

Édouard Mehl and Christian Trottmann. Eds. *Histoire de la fin des temps. Les mutations du discours eschatologique: Moyen Âge, Renaissance, Temps Modernes*. Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2022. 493 p. ISBN: 9791034401321). Paperback: € 27

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The volume begins with a superb introduction by the organizers and includes a total of nineteen papers, representing the contributions of an international conference organized by the “Centre d’études supérieures de la renaissance de Tours (CESR)” in 2019. Its aim is to examine the transformations of the concept of the end of times from the medieval period to modernity from a twofold perspective. First, it provides a detailed internal historical narrative. Second, it presents a broad historical analysis that interprets the gathered materials. This analysis examines how modernity evolved as a result of shifts in eschatological discourse, shaped by historical events and their diverse interpretations. It also delves into the process of how Christian eschatology was secularized in modern philosophical thought.

The introduction (pp. 7-20) illuminates the concept of “eschatology”, demonstrating its intimate relationship with both time and politics. The authors emphasize that eschatology, which deals with the “end of times” or “aion”, focuses not on the quantity of time but on the duration of a specific reign. Therefore, the “end of times” refers to the end of a political regime. Within the Christian tradition, it heralds the cessation of ephemeral earthly dominions, making way for an everlasting kingdom. Christian eschatology’s distinctive feature lies in the tension between the political/temporal and the spiritual realms.

The introduction delves into eschatology’s historical progression within Church doctrine, touching upon medieval debates concerning the beatific vision, the conceptualization of purgatory, the papal bull *Benedictus Deus*, and the dismissal of heterodox notions such as Amaury de Bène’s rejection of hell and paradise, and millenarianism — all of which helped to crystallize orthodox teachings.

However, the authors do not limit themselves to the history of Catholic eschatology; they also explore the development of the eschatological doctrines in contemporary theology.

This comprehensive work is segmented into three thematic sections: the first titled “The Ambivalence of Medieval Eschatology”; the second, “The Eschatological Threat: Strategies of Temporization”; and the third, “The Modern Era: The Epoch of Fulfillment”.

The first part consists of eight papers. In “Le défi de penser l’irrévocable dans le temps

humain des révocations: la notion de Dieu comme fin dans la *Somme contre les Gentils*” (pp. 23-50), Philippe Valin examines what he describes as the human soul’s inherent resistance to the concept of divine eternity. He structured his contribution into three parts: the first addressing the concept of perpetuity, the second focusing on temporality, and finally, he aims to demonstrate how hope, as a theological virtue, communicates the ultimate, irrevocably self-willed end to the created psyche.

In “Contre les apocalypses. Maïmonide et la sécularisation de l’eschatologie juive” (pp. 51-65), Géraldine Roux examines Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed*, providing an analysis of how Maimonides employs Aristotelian concepts to reshape the traditional understanding of apocalypses. Her study focuses on the secularization of these concepts to mitigate their underlying political violence.

Luc Bergmans, in “Ultimes reflets. Comment les primitifs flamands nous disent leurs quatre vérités sur les fins dernières” (pp. 67-83), offers an analysis of the Last Judgement representations by Flemish painters, which are featured in the paper, with a specific emphasis on the role of light.

Matthieu Arnold, “‘Viens cher dernier jour!’ L’attente de la fin des temps chez Martin Luther” (pp. 85-100), suggests that Luther held an optimistic perspective on the end of times, even expressing a desire for its immediate arrival and beseeching God to bring it forth. He delves into Luther’s identification of various signs indicating the world’s end, encompassing anomalies in childbirth, natural disasters, and celestial events (pp. 88-89). Additionally, Arnold explores Luther’s interpretation of the two beasts described in the *Apocalypse* (13:1 and 11), which Luther allegorizes as the Pope and the “Turk”. Notably, Luther, in contrast to some of his contemporaries like Michael Stiefel, avoids predicting a specific date for the world’s end, demonstrating a more cautious approach to eschatology. Arnold’s analysis sheds light on Luther’s complex and multifaceted stance towards the concept of the end of times.

