰.

In Christianity, salvation is brought by Jesus Christ who is considered to be an independent person, a person's God. Perishable is the sin— a monotheistic theme –upon which believers are redeemed through apologizing to God and asking for forgiveness. In the process of salvation repentance of the sinner is the decisive factor, and the ones who repented obtain salvation. To what degree will man's actions determine his or her salvation will be discussed further³¹. Whereas Hinduism and Buddhism program life and rebirth as cyclic concepts, the afterlife enjoined by Christianity is seen as reward or punishment in paradise or hell that is everlasting. There is an exception within the Roman Catholic Church where it teaches of an idea of purgatory – a purging state before one gets to heaven. There are various interpretations of these concepts

²⁷ Dwivedi, A.V., 2022. Henotheism (Hinduism). In *Hinduism and Tribal Religions* (pp. 588-590). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

²⁸ Agrawal, M.M., 2002. *Freedom of the soul: a post-modern understanding of Hinduism*. Concept Publishing Company.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Agrawal, M.M., 2002. *Freedom of the soul: a post-modern understanding of Hinduism*. Concept Publishing Company.

³¹ O'Collins, G., 2007. *Jesus our redeemer: A Christian approach to salvation*. OUP Oxford.

when it comes to the different movement of Christianity, they about form the kind of salvational and eschatological worldview from within Christianity³².

2.3 Roman Catholicism

Thus, the Roman Catholic believes in the literal forgiveness of sins with salvation entailing faith in Christ, crucified to die for the sins of mankind in order to bring about God's love of people. Modern Catholic understanding of salvation also stems from the Second Vatican council of 1962-1965 which opened up catholic theologians to different stand on soteriology³³. Before Vatican II, the doctrine upheld the simple equation of the Church of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church and the following vision: 'The Church of Christ is the Roman Catholic Church'³⁴. Yet Vatican II admitted that the Church of Christ can also be—'but imperfectly'—present in other Christian Churches, according to the Decree on Ecumenism (1964, 3). This change was to turn the key to unlock the idea of non-Catholics being saved, which again was a shift away from an "either or" mentality. Starting with the recognition of believers' baptisms, and the organic connection with the Church of Christ, the *New People of God: The Church Today*, submitted with the revised doctrine, holds all Catholics are Christians first; all Christians baptized within own churches and ecclesial communities are integrated with the Church of Christ³⁵.

Catholic tradition lays stress on human cooperationist in the act of justification, as illustrated by this sacrament of Baptism where symbolizes participation in the Church of Christ and consequently in the possibility to receive salvation. As the institution ordained by God to dispense sacraments people can be in state of grace, according to Catholic Church. This means only Catholics can be sure that their sins will be washed away through the Sacraments. Priesthood is itself a sacrament, priesthood has the sacramental power through Apostolic Succession, and sins are forgiven by the ministerial office while penance is received through sacrament of Holy Eucharist. Max Weber had criticized the Catholic Church for being the only intermediary for sin absolution and Vatican II reformers resolved this issue by altering Catholic theology for the many by providing an account of salvation for non-Christians. The Council spoke saying those who really prayed and whose hearts were touched by the grace working will be saved; God's grace will be offered to both believers and non-believers³⁶. This grace brought through Jesus Christ death is not earned through human work, but it is earned through faith.

Like other religions of the Indian origin such as the Hinduism and Buddhism, Catholics have an intermediate state of existence or warehouse called purgatory where the souls that die with sins of omission or at least mortal sins but without actual mortal sins, goes through a final purification process so that they can get to heaven. The living can offer aid to those in purgatory by saying masses and prayers to apply the merits for their purification which help save their souls.

³² ibid

³³ Boettner, L., 1962. *Roman Catholicism* (p. 466). Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

³⁴ Jelly, F.M., 1986. The Theological Context of and Introduction to Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*. *Marian Studies*, 37(1), p.10.

³⁵ ibid

³⁶ ibid

2.4 Protestantism

Protestantism is a movement started by the Reformation and is in agreement with RC in respect to the basic tenet that begs understanding: the belief of the sacrificial death of Christ for humanity's sins. Some of the main governing theologies of the Reformation are: justification by faith where, the role of free will in salvation, the shining light of Luther's doctrine which is justification through faith alone. Although there are constant discussions between Lutherans and the Roman Catholic church, there are essential conflicts: the conflict for view on the use of good deeds in the process of salvation³⁷. Faith in Lutheranism is an inner state, formed in the soul of the individual who patiently awaits the actions of God's-designate, rather than through the institutional Church that is obvious in Catholicism. This faith generates commitment and trust in God the Father and a commitment to Jesus Christ, which replace the reasoned choice³⁸.

