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ESCHATOLOGY-AN INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Eschatology is derived from Greek word 'eschatos' meaning last or end and logy meaning to study. So it is basically theological study of the ultimate destiny of the world and humanity, it is study of end times. It deals with profound questions concerning the final events in human history, including the afterlife, the end of the world, resurrection, judgment, heaven, and hell. Eschatology is present in almost all major world religions and offers answers to fundamental human concerns about what happens after death, the meaning of life, and the future of the world.

KEY WORDS: Islam; Christianity; Hinduism; Resurrection; Death



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INTRODUCTION

Eschatology refers to the study of the "last things," encompassing both personal end times (What happens after death) and cosmic end times (the fate of the world or universe) [1].

Eschatology attempts to provide answers to essential questions like:

- What happens after we die?
- Is there life beyond the material world?
- How will the world end? [2, 3].

Types of Eschatology:

Eschatology can be divided into two major categories:

1. Individual Eschatology: This focuses on what happens to individuals after death, exploring concepts like the soul's journey, heaven and hell, reincarnation, or eternal punishment [4].

2. Collective Eschatology: This concerns the fate of humanity as a whole, focusing on larger events such as the apocalypse, final judgment, and the end of history [5]. These two categories often overlap as individual destinies are believed to be tied to the ultimate fate of the world in many religious traditions.

Eschatology in Major Religions:

- 1. Christian Eschatology:** It centers on the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment. Christianity teaches that Christ will return to the earth to establish God's kingdom, where the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished [6]. Central to this belief is the Book of Revelation, which contains visions of apocalyptic events like wars, plagues, and natural disasters that

will lead to the end of the world and the establishment of a new heaven and earth. In Christian eschatology the four last things are death, judgment, heaven and hell [7].

Christian beliefs:

- **The Second Coming of Christ:** Christians believe that Jesus will return to the earth to judge the living and the dead [8].
- **Resurrection:** The dead will rise and be judged according to their deeds [9].
- **Final Judgment:** At the end of time, all souls will be judged and sent either to heaven or hell [10].

Different views in Christian Eschatology:

- **Premillennialism:** The simplest definition of premillennialism is the belief that after a period of severe tribulation of the earth, the Lord Jesus Christ will visibly and bodily return to earth (His Second Coming/Advent or Parousia) and will then rule and reign on the earth for a period of one thousand years (millennium) of peace or Belief that Christ will return before a literal thousand-year reign of peace (the Millennium) [11, 12].
- **Postmillennialism:** Belief that Christ will return after a symbolic thousand years, during which the world will experience a golden age of Christian prosperity. Postmillennialism holds that Jesus Christ establishes his kingdom on earth through his preaching and redemptive work in the first century [13].
- **Amillennialism:** This view rejects a literal thousand-year reign, seeing it as a symbolic period that represents Christ's spiritual rule. Amillennialists believe that the millennium is a heavenly rule inaugurated

at the death and resurrection of Christ and concluding at his return [14]

2. Islamic Eschatology:

In Islam, eschatology is concerned with the Day of Judgment (Yawm al-Qiyāmah), when the world will end, the dead will be resurrected, and all souls will face divine judgment. Muslims believe in a series of signs that will precede the end times, such as the appearance of the Dajjal (the Antichrist), the return of Isa (Jesus), and the emergence of the Mahdi, a messianic figure who will lead Muslims to victory over evil forces [15]. Islamic eschatology is a field of study in Islam concerning future events that would happen in the end times. It is primarily based on sources from the Quran and Sunnah [16]. Aspects from this field of study include the signs of the final age, the destruction of the universe and Judgement day [17].

Islamic Beliefs:

- **Day of Judgment:** Everyone will be resurrected and judged by God based on their deeds [18].
- **Heaven (Jannah) and Hell (Jahannam):** Souls will be sent to eternal bliss or punishment based on their deeds [19]
- **Signs of the End Times:** Including the appearance of Dajjal, the return of Jesus, and the blowing of the trumpet signaling the end of the world [20].

