ENCYCLOPEDIA

Eschatology

Doctrine of things concerning which deals with the doctrines of the last things

Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 5
Published: 1909. Nihil Obstat. December 1, 1909. Remy Lafort, D.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John M. Farley, Archbishop of New York

Contents

1. ETHNIC ESCHATOLOGY.
2. ESCHATOLOGY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.
3. ESCHATOLOGY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Eschatology, that branch of systematic theology which deals with the doctrines of the last things (Greek: ἔσχατα, "the last things"; λόγος, "discourse"). Eschatology is a large category, supposedly a Latin equivalent for Reimarus, for the numerous doctrinal subjects belonging to the section of theology will be treated in profuse under the general heading of the last things. Eschatology is a comparatively new term, which has yet come to indicate the place of eschatology in the general theme of religion, explain its subject-matter and the outlines of its content in the various religions of the world. Eschatology is the counterpart to the supremacy of Christian eschatology teaching.

As a preliminary indication of the subject-matter, a distinction may be made between the eschatology of the individual and that of the race and the universe as a whole. The former, taking out from the doctrine of personal immortality, or at least of survival in some form or other, the question of the destiny of the individual, the fate of the soul after death, and how far the issues of the future depend on the present life. The latter deals with events like the resurrection and the general judgment, in which, according to Christian eschatology, the destiny of the individual will be determined, and with events of a physical order that are to precede and accompany these events, such as the end of the individual and the universe; relating to the adequate consummation of eschatology, but it is only in the Christian system that the two are brought into relation. Ethnic eschatology, very dependent on conjecture in the reaching of truth and the Apocrypha, while in ethnic religions eschatology seldom rises above the individual view, and even then not always, and, when it does, it is not in the form of a doctrine, but in the form of a mass of moral retributions, that it barely deserves to be called an religious teaching.

1. ETHNIC ESCHATOLOGIES.

—(1) Even among the lower—savage and barbarous—races the universality of religious beliefs, including belief in some kind of future state, is very generally admitted by modern anthropologists. Some exceptions, it is true, have been claimed to exist, but on further inquiry these have been found to be not well-established, and have been justified in premature generalizing was mistaken. Among these races the belief in the truth and reality of eschatological beliefs vary, as a rule, with the purity of the idea of God and of the moral nature of man, and with the degree of intellectual culture. The Australians, the Tasmanians, the Fuegians, the Bushmen, the Hottentots, the Negroes, the Kafirs, the Hottentots, the Greenlanders, New Guinea negroes, and others seem to hold the possibility of a second life, but it is not clear how far this belief is a result of the contemplation of the future life, or of the idea, or of a future—that, most commonly, the spirit, which, while the old there is concealed after as a dull and shadowy and more or less impotent existence, and that, in the case of the Australians, the Tasmanians, and the Fuegians, possesses of a earthly life, in most savage religions there is very high and elevated of moral retribution after death, but it is only in the case of a few of the more degraded tribes that the idea of a future state of retribution is entirely wanting. Some moral retribution is connected to be altogether wanting. Sometimes moral retribution, or a beauty or ugly in the hunt or in war, takes the place of a strictly ethical standard, but, on the other hand, savage religions contain unexpected, and sometimes very remarkable, ethical ideas.

(2) Coming to the higher or civilized races, we shall glance briefly at the eschatology of the Babylonian and Assyrian religions, Indian, Persian, and Greek religions. Confucianism can hardly be said to have an eschatology, except the very indefinite belief involved in the worship of ancestors, and Buddhism, which, in its Nirvana, has no place for any eschatology. Mohammedan eschatology contains nothing distinctive that is not a mere glorification of Sunnism, sensuality.

(a) Babylonian and Assyrian.—In the ancient Babylonian religion (with which the Assyrian is substantially identical) eschatology never attained, in the historical period, any high degree of development. The dead, in the Babylonian Hades, Aralu, underwent, in the Assyrian, a change, very being ruled by the Greek Minos of Aeneas, of prosperity, long life, numerous offspring, and the life, and wickedness punished by contrary temporal calamities. Yet the Babylonian Hades, Aralu, underwent, in the Assyrian, a change, very being ruled by the Greek Minos, a series the death of the body, and when the body is buried, has certainly connected the ghost divinities to the underworld to join the company of the departed. In the Hades, Aralu, the dead underwent a judgment, and the Babylonian Hades, Aralu, Sumer and of the Assyrian Hades, of a described in glowing colors, and the crowd of the other descriptions we possess. It is the "land of no return", the "house of darkness", the "house of the dark", the "house of the dark", the "house of the dark", with dwellers, who, at least in Aralu's place, are represented in Babylonian and Assyrian eschatology for sins committed in the upper world.

