

(Translated by A. L. Peck, o.c.)

- 37 *De Generatione Animalium*, Bk 2, c 1, 734b10. Cf. Bk 2, c 5, 741 G9.
38 *De Generatione Animalium*, Bk 2, c 1, 731b18.
39 A. L. Peck, o.c., p.xliii, cites nine instances where Aristotle does this: 642a31, 663b13; 663b20; 738a33; 739b28; 743a36, 755a22, 776a15, 776b33.
40 Cf. Note 12.
41 *De Partibus Animalium*, Bk 1, c 5, 645a20.
42 *In Sententias*, Bk 4, ds 26, qu 1, ar 3.

Maurice Wiles and Christian Doctrine

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The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles.

eds. Sarah Coakley and David Pailin (Oxford, 1993)

This festschrift honours the notable theological career of Dr. Maurice Wiles, Regius Professor emeritus of Divinity at Oxford University. In their Preface Drs. Coakley and Pailin state: "Throughout his distinguished career he has been a staunch supporter of a liberal approach to Christian theological understanding" (p. v). The essays in this volume take up a major, if not the major, preoccupation of Professor Wiles' "liberal approach", that of the making of Christian doctrine in the early Church and the remaking of it today.

The majority of the authors endorse, and so champion, in some fashion, Wiles' initiative that Christian doctrine be remade in light of the demands of historical criticism, contemporary philosophy, and cultural experience. Thus J. Barr, J. Hick, M. Hooker, G. Kaufman, R. Lyman, S. McFague, J. Macquarrie, S. Ogden, and D. Pailin argue, in a variety of ways, that the traditional understanding of Christian doctrine,

166

based on an often unscriptural (Hooker, p. 74), supernaturalist (Macquarrie, p. 168), interventionist (Barr, p. 9), and dualistic (Kaufman, pp. 99-100) understanding of God's relationship to the world, must be fundamentally reconceived and replaced by an understanding of doctrine where God's activity is restricted within the enclosed process of history and human activity, and interpreted through human experience and philosophical insight. As Ogden states: "I hold that one of the lasting achievements of revisionary theology right from the beginning is to have shown that the credibility of Christian witness can be validated, finally, only by appeal to what anyone is capable of experiencing simply as a human being" (p. 196).

Then there are those, the minority, who criticize some aspect(s) of Wiles' theology. S. Coakley, in a very creative fashion, argues for the relevance of the Trinity, especially the *hypostasis* of the Holy Spirit, in light of the early Christian experience and understanding of prayer and worship. B. Mitchell contends, though not in an altogether convincing manner, that a true Christian understanding of revelation can only be maintained within a framework where God actually speaks to and communicates with humankind. R. Williams maintains, in a very erudite, though at times obscure, essay that Wiles' understanding of Christian doctrine does not do justice to the effect Christian revelation claims to make upon the world and the lives of believers.

Lastly there are those — H. Chadwick, A. Louth, and F. Young — who address the theme of the making and remaking of doctrine, but do so without directly confronting the Wilesian enterprise. While these essays are engaging and instructive, especially Louth's on Maximus the Confessor's reinterpretation of Gregory of Nazianzus, and Young's on the essentially pedagogical nature of Christian doctrine in the early Church, they do not significantly advance the debate.

Now the debate over the making and remaking of Christian doctrine centres upon the nature of God's action and ultimately then on the nature of God. Is God ontologically distinct from all else that exists and so differs in kind from everything else as the Christian tradition claims? Or is God "the symbol" of the transcendent within the immanent world historical process which provides "the focus for a world-view" (Kaufman, p. 96)? Does God actually enter into time and history and radically change humankind's relationship with him altering then the course of history? Or is God's activity confined to the working out of the inherent metaphysical principles contained within reality and illustrated throughout history (Pailin, pp. 220, 234-5). Is faith the entering into the radically new activity of God? Or is it human insight (religious and so symbolic, poetic, and mythical, or

philosophical and so demythologized) into the generic 'activity' of God's abiding presence within an order that is self-contained and closed? The traditional understanding of Christian revelation, which Christian doctrine attempts to articulate, is expressed in the first alternatives of all the above. The Wilesian enterprise consists of the second alternatives. The remaking of Christian doctrine involves recasting it so as to give expression to 'God's activity' from within the immanent and self-contained world order through religious insight, historical analysis, or philosophical evidence.

Jesus becomes the touchstone for the Wilesian project (Ogden, p. 193). Jesus is not the eternal Son of the Father who comes to exist as man and who as man, through his redemptive death and resurrection (all of which are mythological) radically alters humankind's relation to God, but rather he is the supreme (symbolic) paradigm of how God is always 'acting' within history. Seeing no difference between himself, J. Robinson and Wiles, Macquarrie affirms Wiles' statement from *The Myth of God Incarnate*: "[Jesus] had lived a life that embodied and expressed God's character and action in the world" (p. 172).