In “A Global Warming Before the Last Judgement? The Conflagration (*Diluvium Ignis*) in Latin Philosophy and Theology (12th-14th Century)” (pp. 103-119), Pascale Bermon examines the origins and interpretations of the term *diluvium ignis* within biblical, philosophical, and patristic texts. Bermon meticulously analyses the various philosophical inquiries surrounding the concept of the final conflagration, as discussed in these sources. These questions include the nature of the fire, its causes, timing and location, the mode of action, and its potential effects. Bermon discusses a wide array of authors, including Peter Lombard, William of Auvergne, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, and Robert Holcot. In his analysis, Bermon reveals that the notion of *diluvium ignis* integrates elements of physics, meteorology, and mysticism. The textual sources attempt to rationalize this catastrophic event, offering as many physical and meteorological explanations as possible to enhance coherence, incorporating data from various contexts beyond the biblical narrative. Furthermore, Bermon concludes that in these texts, the cataclysm is not depicted as absolute; instead, it spares the chosen ones, suggesting a selective rather than a total destructive impact. This comprehensive

exploration by Bermon provides a nuanced understanding of medieval perspectives on this eschatological concept, highlighting the interplay between natural science, theology, and belief in medieval thought.

Andrea Tagliapietra, in “*Dispositio novi ordinis pertinens ad tertium statum: Joachim de Flore et l’avant-dernier temps de l’histoire*” (pp. 121-138), discusses Joachim de Flore’s innovative reinterpretation of the Augustinian concept of temporal uniformity, that is, the idea that history is oriented in a linear manner, where the Christian period marks the end of times. While Augustine viewed the Church’s time as the final epoch, Joachim de Flore proposed a transformative third stage, the Age of the Spirit. Tagliapietra explains that time in this stage should not be interpreted in terms of succession, or as a boundary for linear time, but rather as a qualitative transformation. This is a messianic time that reflects the intervention of the Spirit in human history (p. 127). Tagliapietra emphasizes that Flore believes that the third *status* represents a penultimate time; that is, it anticipates the end, but is still internal to the economy of history. This stage is dedicated to realizing the *experimentum mundi*, which involves the geographic manifestation of Christian ideals. Characterized by the extension of monastic utopian ideals to the wider *societas christiana*, this phase aims to include the whole Christian community.

Tara Arrouet’s, “Théologie et politique: le *De antichristo* de Jean Quidort de Paris” (pp. 139-157), explores John Quidort’s eschatological discourse within a political framework. The paper delves into the portrayal of the Antichrist’s advent as seen through the eyes of medieval intellectuals. Arrouet critically examines the literary genre of Quidort’s *De antichristo*, advocating for its classification as a political apocalypse. This perspective places Quidort at a unique intersection between two divergent viewpoints: those fixated on pinpointing the exact date of the Antichrist’s arrival and those who dismiss the possibility altogether. Arrouet maintains that Quidort offers a nuanced approach, suggesting that *human conjecture*, which does not have the same degree of certainty as a mathematical demonstration (p. 155), can lead to an estimation of the Antichrist’s arrival that is both flexible and precise.

The first section concludes with Bruno Pinchard’s contribution, “Dante ou l’Apocalypse contenue. Sur le chien de justice et autres figures eschatologiques” (pp. 159-174). This paper explores the notion of *katechon*, the restraining force or entity that postpones the emergence of the Antichrist and delays the end of the world, as depicted in Dante’s works. Pinchard asserts that there is no other restrainer besides the *Commedia* and the poet (p. 160). As such, all elements in Dante’s writings are analyzed through this lens. The contribution primarily focuses on the interpretation of the character Beatrice.

The second section, comprising six papers, begins with Christian Trottmann’s “Trois témoins de l’évolution des discours sur l’eschatologie à la Renaissance: Denis le Chartreux, Nicolas de Cues et Charles de Bovelles” (pp. 177-205). Trottmann chooses to analyze three prominent Renaissance figures outside the context of late scholasticism. Denis the Carthusian represents a traditional view of eschatology, emphasizing themes like death, both particular and general judgment, the torments of hell, and the vision of God in

celestial paradise. This classical approach sharply contrasts with the innovative ideas of Nicholas of Cusa, who focuses on the resurrection of Christ and humanity. He even ventures to suggest a date for the world's end, offering theological reasoning for placing it in the distant future. Charles de Bovelles, meanwhile, adopts a distinctly philosophical approach, largely devoid of Christological foundations. He offers philosophical justifications for the resurrection, drawing on the concept of entelechy. Bovelles' work is seen as a precursor to secularization (p. 205).