Methodism's founder John Wesley refined Luther's division of justification and sanctification describing it as two different steps in the process of becoming saved. For Wesley sanctification qualified as a notable step in the Christian's development and was sentimental or sensational in nature, giving the believer a subjective assurance of salvation. However, Luther did not endorse this sort of assurance; faith can only come and is 'borrowed' from God in a continuous manner³⁹. Luther saw the relationship of the believer with Christ as one of trust (fiducia) where the Christ is believed to stand for each the believer before God. He said that people are sinful even if baptized and therefore, God's gracious gift – faith – only hides this sin and the Christians have to try to live a saintly life and be sanctified constantly asking for forgiveness and divine grace⁴⁰.

There is no unified doctrine within Calvinist churches; various denominations have formed their confessions, whereas Lutherans are united in their Confession. Calvinism breaks away from Lutheranism because it holds that nothing human affects divine grace or the salvation of any person, and God's will is not knowable emotionally or rationally by humans. For Calvinists, justification cannot be conceived without sanctification, while they deny everything that may be called grace or righteousness given due to good works. The confusion of these two concepts has its origin in Calvin's doctrine of election where it is asserted that there are those who were predestined to save. With the advancement of years, this doctrine was no longer tenably held by Reformed theologians but continued to have resonance in modern-day usage where some theologians expanded on it and others discarded it entirely⁴¹.

In Lutheran theology, sanctification consists of accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit that inspires good works. Contrarily, Calvinism considers good works to be valueless in themselves because no act is inherently righteous. Calvin believed that morality - based on God's statutes - was a rational undertaking

³⁷ Murphy, K., 2018. *Pentecostals and Roman Catholics on becoming a Christian: Spirit-baptism, faith, conversion, experience, and discipleship in ecumenical perspective* (Vol. 28). Brill.

³⁸ Malley, B., Bialecki, J., Muse, E., Del Pinal, E.H., Pulis, J., Murphy, L., Coleman, S., Harding, S., Rodman, R., Samson, C. and Baron, A., 2009. *The social life of scriptures: cross-cultural perspectives on biblicalism*. Rutgers University Press.

³⁹ Burgess, J.A. and Gros, J. eds., 1989. *Building unity: ecumenical dialogues with Roman Catholic participation in the United States* (Vol. 4). Paulist Press.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Brinkman, M.E., 1997. JUSTIFICATION IN ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE: an assessment of the results. *Exchange*, 26(1), pp.40-60.

independent from religious authority. Daily labor, as such, becomes God's work; productivity and proper Christian conduct are considered witness to grace, while worldly success is understood to be an evidence of election to heaven⁴². Reformed Protestant creeds usually do not necessitate the Calvinist predestination aspect. This has caused Protestant denominations to differ in beliefs across the board, or even within the denomination, such as baptismal beliefs. For example, Mennonites have scrapped the Predestination doctrine of Calvin and taken the side of Jacob Hermann Arminius, where they consider the salvation to be universal. The Evangelical category cuts across many denominations, and their concept of salvation could be either elitist or inclusivity depending on one's personal point of view⁴³.

3.0 Economic Activity and Charity

Beliefs about salvation across major world religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam create economic incentives in their own way. In each of these religions, hard work and frugality are displayed to be means for accumulating personal wealth, while debt is condemned. All of them estimate economic prosperity inasmuch as this is achieved by honest labor. The principal purpose of individual wealth is to serve one's family, and Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, and Islam have clear economic responsibilities for husbands or fathers towards family sustenance. Hinduism and Buddhism, in fact, value material wealth, and maintaining a comfortable life is a highly desirable endeavor⁴⁴. The religions that emphasize salvific merit dampen the economic prosperity since they emphasize distribution of wealth within the community as a manner of achieving merits. In Buddhism, the incentives to accumulate wealth are also modulated by precepts which encourage sharing of wealth towards the Sangha or the Buddhist monastic community and family members. Similarly, Islam emphasizes obligatory redistribution of wealth through charitable giving - zakāt, and within the family structure.⁴⁵

One advantage of making obligations to family, caste, and community paramount is that such a system reduces transaction costs. A religious group's strictness in membership can increase benefits for members, such as interest-free credit, volunteer labor, and bankruptcy insurance⁴⁶. More strict religious groups commonly demand participation in non-productive activities such as prayer and sacred text study. Religions with high salvific merit, as with strict religions generally, tend to develop non-productive activities and distributive networks in order to compensate for their lack of productive activity. In doing so, religiously rewarding networks of mutual aid and charitable acts that help buffer day-to-day uncertainties. If believers can achieve salvation through practices such as giving money for support to the religious class, attending group worship services,

⁴² Wright, F., 1973. Protestant ideology and politics in Ulster. *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 14(2), pp.212-280.