3. Hindu Eschatology:

Hindu eschatological tradition involves no final consummation, it is characterized by great cycle's kalpas of rise and decline, creation and destruction [21]. The kalpa comprises 2,000 mahayugas, which in turn are each made up of four ages, or yugas, of diminishing length [22]. In Hinduism, the concept of the end of time is cyclical

rather than linear, involving recurring cycles of creation and destruction. These cycles are known as Yugas, each representing different ages of the world. The current age, Kali Yuga, is believed to be a time of moral decay and conflict, which will eventually end with the appearance of Kalki, the final avatar of Vishnu, who will destroy evil and bring about a new age of righteousness [23].

Hindu Beliefs:

- **Cyclic Time:** The universe undergoes cycles of creation, preservation, and destruction [24].
- **Kali Yuga:** The current age of darkness, ignorance, and decay [25].
- **Kalki Avatar:** Vishnu's final incarnation, who will restore righteousness at the end of the age [26]

4. Buddhist Eschatology:

Buddhism views the cycle of life and death through the lens of Samsara—the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The ultimate goal is to achieve Nirvana, a state of liberation from Samsara [27]. While Buddhism doesn't focus on a single eschatological event, there is a belief in the eventual coming of Maitreya, the future Buddha, who will guide humanity to enlightenment in a time when the teachings of the historical Buddha have been forgotten [28]. There are two major points of Buddhist eschatology: the appearance of Maitreya and the Sermon of the Seven Suns [29].

Buddhist Beliefs:

- **Samsara:** The endless cycle of rebirth that can only be broken by attaining enlightenment [30].
- **Nirvana:** Liberation from the cycle of life, death, and suffering [31].

- **Maitreya:** The future Buddha who will appear to restore the Dharma (teachings of the Buddha)[32].

Themes and Symbols in Eschatology:

Apocalypse:

In religious eschatology, the term "apocalypse" refers to a revelation or disclosure of future events, often involving the destruction of the world. Apocalyptic literature, found in the Bible, the Quran, and other religious texts, describes catastrophic events, the defeat of evil, and the establishment of a new, divine order [33].

Resurrection:

Resurrection is a central theme in both Christianity and Islam, where the dead are believed to rise on the Day of Judgment to face divine judgment. This concept highlights the eternal significance of human deeds and the hope of eternal life [34].

Heaven and Hell:

Heaven and Hell are common eschatological symbols, representing eternal reward and punishment. In both Christianity and Islam, heaven is depicted as a place of eternal joy and communion with God, while hell is a place of eternal suffering and separation from the divine [35].

Judgment Day:

Judgment Day is a universal concept across many religions, representing the final reckoning of human actions. It emphasizes accountability for one's deeds and the moral structure of the universe, where good is ultimately rewarded and evil punished [36].

Critical Analysis:

Comparison of Eschatological Views

While each religion offers a unique perspective on the end times, several common themes emerge. For example, both Christianity and Islam emphasize resurrection and judgment, while Hinduism and Buddhism focus on cycles of time and spiritual liberation [37]. The difference in these views highlight the diversity of religious thought on ultimate matters, while the similarities reflect humanity's shared concerns about death, morality, and the future [38].

Psychological and Sociological Impact:

Eschatological beliefs often shape the way individuals live their lives, offering hope in the face of death or motivating ethical behavior through the promise of reward or punishment in the afterlife [39]. On a societal level, these beliefs can influence laws, traditions, and ethical systems, as they provide a framework for understanding justice, morality, and human destiny [40].

Conclusion

Eschatology provides deep insights into how human beings understand life, death, and the future of the universe. Through studying the eschatological beliefs of different religions, we gain a broader understanding of how people make sense of their existence and the ultimate fate of the world. Whether through the promise of resurrection, reincarnation, or spiritual liberation, eschatology offers answers to humanity's most profound questions about the end of time and the Destiny that awaits us all.

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