



INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND THEOLOGY (IJCET)

Homepage: <https://journalijcet.my.id/index.php/ijce/Index>

ISSN: 2961-9300 (Online)

Research Article



Volume 5, No 3, August (2026)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55927/ijcet.v5i3.31>

Page: 295-300

Salvation as a Moral Life: An Ethical Analysis of Confucianism and His Challenge to the Concept of Christian Soteriology

Khezia Laurent Fiorentina Sitompul^{1*}, Elsa Patricia Silalahi², Victor Deak³

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Kharisma Bandung

Corresponding Author: Khezia Laurent Fiorentina Sitompul kezasitompul27@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Salvation, Morality, Confucianism, Christian Soteriology, Ethics

Received : 16, April

Revised : 18, June

Accepted : 20, August

©2026 Sitompul, Silalahi, Deak: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Atribusi 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of salvation as a moral life from a Confucian ethical perspective and its relevance as a challenge to the concept of Christian soteriology. In Confucianism, salvation is not defined as human liberation from sin or the guarantee of eternal life, but rather as the achievement of a harmonious life through character formation, self-control, and the application of moral values such as ren (humanity), li (manners and order), and yi (righteousness and justice). In contrast, Christianity views salvation as a work of God's grace revealed through Jesus Christ to free humanity from sin and restore humanity's relationship with God. This study employed a qualitative method with a library research approach. Primary data sources were obtained from Confucius's Analects and the Bible, while secondary data sources were obtained from theological books, scientific journals, academic articles, and previous research related to Confucian ethics and Christian soteriology.

INTRODUCTION

One of the important concepts in various religious thought because it relates to the purpose of human life, the restoration of their existence, and the right way of life. In Christian teaching, salvation is understood as the result of God's grace through Jesus Christ, which frees people from sin and restores their relationship with God. Salvation is not obtained through human efforts through good deeds, but through faith in Christ (Rusmelia, 2025). However, in the development of interfaith studies and Eastern philosophical thought, there is a view that understands salvation not primarily as liberation from sin, but as a process of moral personal formation and living in harmony in society (Ricka Handayani, n.d.). This view can be found in Confucian ethics.

The main problem in this study lies in the fundamental difference regarding the source and meaning of salvation. Confucianism emphasizes moral change through self-discipline and ethical education, while Christianity emphasizes that salvation comes from God's grace (Bangun & Harefa, 2020). These differences raise several important questions, such as whether a moral life can be called salvation, how good deeds stand in the Christian faith, and the extent to which the concept of Christian salvation can dialogue with the Confucian ethical approach (Rusmelia, 2025).

Furthermore, these differences also open up a more in-depth study space for the relationship between faith and ethics in human life. Confucianism places morality at the center of the achievement of the ideal life, whereas Christianity needs to explain that faith in God is inseparable from ethical responsibility in the praxis of daily life (Natasaputra et al., n.d.). Thus, there is a theological need to affirm that the Christian faith is not only normative-doctrinal, but must also be concretely manifested in moral behavior. Therefore, the dialogue between these two perspectives is significant to enrich the understanding of the relationship between divine grace and human active participation in realizing a righteous and meaningful life (Daniel, 2022).

In addition, the dynamics of modern society that are increasingly plural and open to various religious views require the presence of contextual theological understanding and being able to answer moral issues in social life. In this context, Confucian ethics pays great attention to human values, harmony of life, and social responsibility, which in some respects have similarities with ethical principles in Christianity (Seriyantri Seriyanti, 2025).

Nevertheless, the two views still have fundamental differences regarding the source of salvation. While Confucianism emphasizes that salvation is obtained through the process of moral development and human self-development, Christianity says that salvation is obtained through God's grace through Jesus Christ. As a result, it is crucial for this study to critically study both perspectives and discuss them in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between safety, ethics, and the transformation of human life.