⁴³ Linfield, H.S., 1925. A survey of the year 5685. *The American Jewish Year Book*, pp.21-153.

⁴⁴ Adloff, F., 2006. Religion and social-political action: The Catholic Church, Catholic charities, and the American welfare state. *International Review of Sociology—Revue Internationale de Sociologie*, 16(1), pp.1-30.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Piano, C. and Flowers, A.C., 2022. Three to Get Married? The Role of Religious Authorities in Marriage. *Forthcoming in reference series Economics, Religion, and Public Policy*.

or building religious structures, they are more likely to do so. This practice further ensures that religion can survive from one generation to another and perpetuates its economic and social institutions accordingly⁴⁷.

3.1 Christianity

3.1.1 The Roman Catholic Church

Roman Catholicism considers work a dignified activity, as it reflects Christ's own labors as a carpenter. The Vatican II documents confirm in a positive note that the daily labor, if done with the right intention, can add to one's holiness. Catholics are to live in their "own proper state," yet should not allow attachment to worldly goods to interfere with the pursuit of perfect charity⁴⁸.

The family is seen as the basic unit of Catholic life both in the pre- and post-Vatican II documents. There is little in the documents to provide guidance on economic responsibilities to members of one's family. Here, the role of gender is clearly segregated; the father has to fend for the economic needs of the family while the mother plays the domestic role in the family⁴⁹. Thomas Aquinas also stated this as a moral judgment that a person's first responsibility is towards his/her family before the needy outside of his or her family. As he he said: "For a man's first duty is to provide for himself and those under his care, and only when that is done, to use what is left to relieve the needs of others" Summa theologiae II-II.32.5c). And in his 1963 Encyclical on Establishing Universal Peace - *Pacem in Terris* art. 11, 20, 29, Pope John XXIII reaffirmed this position. The first commitment therefore, is to family needs, after which one can see how to assist others⁵⁰.

Aquinas also distinguishes between what is needful to hold a family and the needs which are enacted by the status of an individual in society. He declares that it is meritorious to forego considerations of status if people are in dire need of assistance or if the state has a dire need; however, this is not obligatory. Because, therefore, the believer can only merit their salvation partially, Roman Catholicism is considered a medium salvific merit religion⁵¹. This meritorious work view from Catholicism contrasts with that of Protestantism. In the words of Martin Luther, "there are no good works except those which God has commanded⁵². This critique roots from opposition against the denial of social obligations at the heart of Roman Catholic asceticism because he judged it immoral. For Luther, works are a manifestation or "fruit" of what God is

⁴⁷ Tokmantcev, A., 2023. *Jehovah's Witnesses in Post-Soviet Armenia*. University of California, Los Angeles.

⁴⁸ holiness, h. and vi, p.p., 1965. pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world *gaudium et spes*.

⁴⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁰ Grzenkowitz, M., 2021. The Relationship between Theology and Law on the Basis of the Encyclical *Pacem in terris* of John XXIII. *Roczniki Teologiczne*, 68(2), pp.83-99.

⁵¹ Beyer, G.J., 2013. John XXIII and John Paul II: "The Human Rights Popes." *Thought*, 10(1), p.8.

⁵² Allen, R.O., 1965. *Religion and prejudice: An attempt to clarify the patterns of relationship*. University of Denver.

doing in the life of believers. He then said, "If works do not follow, it is certain that this faith of Christ does not reside in our heart but is dead. Works are necessary to salvation, yet do not cause salvation, for only faith gives life. Works are a necessary effect in the Christian, who is already saved in faith and hope"⁵³. Works here, in this context, do not ensure salvation but are a mirror of God's existence in a believer. To this respect, Luther's teaching justification by faith alone, as opposed to works, creates the belief that there are no supererogatory acts beyond God's commandments and thus situates the Lutheran and Calvinist branches of Protestantism at zero salvific merit⁵⁴.