A full response to the Wilesian enterprise is not possible here. However, a few queries can briefly be made. Firstly, does Wiles, and do those in agreement with him, adequately distinguish between comprehending the action of God and knowing what the action of God is? Does the Wilesian enterprise seek to remake doctrine by making it entirely comprehensible? And, is this not in contrast to the traditional understanding of the development of doctrine? For example, the Chalcedonian statement, that, in the Incarnation, one and the same Son now exists as God and as man, clarified what the mystery of the Incarnation is but did not provide comprehension of the mystery making it entirely lucid to the human mind. May this be the point at the heart of Wiles' statement, concerning patristic doctrinal statements: "I am not in a position either to affirm them or to deny them; I cannot give any satisfactory sense to them *in that form*" (As quoted by Williams, p. 240)? Is the lack of "satisfactory sense" due to the inability of knowing what, for example, Chalcedon is saying, or rather to the desire to comprehend the mystery and not being able to do so under its present Chalcedonian form?

Secondly, the Wilesian enterprise cannot adequately account for the soteriological effects of God's action in Christ claimed by the New Testament and the Christian tradition. Wiles, and those who espouse a similar position, argue that the soteriological effect of 'God's activity' is that human beings obtain clearer insight into the ever present nature of that 'activity'. According to Hick, Jesus was "so open and

responsive to God's transforming presence that we can say, in a natural metaphor, that he embodied or 'incarnated' the meaning of God's reality for human life" (p. 69). Thus Jesus is the supreme exemplar of God's generic activity in the world and so provides the symbolic revelatory clue to that activity. However, does not the biblical witness proclaim that God's activity changed in kind, and not just in degree, our relationship to him and so offers to humanity a life that changes not in degree, but in kind? For example, do not the New Testament notions of 'covenant', 'forgiveness', 'righteousness', 'adoption', 'new creation', etc. denote changes that differ in kind from what went before and do so precisely because God has acted in a *new* kind of way in Christ? I believe this is the point Williams is making when he states:

What their (the New Testament writers') language actually says is that, in his ministry *and* now, Jesus is the form which God's judgement takes; that he, then and now, makes real the welcoming mercy of God in the Lord's Supper; that the believer is united with him, that the death and resurrection of Jesus in particular constitute the condition of there being a new humanity of unrestricted *koinonia* so that if we 'enter into' the dying and rising of Jesus by baptism and in daily conversion, we come to stand where he stands, in full intimacy with the Father, and the barriers separating us from other human beings fall away (p. 257).

Lastly, the Wilesian project makes much of human experience (especially contemporary experience) as the foundation for and the validity of God's action. It is true that humankind must experience God's action if it is to be known. However, the heart of the contemporary crisis concerning the remaking of Christian doctrine is that many people, including Christians, often have not experienced the reality of what the traditional doctrines proclaim. Not having experienced, through faith and conversion, the transforming work of the Gospel in their own lives, they presume that such a transforming work is incredible and philosophically incoherent. Nonetheless, there are many Christians today, within all cultures, economic classes, educational levels, and Christian denominations, who have experienced the truth of Christian doctrine and continue to encounter the reality of which it speaks. While these people are often summarily and simplistically dismissed as "fundamentalists" (some may be) and so discounted as unworthy of serious consideration (Macquarrie, p. 161), yet it is these Christians, along with the Christian men and women of the past, who point to the limitations of the Wilesian enterprise, which limits experience to that of the merely human and secular and does not

adequately account for the expansive experiential horizons of the Holy Spirit.

In the end the Wilesian project is not a remaking of Christian doctrine, but the attempt to remake a doctrine that ceased to exist with the call of Abraham. Actually, it perished when God (if a poetic expression may be excused) said: "Let there be light."

Reviews

RESPONSIBILITY, by J.R. Lucas. *Oxford University Press, Oxford.* 1993.

What is "responsibility"? Perhaps the question gives us the odd feeling its analogue about time gave St. Augustine: "So long as no one asks me what it is, I can tell; when I try to say what it is, I cannot tell". Responsibility is clearly a vital concept for any society remotely like ours — perhaps for any civil society whatever. Yet despite the obvious importance of the notion judges, philosophers, theologians, sociologists, historians and ordinary people often betray deep-seated confusions about it. This may be particularly so nowadays, when it looks to many as if determinism of some sort must be true, leaving little room for (at any rate) the particular notion of responsibility that our society has used ever since the arrival of Christianity.

In his engaging, learned and readable new book, John Lucas ventures an answer to our question. In many ways his answer is, or entails, a deliberate reaffirmation of certain traditional or intuitively natural views — e.g. about our freedom of will and consequent moral responsibility, and about the consequent need for punishment and reward in society; also about the merits of participative democracy as an expression of our belief in the different but equal responsibilities both of rulers and of ruled. Among the many other issues he touches on, Lucas also reaffirms views about the role of women in society which, while they are certainly traditional, will not seem intuitively natural to many "modern-minded" people (Lucas's phrase, p.93). (I confess that they do not seem so to me, which perhaps makes me modern-minded.) But this is a side-show; Lucas's central suggestion, an interesting and plausible one of which he gives a most original and able statement and defence, is that responsibility means what, given its etymology, we might expect it to mean: answerability (p.5). "To be responsible is to be answerable. . . I can equally well say I am answerable for an action or accountable for it. And if I am to answer, I must answer a question; the question is 'Why did you do

170