Fosca Mariani Zini, "Pas encore et pourtant déjà: l'identité eschatologique selon Marsile Ficino" (pp. 207-225), examines Ficino's conception of the eschatological identity and the "between time", that is already here but at the same time not yet accomplished. Ficino views the soul as a crucial junction where two significant concepts meet: the end of time (*eschaton*) and the anticipation of something new (*novum*). The soul is portrayed as the driving force behind an identity that is eschatological. This identity takes on the characteristics of the "millenarian Christ". Ficino incorporates elements from astrological traditions to further understand this eschatological identity. Astrology, with its focus on celestial influences, provides a framework for interpreting the signs or characteristics of this end-times identity. Commenting on Ficino's conception, Mariani Zini notes that he is seeking a form of salvation that exists both within history and at its edges. This suggests a state of being that is in the world but also transcends it, occupying a liminal or transitional space just before the final, culminating events of history. This state is not just a personal attitude of individuals. Instead, it is described as a specific moment in the broader scope of creation, implying that this anticipation of the end times and the new era is a collective, universal experience that affects the entirety of creation.

Olivier Ribordy's, "Fin du monde et fins dernières: diversité des horizons eschatologiques chez Pierre d'Ailly et Francisco Suárez" (pp. 228-250), highlights that Pierre d'Ailly approaches the concept of the world's end from two distinct perspectives: geographically, referring to the physical limits of the world, and temporally or eschatologically, focusing on the final events in the history of the world. Ribordy's analysis draws extensively from d'Ailly's *Sermon of All Saints*, which provides an exegesis, of the passage from Revelation 12:1. This sermon is instrumental in Ribordy's exploration of how d'Ailly interpreted and conveyed the signs that might precede the end of the world. In contrast, Francisco Suárez focuses on individual eschatology, particularly concerning the destiny of the human soul. His work offers a detailed account of the journey towards the ultimate end of human existence, namely, eternal beatitude.

Philippe Debroise, in "Un nouvel âge de la variation? Prophétie et astrologie chez Nicole Oresme" (pp. 253-281), presents the argument that Oresme recognized the validity of certain divinatory methods, including prophetic vision and astrology. This stance put forward by Debroise offers a contrast to the more commonly held perception of Oresme as an opponent of such methods. In fact, Oresme's work often seamlessly integrates philosophy, astrology, and prophecy, creating a harmonious blend of these disciplines. Oresme's criticism of astrological divination is driven by his aim to prove that completely

unique events can and will happen. These unique events might either mark the end of history or start a new era. His criticism has an underlying eschatological goal. He uses mathematics to argue that the future will not just repeat what has happened in the past but will bring something completely new and never seen before.

In “Astrologie et eschatologie au XVe siècle: le *Prenosticatio* de Jean de Bruges (1444)” (pp. 283-301), Jean Patrice Boudet and Marianne Zentz analyze Jean de Bruges’ work, focusing on his defense of astrology. They explain that, according to de Bruges, legitimate astrology is not about predicting specific or individual events, which he dismisses as superstitious vanities. Instead, true astrology is concerned with studying the impacts of planetary movements on humanity as a whole. In *De fine seculi*, Jean de Bruges acknowledges that only God knows the precise date of the world’s end, but he nevertheless estimates it to be around 1765 based on his analysis of Saturn and Jupiter’s positions (p. 298). The authors conclude their paper by suggesting that de Bruges did not achieve the same level of success as Pierre d’Ailly, partly due to the absence of a skilled editor.

The final contribution in the second section is authored by Miguel Á. Granada, titled “Andreas Osiander’s Eschatology: from the *Nürnbergger Ratschlag* (1524) to the *Coniecturae de ultimis temporibus ac de fine mundi* (1544)” (pp. 303-331). Osiander is renowned for editing the first edition of Copernicus’s *De revolutionibus* and authoring its anonymous preface. Adhering to the principle of *sola scriptura*, Osiander exclusively used scriptural sources to formulate his eschatological arguments and propose a date for the end of the world. However, he emphasized that this was merely a *conjecture*, acknowledging that only God possesses the knowledge of the actual timing.

