

**ESCHATOLOGY; OR, THE
CATHOLIC DOCTRINE
OF THE LAST THINGS,
A DOGMATIC TREATISE**

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Eschatology; Or, The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things, a Dogmatic Treatise by Joseph Pohle

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JOSEPH POHLE

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OR

THE CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF THE LAST THINGS

A DOGMATIC TREATISE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

I. DEFINITION.—Eschatology is the crown and capstone of dogmatic theology. It may be defined as “the doctrine of the last things,” and tells how the creatures called into being and raised to the supernatural state by God, find their last end in Him, of whom, and by whom, and in whom, as Holy Scripture says, “are all things.”¹

Eschatology is anthropological and cosmological rather than theological; for, though it deals with God as the Consummator and Universal Judge, strictly speaking its subject is the created universe, *i. e.* man and the cosmos.

The consummation of the world is not left to “fate” (*fatum, εἰμασύνη*). God is a just judge, who distinguishes strictly between virtue and vice and metes out reward or punishment to every man according to his deserts. The rational creatures were made without their choice; but they can not reach their final end without their coöperation. Their destiny depends upon the attitude they take towards the divine plan of salvation. The good are eternally rewarded in Heaven, the wicked are punished forever in Hell. In the latter God

¹ Rom. XI, 36.

will manifest His justice, while in the former He will show His love and mercy. By dealing justly with both good and bad, He at the same time triumphantly demonstrates His omnipotence, wisdom, and holiness. Thus Eschatology leads us back to the theological principle that the created universe in all its stages serves to glorify God.²

The consummation of the world may be regarded either as in process (*in fieri*) or as an accomplished fact (*in facto esse*). Regarding it from the former point of view we speak of the "last things" (*novissima*, τὰ ἔσχατα), i. e. the events to happen at the second coming of our Lord. "The four last things of man" are Death, Judgment, Heaven (Purgatory), and Hell.³

The four last things of the human race as a whole are: the Last Day, the Resurrection of the Flesh, and the Final Judgment, followed by the End of the World. These four events constitute so many stages on the way to the predestined state of consummation (*consummatio saeculi*, συντέλεια αἰῶνος), which will be permanent and irrevocable.

2. DIVISION.—In the light of these considerations it is easy to find a suitable division for the present treatise. The object of the final consum-

² Cfr. Pohle-Preuss, *God the Author of Nature and the Supernatural*, 2nd ed., pp. 80 sqq., St. Louis 1916.

³ Cfr. Eccles. VII, 40: "In om-

nibus operibus tuis memorare novissima tua, et in aeternum non peccabis."

mation is the created universe, which consists of pure spirits, human beings, and irrational creatures. The lot of the spirits (angels and demons) was determined forever at the very beginning of things.⁴ Man and the physical universe still await their consummation. Man, individually as well as collectively, occupies the centre of creation. Hence we may divide Eschatology into two parts: (1) The Eschatology of Man as an Individual, (2) The Eschatology of the Human Race.

GENERAL READINGS:—St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Supplementum*, qu. 69 sq.; *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 1-63 (tr. by Rickaby, *God and His Creatures*, pp. 183-233, London 1905), and the commentators.

Mazzella, *De Deo Creante*, disp. 6, 4th ed., Rome 1908.—E. Méric, *L'Autre Vie*, Paris 1880; 12th ed., Paris 1900; (German tr., *Das andere Leben*, Mayence 1882).—*Card. Katschthaler, *Eschatologia*, Ratisbon 1888.—F. Stentrup, S.J., *Soteriologia*, Vol. II, Innsbruck 1889.—Chr. Pesch, S.J., *Praelectiones Dogmaticae*, Vol. IX, 3rd ed., Freiburg 1911.—*Atzberger, *Die christliche Eschatologie in den Stadien ihrer Offenbarung im A. u. N. T.*, Freiburg 1890.—B. Tepe, S.J., *Institutiones Theologicae*, Vol. IV, pp. 680 sqq., Paris 1896.—P. Einig, *De Deo Creante et Consummante*, Treves 1898.—B. Jungmann, *De Novissimis*, 4th ed., Ratisbon 1898.—J. Royer, *Die Eschatologie des Buches Job unter Berücksichtigung der vorexilischen Propheten*, Freiburg 1901.—*W. Schneider, *Das andere Leben; Ernst und Trost der christlichen Weltanschauung*, 10th ed., Paderborn 1910.—Card. Billot, S.J., *Quaestiones de Novissimis*, 4th ed., Rome 1918.—Prager, *Die Lehre von der Vollendung aller Dinge*, 1903.—Heinrich-Gutberlet, *Dogmatische Theologie*, Vol. X, Part II, Münster 1904.—J. E. Niederhuber, *Die Eschatologie des hl. Ambrosius*, Paderborn 1907.—J. Keel, *Die jenseitige Welt*, 3 vols., Einsiedeln 1868 sqq.—D. Palmieri, S.J., *De Novissimis*, Rome

⁴ Cfr. Pohle-Preuss, *God the Author of Nature and the Supernatural*, 3rd ed., St. Louis 1919, pp. 340 sqq.