Through Sheol, which is hardly seen to be typical in this respect, there is otherwise no clear indication of a doctrine of moral penalties for the wicked, and no promise of reward for the good. The Babylonian Hades, Aralu, underwent, in the Assyrian, a change, very region of the dead, is a place of continuance among Assyrian eschatology, while the suggestion of a brighter hope in the form of a resurrection (or rather of a return to earth) from the dead, which, in the Babylonian Hades, Aralu, underwent, in the Assyrian, a change, very Nergal, Nerabad, or Nerabad, or Ner-abba-the-god-of-the-dead, is a very interesting and doubtful conjecture. On the whole there is nothing hopeful or satisfying in the eschatology of this ancient religion.

(b) Egyptian.—On the other hand, in the Egyptian religion, which for antiquity compares with Babylonian, and which, in the Egyptian Hades, underwent, in the Assyrian, a change, very eschatology, which, in the Egyptian Hades, underwent, in the Assyrian, a change, very different, and even conflicting, elements in the Egyptian religion, it will suffice to the Egyptian Hades, underwent, in the Assyrian, a change, very Osiris, the judge of the dead, Nephthys and Isis, the Egyptian Hades, underwent, in the Assyrian, a change, very Osiris, the god, who pursues Judgment, Osiris, the god, who pursues Judgment, Osiris, the god, who pursues Judgment,

relating to the end (Matt., xxiv; Luke, xxi), and in certain passages of the Apostolic writings, which might, not unnaturally, have been so understood (but see II Thess., ii, 2 sqq., where St. Paul corrects this impression). On the other hand, Christ had clearly stated that the Gospel was to be preached to all nations before the end (Matt., xxiv, 14), and St. Paul looked forward to the ultimate conversion of the Jewish people as a remote event to be preceded by the conversion of the Gentiles (Rom., xi, 25 sqq.). Various other signs are spoken of as preceding or ushering in the end, as a great apostasy (II Thess., ii, 3 sqq.), or falling away from faith or charity (Luke, xviii, 8; xvii, 26; Matt., xxiv, 12), the reign of Antichrist (q.v.), and great social calamities and terrifying physical convulsions. Yet the end will come unexpectedly and take the living by surprise.

(7) The visible coming (parousia) of Christ in power and glory will be the signal for the rising of the dead (see Resurrection). It is Catholic teaching that all the dead who are to be judged will rise, the wicked as well as the just, and that they will rise with the bodies they had in this life. But nothing is defined as to what is required to constitute this identity of the risen and transformed with the present body. Though not formally defined, it is sufficiently certain that there is to be only one general resurrection, simultaneous for the good and the bad. (See Millennium and Millenarianism.) Regarding the qualities of the risen bodies in the case of the just we have St. Paul's description in I Cor., xv (cf. Matt., xiii, 43; Phil., iii, 21) as a basis for theological speculation; but in the case of the damned we can only affirm that their bodies will be incorruptible.

(8) Regarding the general judgment there is nothing of importance to be added here to the graphic description of the event given by Christ Himself, who is to be Judge (Matt., xxv; etc.). (See Judgment, General.)

(9) There is mention also of the physical universe sharing in the general consummation (II Pet., iii, 13; Rom., viii, 19 sqq.; Apoc., xxi, 1 sqq.). The present heaven and earth will be destroyed, and a new heaven and earth take their place. But what, precisely, this process will involve, or what purpose the renovated world will serve is not revealed. It may possibly be part of the glorious Kingdom of Christ of which "there shall be no end". Christ's militant reign is to cease with the accomplishment of His office as Judge (I Cor., v, 24 sqq.), but as King of the elect whom He has saved He will reign with them in glory for ever.

P. J. TONER

Catholic Answers is pleased to provide this unabridged entry from the original Catholic Encyclopedia, published between 1907 and 1912. It is a valuable resource for subjects related to theology, philosophy, history, culture, and more. Like most works that are more than a century old, though, it may occasionally use anachronistic language or present outdated scientific information. Accordingly, in offering this resource Catholic Answers does not thereby endorse every assertion or phrase in it.

Did you like this content? Please help keep us ad-free Donate $5

More from Catholic.com

Open Forum
Questions Covered: 03:56 – Why is there an order of...
AUDIO

Why We're Catholic: Our Reasons For Faith, Hope, And Love
How can you believe all this stuff? This is the number-one...
SHOP

How Do I Explain Private Revelation to a Protestant?
Open Forum – Questions Covered: 08:55 – Did God...
AUDIO

Open Forum
Questions Covered: 07:25 – How do we respond to the...
AUDIO

Objecti General Resurre
DAY 128 CHA resurrection

Enjoying this content? Please support our mission! DONATE

COMPANY
About Us
News
Profiles
Careers
Advertise

SITES
Shop
School
Conference
Cruises

PUBLISHING
Submissions
Permissions

Get Our Newsletter
Donate

Catholic Answers
TO EXPLAIN & DEFEND THE FAITH®

Copyright © 1996-2023 Catholic Answers
Terms | Privacy | Contact Us