This study is particularly important in an era of pluralism and globalization when the interaction between the Christian faith and Eastern philosophical traditions is stronger. Many contemporary societies focus on practical spirituality that emphasizes social and moral principles rather than theological doctrines that are considered abstract. Therefore, the church and the academic world must provide a proper explanation of the concept of Christian salvation in order for a broad understanding of the Christian faith to be maintained. They must also show that the moral life also has an important place in the Christian faith.

In the midst of a modern society that is increasingly plural, open, and influenced by various religious thoughts and world philosophies, this research is increasingly important. The encounter between the traditions of Eastern thought and Christian theology flourishes in society, education, and the digital space. Thus, Confucian ethics, which emphasized character building, social harmony, and moral responsibility, were often considered relevant to answer the various problems facing human beings. On the other hand, a good and moral life causes people to be more likely to understand salvation.

This view can change the way people understand Christian soteriology, which states that salvation is a God-given gift through Jesus Christ. According to literature research, most research on Confucianism focuses on cultural values, moral philosophy, and character education. While research on Christian soteriology generally addresses salvation from the perspective of systematic, biblical, and historical theology, there is still little research that specifically studies the concept of salvation as a moral life in Confucian ethics and its relationship to confession.

Based on this situation, the gap of this study lies in the attempt to analyze comparatively the relationship between the concept of salvation in Confucian ethics and Christian soteriology. This study not only sheds light on the differences between the two, but also looks at how Confucian ethics challenges Christians' understanding of grace, faith, and good works. As a result, it is hoped that this research will help develop comparative theological studies and also expand our understanding of the relationship between salvation, morality, and the transformation of human life.

The novelty of this research lies in the attempt to place the concept of salvation in Confucianism not only as a teaching of social ethics, but also as an alternative soteriological paradigm that challenges Christian understanding. Previous research has generally examined Confucianism from the perspective of moral philosophy or culture, while this study specifically links Confucian ethics with Christian doctrine of salvation. Thus, this research is expected to provide a new perspective in the dialogue between Christian theology and Eastern philosophy, especially regarding the relationship between grace, morality, and the transformation of human life.

METHODS

This study applies a qualitative research method with a library research approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on the process of understanding, studying, and interpreting the concept of salvation in Confucian ethics and its relation to Christian soteriology. This method provides space for researchers to examine in depth various meanings, values, and ideas contained in literature sources without using statistical methods or numerical calculations. Thus, the research is focused on a conceptual and theological analysis of the relationship between morality and salvation in both traditions of thought.

The data collection process is carried out through literature studies by utilizing primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data are obtained from the main text of Confucian teachings, namely the *Analects of Confucius*, as well as the Bible which is the main basis for understanding the concept of Christian soteriology. These two sources are used as the main foundation in studying the understanding of morality, character formation, and salvation. In addition, this study also uses secondary data obtained from systematic theology books, scientific journals, academic articles, and various previous studies related to Confucian ethics, moral philosophy, and the doctrine of salvation in Christianity. The use of secondary data is intended to enrich the perspective of the study while strengthening the analysis conducted in this study.

Data analysis techniques are carried out through descriptive, comparative, and critical approaches. Descriptive analysis is used to present the main concepts contained in both views. Comparative analysis is used to identify similarities and differences between Confucian ethics and Christian soteriology, particularly with regard to the source of salvation, the purpose of human life, and the position of morality. Meanwhile, critical analysis is used to examine the challenges that Confucian ethics poses to the understanding of salvation in Christianity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Salvation in Christian Soteriology

In Christian theology, salvation is at the heart of God's redemptive work for man. The term soteriology comes from the Greek words *soteria* meaning "salvation" and *logos* meaning "knowledge" or "teaching." Therefore, soteriology can be understood as a branch of theology that discusses human salvation based on God's work in Jesus Christ (Situmorang, Jonar T.H, n.d.). Salvation in Christianity is understood as an act of God's grace that frees man from sin and restores man's relationship with God that has been damaged by sin.

