

END TIMES PHILOSOPHIES OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

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Abstract

In the history of religions, eschatology is a subject that refers to end times of this world, the day of resurrection, the day of judgement and the final destiny of mankind. The end of this world is anticipated by all Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions. Apocalypticism is a religious belief that the end of the world is imminent. As per this belief, a sudden intervention of God will result in the destruction of this cosmos and in its place, two entities known as Paradise and Hell will be established. Apocalypticism is also part of modern science, technology, and political discourse in which opinions are offered about the end of the world. We have described beliefs of some important religions in the world in this context and have compared it with the Islamic perspective of end of this world. Since this subject is of significance to every individual in the world, we hope that this research will provide logical explanation to people to know if the world will indeed end at some point, and if so, what is the course of action people need to follow in this context.

Keywords – Eschatology, Apocalypticism, Religion, Islam, Qiyamah

Nature and significance of eschatological events

The word "eschatology" is the combination of two Greek words 'eskhatos' (last) and 'logy' (doctrine, science). In Abrahamic religions, eschatological events are of three types, (i) individual, (ii) collective, and (iii) cosmic. In an individual eschatological event, every human being must answer for his/her deeds after his/her death. In a collective eschatological event, a whole nation or a community or the whole world is prepared towards human salvation under the leadership of a prophet or religious guide. In a cosmic eschatological event, this cosmos will be destroyed by God's intervention and in its place, two entities, paradise, and hell will be established. A Judgement Day will be held when

every human being will have to answer for his/her deeds and depending upon the outcome of his judgement, he/she will be placed in either paradise or hell, the only places of residence available at that time. It is said that the life in paradise or hell will be infinite.

Non-Abrahamic religions, like Hinduism and Buddhism believe in transmigration of soul after the death of a human being. The soul travels from one body to another until it gets Moksha or Nirvana (freedom from the cycle of rebirths). However, almost every religion in the world Abrahamic or non-Abrahamic, has a concept of end time. Even ancient Greeks, Egyptians and American Indians all had apocalyptic beliefs.

Eschatology in world religions and cultures

(i) Christianity

There are many branches of Christian theology; among them the following are important. (i) Christology, (ii) Soteriology, and (iii) Eschatology. In Christology, the person of Jesus is studied, if he is a human, or divine, or both. In Soteriology, their religious doctrine of salvation is discussed. In eschatology they study the end times events. Among the end time events, Christians believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. There are differences of opinions among Christians about the end times events and exact time of second coming of Jesus Christ. In Christian belief, 'rupture' is an event which will occur before the end of the world when God removes all Christians from the earth. Some say the rupture will occur before the end time tribulations while others say it will occur after tribulations.

(ii) Judaism

Jewish eschatology is part of Jewish theology in which, subjects like death, revival of the dead, afterlife, etc., are discussed. According to Jewish American scholar and Rabbi Irving Greenberg (b 1933), afterlife is central to Jewish belief. He claims that the belief of afterlife is derived from the belief of reward and punishment for the deeds undertaken during the lifetime. Jewish Talmud, 'Bavli Sanhedrin' contains frequent mentions of resurrection of the dead.

The gathering of Jewish diaspora from around the world into Palestine before the end time and the coming of Jewish Messiah are also part of Jewish eschatology. Jews call end times as 'end of days' (Aḥarit ha-yamim). According to Jewish beliefs, a climatic war with Gog and Magog will take place at the end of Jewish exodus into Palestine. This war will be in Jerusalem. However, some Jews do not agree with this, and say that the suffering of Jews while migrating into Palestine has already made up for this war.

(iii) Zoroastrianism

As per Zoroastrian eschatology, the evil will be destroyed in the end times and good will prevail. Zoroastrian end time doctrine is known as 'Frashokereti'. They believe that after the destruction of the cosmos, the world will be restored once again. A 'Saoshyant' will emerge on earth as a final savior of mankind and bring about the resurrection of the dead. A lava will flow across the earth and both the living, and the resurrected will have to pass through it. The good will survive, and sinful will burn. Then this lava will flow into the Hell along with the sinful people.

(iv) Hinduism

Hindus believe that people are living in last of the age known as Kali Yuga. As per Vaishnavi Hindu eschatology, a figure known as Kalki will emerge on earth who is the 10th Avatar of Hindu God Vishnu. Other Hindus believe that Kalki is the incarnation of Hindu God Shiva, not Vishnu, and that he will destroy and recreate the world.

(v) Buddhism

There is no account of beginning or end of cosmos in Buddhism as they believe in endless cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. However, Mahayana Buddhist claim that there is an end time for this Cosmos. They claim that a figure known as Maitreya Buddha will emerge on earth in the end times who will bring the end of this world. Some Buddhists claim that in 'sermon of the seven suns' in their religious text, 'Pali Canon', Buddha indicated the ultimate destruction of planet earth.

Physical / Scientific (non-religious) Eschatology

Physical or Scientific eschatology is a term used in the predictions of astrophysics about the ultimate destruction of planet earth. It is claimed that an event will take place which will destroy the modern civilization along with planet earth. Many academic and non-profit organizations have been established in the world for the purpose of research in this context. The first of such organization was established in UK in 1945, who also established a Doomsday clock in 1947. Beginning 2000 there is a spurt in such organizations. In 2005, 'Future of Humanity Institute' was established. In 2009, 'Lifeboat Foundation' was established to prevent technological catastrophe. This Foundation funds many such projects in major universities of the world. A 'Global risk Institute' was established in 2011 in US. They sponsor research about the potential risks in the destruction of human civilization with the help of Artificial Intelligence. Other similar Institutions include (i) Global Challenges Foundation (est. 2012), (ii) The Centre for the study of existential risk (est. 2012), (iii) Future of Life Institute (est. 2014), (iv) The Centre for Long Term risk (est. 2016), (v) The Centre for Security and emerging technologies (est. 2019), etc.

