

**JULIAN OF TOLEDO : PROGNOSTICUM FUTURI SAECULI. FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD TO COME** translated, edited and introduced by Tommaso Stancati OP, **Ancient Christian Writers No. 63, The Paulist Press/The Newman Press, New York 2010, Pp. xv + 608, £ 40.50 hbk**

Any theology of the after-life has to make a remote world accessible and convincing. If such a theology belongs itself to a distant past, then there is a twofold distance to be overcome. St Julian of Toledo lived and died in 7th-century Toledo, where he was its bishop for the last decade of his life (d.690). Fr Stancati has more than met the challenges posed. The life, works and times of Julian are carefully reconstructed, making him much more than a shadowy figure linked to an early canonical collection (the *Hispana*), the elaboration of the Mozarabic liturgy, and the ecclesial life and politics of his age. In providing the first full translation into English of Julian's *Prognosticum*, with a wealth of information and commentary, Stancati, a professor at the Pontifical University of St Thomas in Rome, makes widely accessible what can be described as the first systematic theological treatise on eschatology. While avoiding anachronistic attempts to force the eschatology of Julian into up-to-date relevance, such is Fr Stancati's theological intelligence that today's reader can profit from the *Prognosticum* as well as understand why it was an immensely influential medieval text. J.N.Hillgarth, editor of the critical edition of the *Prognosticum* in the *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* vol.115 (1976), observed how the work was to be found in almost all libraries from the 9th to the 12th centuries. Thereafter its contribution to the development of eschatological theology was assimilated, and took new forms from Peter Lombard onwards. Julian's method might be described as the stating of a thesis and its demonstration from biblical and patristic authorities, especially Augustine, interwoven by his own thinking. In time, there would come various authoritative papal and conciliar teaching on eschatological themes, and his book would be printed as useful to Catholics in Reformation polemics. All this was in the future, but Julian contributed to shaping that future. Julian wrote the *Prognosticum* as a result of a long conversation he had with the bishop of Barcelona one Good Friday in Toledo. The work is in three parts, amounting to about a 100 pages; the lauded *brevitas*. Book I faces the mystery of death, Book II constructs an intermediate eschatology, while Book III is given over to the resurrection. The *Prognosticum* is based solidly on Scripture and Tradition, with numerous quotations, yet (and Stancati is insistent on this) the work is much more than an anthology of authoritative texts. The choice of texts, their arrangement and how they were understood are significant. The result is a high degree of thematic completeness combined with a pastoral, didactic and catechetical purpose most appropriate for a bishop. We are far from the prevalence of idle speculations on the after-life or an obsession with wanting to know what God has withheld from us. Julian aimed at grounding a sustaining faith, and in Virgilian tones he hoped to touch in a more intense way the minds of mortals. Book I in particular is the voice of the pastor, speaking truth in charity – 'death is not a good thing, and yet for the good it is good', and 'the particular fear that makes everyone wonder which is more bearable: to dread several kinds of death while still alive, or to endure the one that actually occurs?'. Book II is extraordinary and successful. It is a thorough account of what can be termed the intermediate state for the soul between the moment of death and the universal bodily resurrection. Here was the theological foundation of purgatory, although of course not the word. Like Stancati, we can admire the equilibrium between an anthropological perspective which gives due attention to the destiny of the individual and a collective perspective, also involving the whole cosmos. Julian stresses the vitality of the soul, yet desiring to be embodied, and he quotes Cassian as saying that souls are not idle after their separation from the body. The souls of some of the just are not immediately gathered into the kingdom of heaven and, quoting Gregory the Great, what is to be understood in this punishment that comes from the delay (*dilationis damno*) if not that they had something less with respect to perfect justice? Also striking is the passage which states that the church effectively pleads here for the dead who lack perfect holiness, and that such are purified by medicinal punishments. Both affirmations are vital components of a theology of purgatory. It is important to centre eschatology

on God and on living joyfully with others in Christ rather than map out the Last ‘Things’. Book III is the longest in the *Prognosticum*, and covers an assorted variety of subjects connected to the resurrection although its opening is decisively Christocentric, and makes the point that the Lord *wanted* the time or the day of judgment to be unknown to us. This is Julian’s interesting exegesis of Mk 12:32, a perennially problematic text. Julian generally adopts a sober approach, although today’s theologian would be unlikely to discuss all that he did. Stancati might usefully have added some reference to contemporary discussions of the eschatological destiny of embryos. It is worth recalling, however, that in the prayer attached to his book, Julian presents himself to the Lord as one who does not arrogantly define what is unknown, but humbly desires to know what can be known. The magnificent closing passage draws on Augustine, and is headed by Julian as ‘the end without end’. It proclaims that Christ, our end, rendering us perfect, will be at the same time solace and our praise; we will praise him forever and, praising him without end, we will love him. Stancati, with erudition and a fine theological sensibility, has convincingly proposed the *Prognosticum* as deserving the attention not only of historians.

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