The Christian understanding affirms that man cannot obtain salvation through personal effort or moral action alone. Salvation is seen as a gift of God received through faith in Jesus Christ (Angelica et al., 2025). In this perspective, man is understood to have limitations and is unable to save himself because sin has affected all aspects of human life (Nainggolan, n.d.). Therefore, Christ's redemptive work is the primary basis of salvation in the Christian faith.

Nevertheless, Christianity does not ignore the importance of morality in the lives of believers. A righteous and moral life is understood as the fruit of salvation that has been received (Rusmelia, 2025). In other words, good works are not a condition for salvation, but rather a tangible form of life change produced by faith in Christ. This shows that Christian salvation not only has a spiritual dimension, but also has an impact on human social and ethical life.

Ethical Concepts in Confucianism

Confucianism is a system of ethical thought and moral philosophy that developed from the teachings of Confucius. The main focus of this teaching lies in the formation of human character and the creation of harmony in social life (Seriyantri Seriyanti, 2025). In Confucianism, human beings are seen as having the ability to develop into good individuals through moral education, self-control, and correct habits. Therefore, the aspect of morality has a very important position in human life.

Some of the key values in Confucian ethics include *ren*, *li*, and *yi*. The concept of *ren* refers to human values, love, and concern for others. *Li* is related to manners, politeness, and social order, while *yi* refers to moral truth and justice (Seriyantri Seriyanti, 2025). These three values are the basis for forming an ideal human being called *junzi*, which is a person who has high moral qualities and is able to have a positive influence on society.

From the perspective of Confucianism, salvation is not understood in the context of absolution or eternal life after death as it is in Christianity. *Safety* is better understood as the achievement of a harmonious, orderly, and moral life in relationships with oneself and with society (Rusmelia, 2025). Therefore, the process of moral formation is the main center in achieving a life that is considered good and ideal. Thus, Confucian ethics emphasizes more on the practical and social dimensions of human life.

Comparative Analysis between Confucian Ethics and Christian Soteriology

The results of the study show that there are big differences in the way Confucianism and Christianity understand the concept of salvation. The formation of character and morality is considered the first step towards an ideal life according to Confucianism. Salvation is achieved through man's efforts to improve himself, expand virtues, and maintain social harmony. In contrast, Christian soteriology states that salvation is the result of faith and God's gifts received through faith (Bangun & Harefa, 2020).

This difference shows that Confucianism emphasizes more on the horizontal dimension of human life, namely social order and relationships between individuals. On the contrary, Christianity emphasizes the vertical dimension, namely the relationship between man and God as the main basis of salvation. However, both agree on the importance of the moral life. While Christianity sees morality as the result of salvation that has been given, Confucianism sees morality as the essence of salvation. (Natalia & Bani, 2025).

In this situation, Christian soteriology faces the challenge of Confucian ethics, especially in explaining the relationship between faith and good works. Confucianism emphasizes that human moral qualities are the basis for realizing a harmonious life, whereas Christianity must emphasize that true faith must also produce real moral action. Therefore, it is important to conduct a discussion between these two perspectives to show that Christian salvation includes not only the spiritual life but also the moral change and social responsibility of man.

Theological Implications and Contextual Relevance

The results of this study show that the relationship between morality and salvation is an important issue in the conversation between Christianity and Confucianism. As the basis for creating social harmony, Confucianism prioritized the formation of character and moral life. Rather, the Christian faith states that although salvation comes from God's grace, it must be achieved through a life that exemplifies the values of love, justice, and truth.

In the context of a plural and multicultural modern society, the dialogue between these two views has significant relevance. Many people today are more interested in the practice of moral and social life than in theoretical doctrinal discussions. Therefore, the church and the academic world need to present a balanced understanding between faith and moral action. Salvation is understood not only as a personal spiritual experience, but also as a real-life transformation in social relationships and daily life.