The third and final section begins with Laura Ackerman Smoller’s contribution, “Looking for the End in Late Medieval Germany: Wolfgang Aytinger’s Commentary on Pseudo-Methodius” (pp. 335-360). Smoller illustrates how Aytinger, drawing on Pseudo-Methodius’s *Revelations* and selectively using astrological sources, foretold the end of Muslim rule by a savior emperor who would also act as a reformer of the Church. Aytinger regarded astrology as divinely inspired. Nevertheless, he refrained from employing it to pinpoint the exact timing of the apocalypse. Instead, he used it to emphasize his vision of the near future as a period marked by clerical corruption, which he believed would be resolved with the advent of the last emperor. His use of astrology also served to support his chronology of the end times.

Édouard Mehl, in “Eschatologie et histoire dans le *De novo orbe* (1619) et le *De conversione Hebraeorum* (1620) de Christoph Besold” (pp. 361-381), places Christoph Besold within an eschatological and millenarian tradition that begins with Christopher Columbus. Contrasting with the belief that the end of times (*consummatio saeculorum*) would follow the announcement of God’s kingdom to the entire world, a notion associated with Columbus’s discovery of the “new world”, Besold argues that the Kingdom of God will be established not simply after the evangelization of the “new world” but following the conversion of the Jews and the re-establishment of the original apostolic church.

Manuel Lázaro Pulido, in “Un temps eschatologique nouveau pour un monde nouveau: l’*Apocalypse Nouvelle* du bienheureux Amadeo da Silva” (pp. 383-399), examines the lesser-known work of Amadeo da Silva, where he details the revelations communicated by the angel Gabriel. According to these revelations, the decline of the Church will be addressed by seven angels who will bring forth an angelic pope. This pope will form an alliance with a universal monarch, triumph over the Antichrist, and subsequently, the end of times will follow. Pulido also explores the significance of angels and the Immaculate Virgin within the context of the *Apocalypsis Nova* and their roles in its eschatological discourse.

Gwladys Le Cuff’s paper, titled “*Quae erant abscondita sunt manifesta: la vision du bienheureux Amadeo par Pedro Fernández de Murcia et la demeure des élus selon l’Apocalypsis nova*” (pp. 404-430), also centers on Amadeo da Silva, but from an art historical perspective. Le Cuff delves into various artistic depictions of Amadeo’s visions, particularly emphasizing the works of Pedro Fernández de Murcia. The article pays special attention to the iconography of eschatology, exploring how these visual representations capture and interpret the themes of Amadeo’s visions.

In the final contribution, “La prophétie politique de Tommaso Campanella: apocalypse et mondialisation” (pp. 431-446), Saverio Ricci analyzes Tommaso Campanella’s work, highlighting his vision of an ideal “City of the Sun”. This envisioned utopia is a universal monarchy led by the Pope and sanctified Christians. Campanella identifies two major barriers to this ideal: Islam, which he views as serving the Antichrist, and Machiavellian politics, aimed at augmenting the power of states or empires. According to Campanella, Christianity provides the most accurate interpretation of both the Law and natural reason and with the help of the sacraments, Christianity can unite humanity under a single state that would achieve perfect justice before the end of times (p. 444). Saverio Ricci emphasizes the Christological aspect of Campanella’s metaphysics, identifying Christ as the “first reason”. Finally, Ricci concludes that Campanella’s vision is post-Christian in nature, advocating for the self-redemption of humanity through political means. In this framework, by the time the Savior arrives, humanity would have already rendered itself worthy of eternal life through its own efforts.

The book ends with biographical notes on the authors, accompanied by an index of names and a comprehensive index of scriptural passages referenced throughout. This volume is a thorough and enlightening exploration of eschatological thought, covering a vast array of historical periods, disciplines, and various cultural, linguistic, and confessional contexts. Notably, its inclusion of perspectives from lesser-known authors significantly enriches the depth and breadth of our understanding of these complex themes.