The understanding of good works does vary significantly among Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Pentecostalism. In Catholicism, it is viewed that charity is primarily a supererogatory act. According to the doctrine of justification, the justified are able to merit an "increase in grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life, and increase in glory" ⁵⁵. Here, merit is understood as the reward attached to cooperating with God, and works of charity produce more grace for the giver, regardless of the state of the receiver⁵⁶. Still, Post-Vatican II documents say that the charity, love of neighbor as self, ought to be modeled after Christ's example, to the extent of taking on even a state of poverty or submitting one's will to another-as in various forms of servitude-which constitute meritorious supererogatory acts. Nevertheless, charity and almsgiving are left to a more or less free discretion of the individual believer, framed as a matter of counsel⁵⁷.

Protestantism

These efforts exclude particular forms of Catholic legalism (which Protestant theology claims make human cooperation necessary in order for salvation to occur with beneficent merit); OR exaggerates cases when duty is putatively universal. Protestant factions came together where they agreed on good works being required; they are commanded by God (Form Concord 1577) ⁵⁸the moral duties to non-family members stand on an equal par with someone whom you regard as family. This view so construed reveals that family members have no unique entitlement to resources, thereby levelling down moral distinctions between charitable duties⁵⁹.

⁵³ Kohli, C.L., 2018. The Gift of the Indwelling Spirit. *Lutheran Theology and the shaping of society: The Danish Monarchy as Example: The Danish Monarchy as Example*, 33, p.129.

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ Chevalier, J.M., 2023. Reason, Faith, and Charity. In *The Ethics of Courage: Volume 1: From Greek Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (pp. 291-310). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

⁵⁷ Renard, J., 1986. Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Review of Six Post-Vatican II, Church Related Documents. *Journal of ecumenical studies*, 23(1), pp.69-89.

⁵⁸ Balge, R.D., 1977. The Continuing Relevance Of The Formula Of Concord.

⁵⁹ Troeltsch, E., 2017. *Protestantism and progress: a historical study of the relation of Protestantism to the modern world*. Routledge.

In a voice sympathetic to ideas of almost universal charity, then it seems like religion may be able to open up wider forms interdependence with strangers and the following redistribution by-and-large are used when bias against them. This idea of a universal charity tends to suggest that those who receive assistance are in the same straits with the giver, which flies against centuries-old Christian hierarchies. As Protestantism teaches that grace gets a person into heaven, rather than works meriting heaven, Christians should treat strangers as family because doing this is doing what God wants.⁶⁰

Role obligations, however, are not viewed by the Protestant ethic as a part of primary life order crowding out how much resource can be siphoned off family and community. Christianity has a somewhat similar view, but different from certain other religions (e.g. Hinduism) in that it plays into this by developing a hierarchy of charitable acts as recommended recipients for charitable donations⁶¹ – indeed probably only conceptualizing one or two forms of Charity down to earth socially and trying therefore to avoid drawing more power away from what our Gospel etceteras say are the "impoverised" part's.. on & simply out giving them. High or middle salvific merit sects such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Roman Catholicism and Islam hold that familial obligations are primary (non-contractual; tropes: blood relation, community) Therefore, almsgiving to strangers can be considered superfluous. Francis' words seem to come from the traditional Christian belief in humility and modesty, which modern capitalism has certainly moved away from (since greed automatically receives donations because of it)⁶², while Protestantism does not have this tradition of selective charity and tends to see labour as a gift of God's grace other than seeing charitable acts or praising them when they easily induce backwardness⁶³

In the eyes of Protestants, charity and justice are fundamentally separate issues with duties to love conferred by a commandment from God that makes them just⁶⁴. Protestants claim that good works "follow" as a result of God's righteousness working in us, emphasizing the fact that there are no meritorious acts apart from his grace and commandments. Hence, for all the stress on works that may be found in Luther and Calvin (good works as a collateral effect of faith; love necessary but not sufficient to obtain grace), both Protestantism have considered charity charitable giving - charismatic gift received by some believers according to 1 Corinthians 12:8-9 among others forms Theopedia.com or expressions like Mercy ministrations-- while teaching with Saint Augustine

⁶⁰ Marshall, P. and Ryrie, A. eds., 2002. *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*. Cambridge University Press.

⁶¹ Hudson, K. and Coukos, A., 2005. The dark side of the Protestant ethic: A comparative analysis of welfare reform. *Sociological Theory*, 23(1), pp.1-24.

⁶² Savage, T., 2021. *Christian Humility Conceived in Terms of Lifelong Learning: Francis of Assisi & Modern Church Leadership* (Doctoral dissertation, King's College London).