Thus, this study confirms that ethics and safety are two interrelated aspects in human life. The difference between Confucianism and Christianity is not only a form of theological contradiction, but can also be a space for dialogue that enriches understanding of the importance of morality, social responsibility, and the transformation of human life in the midst of the development of modern society.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis that has been carried out, this study shows that Confucianism views salvation as the achievement of a harmonious life through the process of moral formation and development of human character. From the perspective of Confucianism, salvation is not understood as liberation from sin or eschatological salvation, but rather as an ideal condition achieved through self-discipline, ethical education, and the application of moral values such as ren (humanity), li (manners and order), and yi (truth and justice) in daily life. Therefore, salvation in Confucianism is oriented towards the creation of social order, harmony of coexistence, and the moral perfection of man as an ideal person (junzi).

On the other hand, Christianity understands salvation as the work of God's grace expressed through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Salvation is seen as an act of God that frees man from the power of sin and restores man's relationship with God that has been damaged by sin. In Christian soteriology, salvation is not obtained through human effort, moral achievement, or ethical ability, but through faith in Christ as the true source of salvation. Thus, the concept of salvation in Christianity emphasizes the relational and spiritual dimensions between man and God, which in turn results in moral and ethical changes in life.

The fundamental difference between the two views lies in the source and basis of salvation. Confucianism places human effort, character building, and self-control as the primary path to an ideal life, while Christianity affirms that salvation comes entirely from God's grace. Nevertheless, both views have a common point in placing moral life as an important part of human life. Confucianism makes morality the primary means of achieving harmony in life, while Christianity views morality as the fruit or result of salvation received through faith in Christ. In other words, both perspectives both emphasize the importance of transforming human behavior in social life.

REFERENCES

- Angelica, W. S., Pebrianti, U., & Yurisgio, R. (2025). Kajian Literatur Tentang Doktrin Keselamatan (Soteriologi). *Jurnal Ilmiah Literasi Indonesia*, 1(2), 505–513.
- Bangun, J., & Harefa, J. (2020). Sola Gratia Melihat Dari Status Manusia Di Hadapan Allah, Karya Penebusan Kristus, Dan Anugerah Yang Mendahului Keselamatan. *SUNDERMANN: Jurnal Ilmiah Teologi, Pendidikan, Sains, Humaniora Dan Kebudayaan*, 13(2), 115–126. <https://doi.org/10.36588/Sundermann.V13i2.45>.
- Daniel, K. (2022). MANUSIA DI TENGAH DINAMIKA ZAMAN 1 (Sebuah Perspektif Teologi Kontekstual Kristen). 02(02), 82–91.
- Nainggolan, A. M. (N.D.). Refleksi Teologis Kepastian Keselamatan. Pengarah: *Jurnal Teologi Kristen*.
- Natalia, & Bani, E. P. (2025). Merefleksikan Kembali Konsep Keselamatan Dalam Perspektif Teologi Kontemporer Dan Kaitannya Dengan Praksis Pastoral. *Jurnal Luxnos*, 11(2), 518–530. <https://doi.org/10.47304/Gpscen28>.
- Natasaputra, E., R, M. E., & Indaldo, U. (N.D.). Titik Temu Moralitas Dan Pluralisme: Reflektif Etis Teologis Dalam Lanskap Teologia Yang Beragam. *Manna Rafflesia*.
- Ricka Handayani, M. M. (N.D.). Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama Harmoni Sosial, Budaya, Dan Agama. *Bypass*.
- Rusmelia. (2025). Soteriologi Dalam Iman Kristen: Anugerah Keselamatan Melalui Karya Kristus. *Indojurnal*, Vol. 1, No(1), 61–71.
- Seriyanti Seriyanti. (2025). Membumikan Nilai-Nilai Kebangsaan: Integrasi Pancasila, Kewarganegaraan, Bahasa, Dan Agama Dalam Pendidikan Tinggi.
- Situmorang, Jonar T.H, M. (N.D.). Soteriologi: Doktrin Keselamatan, Pengajaran Mengenai Karya Allah Dalam Keselamatan.