Islamic concept of end times

Muslims believe that a time will come when the cosmos will be destroyed and in its place two entities, namely paradise and hell will be established. Some Muslims say that paradise and hell have already been created and they will be

made visible to the people on the Day of judgement. Resurrection of the dead will take place as the last sign of Qiyamah, after which a Judgement Day will be held when every single human being will have to answer for his/her deeds and depending upon the outcome of judgement, he/she will be placed in paradise or hell. The Quran refers to this event as ‘the Hour’ (السَّاعَةُ).

It is in Quran, ‘People ask you (O Prophet ﷺ) about the Hour (of Judgment). Say, ‘Allah alone has Knowledge of it. You never know; the Hour may be near.’ (Al-Ahzaab - 63).

Muslims also believe that there are minor and major signs of the Hour. It is believed that all minor signs have already appeared, and Muslims are waiting for the first major sign of the Hour, which is the appearance of Imam Mahdi (عليه السلام) who will establish peace and justice in the world. Muslims also believe in the second coming of Isa (عليه السلام) who will establish the truth of Islam and the truth of all the Islamic prophets from Adam (صلى الله عليه و آله) to Prophet Mohammad (وسلم).

A brief review of the above accounts

It is unanimously agreed by the followers of all Abrahamic and most of the non-Abrahamic religions as well as the scientific community that this Cosmos has an end, but they are no certain about its exact time. The eschatological details believed by the followers of different religions are very much different from each other. Therefore, it is logical that the mind gets confused as to which of these philosophies is truthful. For this purpose, we need to study the history of the religions in the world. This study will provide some logical answers in this context.

A brief history of religions

Most of us agree that we were created from a single male and female. This fact is described in the Quran - ‘O Mankind, surely Allah has created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. (Al-Hujuraat - 13).

We do not know the age of this cosmos. We also do not know the exact date when the first human being and his spouse inhabited the earth.

Bible (in (Genesis 2:5–7, 2:15–4:1, 4:25) mentions the first human being was Adam.

Quranic accounts also confirm that Adam (عليه السلام) was the father of humanity and a prophet of Allah. There is a reference to this aspect in the Quran - ‘Mankind was a single community, then Allah sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth to judge between people in their disagreements.’ (Al-Baqara - 213).

From the above it can be said that the first human being and his spouse had children and grandchildren who were taught by them the original religion of humanity. As the population grew in numbers, some of them might have migrated to other parts of the world in search of fertile lands. That is how the human communities may have developed across the world.

What was the original religion of mankind that was taught to them by their father and mother?

Scottish anthropologist Andrew Lang (1844-1912) concluded that Urmonotheism (worship of one God) or urreligion was the original religion of mankind. He said, it is also known as Original Monotheism, Primeval Monotheism, Primitive Monotheism, etc. Andrew Lang reiterated that all non-monotheistic and polytheistic religions in the world were the degenerated forms of this original religion.

Urmonotheism was defended by many scholars and philosophers in the world. German philosopher Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954), in his book *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee*, opposed the ‘revolutionary monotheism theory’ that claims that the emergence of monotheistic thought was the result of the gradual process covering the Bronze and Iron Age polytheistic religions.

Schmidt reiterated that the practices of Native American mythology, Australian aborigine, and other primitive civilizations are evidence in this context. In his book ‘the origin and growth of

religion' written in 1930s, he said, the Supreme Being became dim only among later peoples.'

Based on the above, it can be said that when human migrations took place, and long time elapsed, people forgot the teachings of their father, Adam (عليه السلام). Their environment played a key role in this context. As time passed, people started contemplating that one single God cannot manage this huge cosmos. There may be several Gods or sub gods taking care of different responsibilities in the cosmos. Then they built imaginary idols of these gods and started worshiping them for alleviating their difficulties. They associated divine attributes with these idol gods. This is the reason, idol gods worshiped in one region of the earth were different from the idol gods worshiped in other regions. As generations passed, people added new idol gods and abandoned old idols worshiped by their forefathers. This way new religions were formed with new theories in the world. This hypothesis may be disputed by some people, but the fact remains that if human beings are living on this planet earth, there may have been the first couple from whom we were all born. And that couple must have taught to their children the original religion of mankind.

Muslims believe in all Prophets sent by God, including Abraham (Ibrahim عليه السلام), Moses, (Musa عليه السلام), Jesus Christ (Isa عليه السلام) as human beings. Muslims believe that Islamic teachings and its philosophy remained the same, i.e., believe in one God, from Prophet Adam (عليه السلام) to the last Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم).

For Muslims, the first prophet was Adam (عليه السلام), and Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) is the last prophet sent by God to humanity. The Quran is the revealed book to Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم). The Quran is the only book in the world which has remained unaltered for 1500 years, ever since it was revealed. No religious scriptures can match the Quran in this context.

Conclusion

Some people will dispute with the above review; however, it must be accepted that this review is most logical in this context as it is free from the factor of faith of different religions. Therefore, we can conclude that Adamic religion is the original religion of mankind which was taught by all prophets sent by God. Since Islam is the continuation of Adamic religion, therefore, Islamic eschatology is the most truthful discourse about end times which has been taught by all Prophets sent by God.

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About the Author



Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian, and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000 books on various Islamic subjects. He has written many research articles on religion, history, and other subjects. He is also the Editor in Chief of CIFIA Global Journal.