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ Ponder, J., 2013. "O Great God!" Humility and Camera Movement in Roberto Rossellini's *The Flowers of St. Francis*. *Journal of Religion & Film*, 17(1), p.36.

"faith without works... To fail in these good works could only result on vice or vanity (Taylor Ch. IV, section 8)⁶⁵.

One of the major theological divergences between Protestants and Catholics is how this works out with charity. Rank-and-file Protestants emphasize the extent of sacrifice that charitable acts require; Catholics focus on whether recipients are truly in need. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II q32 a7)⁶⁶ In cases of extreme poverty, when the recipient's need is severe and lacks essential support, Catholic scholars may argue that charity becomes not merely optional but a moral imperative. According to Catholic teaching (see *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 77-87)⁶⁷, charity is essential whenever human need is present. Therefore, it may not only seem permissible but indeed obligatory for Catholics in so-called developed countries to recognize the sinlessness of charitable failure, even considering it their duty by nature (S.T. II-II, Q. 36, Art. 6, ad 1; Q. 185, Art. 7, ad 1).

Pentecostals emphasize evangelism over charity, seeing sharing the message of being born-again as more important to a true Christian than living in any particular way. They get social causality directly backward (social problems such as poverty result from sinful activity — repent vs., a structural level approach [perhaps also compatible with faith] to addressing the needs generated by genuine inequalities). Pentecostals see wealth as a measure of spirituality—just like Hinduism, Buddhism, and various Protestant denominations. They encourage them to abstain from alcohol and tobacco products, they discourage them leisure-spending. Pentecostals, meantime use morality to improve one's worship of God and direct ones relationship with others (unlike Roman Catholicism which has concentrated more on the familial⁶⁸).

4.1 Future Direction

The world's major religions, however, encourage economic behavior in many ways but all typically include the idea of promoting some form or combination of work ethic, thrift and honesty. These distinctions in motivational mechanisms however, blur the conception of one religion by nature encouraging greater economic productivity over another. That the world religions have survived as long as they have suggests that all of them together represent no fundamental conflict with economic success, which offers little theoretical resolution.

The difference between major organized religions lies in the nature of their charitable consequences. For example, Protestantism might never have gained traction if it had emphasized universal charity as the path to Heaven over hard work and the acquisition of wealth, given the

⁶⁵ Von Habsburg, M., 2016. *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425–1650: From Late Medieval Classic to Early Modern Bestseller*. Routledge.

⁶⁶ Hautala, V. and Roser0000, D., 2023. Utilitarianism and Christian Theology. *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*.

⁶⁷ Guyette, F., 2014. Thomas Aquinas and Caritas: Biblical Theology, Christian Virtue, Prophetic Discourse. *Arc: The Journal of the School of Religious Studies*, 42, pp.93-110.

⁶⁸ Freeman, D., 2012. The Pentecostal ethic and the spirit of development. In *Pentecostalism and development: Churches, NGOs and social change in Africa* (pp. 1-38). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

context of its inception. Tawney argues that the real question is not which religious movement introduced a new paradigm, but rather which elements within particular religious movements have interacted with traditional patterns and institutional structures to bring about change⁶⁹. For instance, when John Wesley transformed his parishioners into respectable bourgeois citizens by teaching, “Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can,” the first Methodists exemplified what Crichton described as material transformation⁷⁰. For Wesley, the economic dynamism these values might unleash and his movement's potential to serve as a foundation for political stability were developments that lay in the future.

What is empirically demonstrable, however, are the effects religious beliefs and doctrines have on communal behavior regarding work, productivity consumption and savings habits. But a methodological problem is that people probably do not deliberately associate their economic and social activities with their chances of going to heaven or hell. No more so that a cynic can charge with investigating the relative importance of variations in religious doctrines between actions and their intended soteriological outcomes.

Empirical tests of these speculative links are necessary to address this Issue. For this empirical investigation, theoretical research on beliefs and behavior (based in the Scholarly context of salvation/salvific merit and demerits-propositionally) are instructive. Religion operates on the basis of salvific currency with merit and demerit rewarded respectively by two key religious currencies — heaven or hell, thus researchers can explore to what extent soteriology translates into reward in worldly registers.

⁶⁹ Goldman, L., 2023. Public and private in the life, thought, and faith of RH Tawney: the Scott Holland Lecture 2022. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 23(2), pp.160-174.

⁷⁰ Wesley, J., 1964. *John Wesley*. Oxford University Press.