

Reviews

HUMAN IMMORTALITY AND THE REDEMPTION OF DEATH by Simon Tugwell; *Darton, Longman and Todd*; London, 1990. Pp. 196, £12.95.

This is an extraordinary, scholarly and fascinating book. In the first part, the author surveys classical Greek views on immortality, and brings out how very untypical Plato was, and how uncertain and vacillating were even his views on the subject. In the second part Christian views on the subject are examined up to the late medieval period, and it is made clear how very speculative and various the views of the Church Fathers were. A 'Catholic View' began to solidify in about the fifteenth century; and Fr. Tugwell concludes with what he calls some very tentative suggestions about possible contemporary Christian views. The book is scholarly because it displays a wide and thorough knowledge of many byways of early medieval thought, in particular. It is fascinating because, especially to those unfamiliar with the Catholic tradition, it expresses views which are rarely discussed seriously today by philosophers. It is extraordinary because what emerges is a view which is probably incoherent but could just be profound, and which is appealing and repellent in approximately equal parts.

Tugwell is adamant that 'a human life needs a genuine end' (73), and that it is aesthetically ugly and morally shallow to think of death as just a way-station on a continuing progress of the soul. Death, he suggests, is not inherently tragic; it is not trivial and it is not a good thing. It is an evil which can be redeemed by the gift of eternity. It completes the story of a human life, as an essential limit, and 'there is no posthumous remedy for a bad death' (74). The problem with this view is that many human stories do not form aesthetically pleasing wholes. Foetuses and infants die; adults die after lives which seem so confused and meandering that no novelist could make them meaningful. It is surely no accident that many stories end before the deaths of their heroes, when they may still 'live happily ever after', or at least before they decay into senile obsolescence. For many people, almost everything remains to be done at death; and the most aesthetically pleasing view, whether true or not, would surely be one for which our handicapped or unfulfilled capacities were given opportunity for fuller exercise in a freer life; not one in which no further progress could ever be made. The way-station may be unduly trivialising; but to arrive at the terminus so soon after we have begun is a bleak and unappealing prospect to many of us.

But death, says Tugwell, is redeemable; 'eternal life is the taking possession, all at once, of a whole lifetime ... in a final perfection which makes such a lifetime precisely a whole' (158). Our final state is not one of unending progress, which he finds wearisome, but one of timeless

completed beatitude. But how can the temporal 'become' timeless? Surely for any being which has lived in time, there must always be a 'time before this'; souls in beatitude have a past; so are they not temporal still? Perhaps they become 'perfectly immobile': after the breathless passing of time, one changeless beatitude. Yet this beatitude must be the consummation of past time; and is that really plausible? Is my actual life, centred on a day's cricket and a pint at the *Prince of Wales*, going to be consummated by an immutable vision of the Divine nature? Of course, I have the alternative, says Tugwell, of a continued endless temporal existence; but its name is Hell. I can only report that I do not find the choice attractive.

There is also a small problem about bodies and what timeless beings could do with them. Fr. Tugwell toys with the thought that we may be able to ride bicycles after the Resurrection, even if we could not before (159); but what is timeless cycling like? He suggests that the temporality of resurrected bodies may 'not affect the essential non-temporality of the blessed' (168); but by then he has given up: 'we are out of our depth', he says. I tend to agree; but I suspect what this shows is the basic incoherence of the view that our final end is both a timeless contemplation of eternity and the possession of new and glorious physical bodies. As for the complication of Purgatory, wherein some post-mortem progress of a sort is apparently re-introduced and pains are suffered without bodies, Fr. Tugwell says little about it; perhaps only those can consider it seriously who have already entered it.

My conclusion is that after all this the problems are no less; speculative viability, in my view, still eludes us. But one can enjoy Fr. Tugwell's wit, learning and intellectual humility as he guides us through the labyrinth of explorer's tales about the geography of a country which may not even exist. It should contribute significantly to reflection on human immortality, and I hope it will be widely used as a resource.

KEITH WARD

LUKE THE THEOLOGIAN: ASPECTS OF HIS TEACHING by J.A. Fitzmyer, *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1989, Pp xiii + 250, Pb. £10.95.

In these eight Martin D'Arcy lectures given at Campion Hall, Oxford, in 1987, Professor Fitzmyer not only distills some of the wisdom of his massive commentary on Luke (Anchor Bible 28 and 28A), and of his extensive studies in Acts, but also seeks to provide a fresh look at some of the key issues of Lucan interpretation.

Despite the title, the first two lectures are mainly devoted to matters of introduction. In the first, Fitzmyer takes up his argument for the traditional authorship of the third Gospel, but argues the possibility that Luke was only an *occasional* companion of the apostle (the lacunae in the 'we' source of Acts being taken to suggest Luke stayed in or around Philippi for the vital years from 50–58 in which Paul developed his theology). A valuable section of this lecture gives a careful critique of Vernon Robbins' implausible thesis that the first person plural of the 'we' sections is to be explained as a standard literary convention for recounting sea-voyages (compare Hemer, *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985)).