MEANING TO BE HUMAN

Conversations with George Lindbeck’s
*The Nature of Doctrine*

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This thesis is presented for the degree of
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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In his *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984), George Lindbeck offered a culture-theoretical approach to doctrine over against liberal and conservative approaches. Respondents to Lindbeck objected that he had misunderstood his opponents, but they displayed their own misunderstandings of his argument. I seek a more fruitful engagement with Lindbeck’s work, proceeding by way of constructed ‘conversations’ between Lindbeck and some of those who made substantial responses to his work from liberal and conservative perspectives. Some underlying issues are clarified with the help of the older voices of F.D.E. Schleiermacher and Karl Barth.

A recurring theme in these conversations is the nature of particularity and its implications for theology. Lindbeck criticises liberal theology on this point, yet he, like Schleiermacher, defines Christian particularity in terms of a ‘pretheological’ social anthropology and on this basis asserts that Christianity is a comprehensive faith. To avoid such incoherence, theological accounts of particularity must attend to Christianity’s own account of what its particularity is.

Though labelled ‘conservative’ by some, Lindbeck’s theory of doctrine relies on philosophical argument rather than the usual conservative grounds in tradition and/or scripture. Yet all such foundations are problematic insofar as they ignore the priority of the Christian confession and its witness to the intrinsic vulnerability of tradition and its sources. Lindbeck’s theory, and some conservative proposals, harbour ideological intrusions alien to the Christian confession, thereby illustrating that critique is needed precisely because of, and for the sake of, that confession.

The key issues emerging from these conversations with *The Nature of Doctrine* are the comprehensiveness of religious claims and the vulnerability of human discourse. To these I respond with a ‘confessional and therefore critical’ theological hermeneutic: confession of Jesus Christ as Lord implicates its confessors, and therefore the confession itself, in the vulnerability of human finitude and fallenness, from which Christian tradition and scripture are not excepted. This hermeneutic avoids problems noted in the various proposals offered by Lindbeck and his respondents, and poses challenges for future theorists of religion and doctrine.
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_Soli Deo Gloria._
ABBREVIATIONS & CITATIONS


BO  Brief Outline on the Study of Theology (Schleiermacher 1966).

CD  Church Dogmatics (Barth 1975 and 1956).

CF  The Christian Faith (Schleiermacher 1928).

GD  The Genesis of Doctrine (McGrath 1990).

LL  On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr Lücke (Letters to Lücke = Schleiermacher 1981).


ND  The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age (Lindbeck 1984).


OR  On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers (Schleiermacher 1988).

Speeches  Alternative brief title for OR.

TCW  Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective (Watson 1994).

ND25 changes the pagination of the original, but not the text. The foreword appears in ND on pp. 7-13, and in ND25 on pp. xxxiii-xxxviii, with different page breaks. In ND, chapter 1 begins on p. 15, while in ND25 it commences on p. 1, and subsequent page breaks are identical to those in ND. Thus, in the main text (chapters 1-6), page numbers in ND25 are 14 less than those in ND. In this study, page references to ND are to the original edition.

Works for which abbreviated titles have been provided are cited by abbreviation and page number, e.g., ND 56. Where it is clear which work is being cited, the abbreviated title may be omitted. Other citations are given in Author-Date format, as follows:

Author Year, Page(s), e.g., Smith 1988, 154-5.

Where an ‘n’ for ‘notes’ is required, it appears without punctuation, e.g., n35. ‘p.’ and ‘pp.’ for ‘page(s)’ are used occasionally for clarity.
Works with numbered sections or paragraphs are usually cited by those numbers (prefixed by §). Page numbers may also appear if the sections are long. In citations from Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith*, ‘ps’ stands for ‘postscript’, e.g., ‘CF §19.ps’ refers to the postscript appended to the discussion of paragraph 19.

Full details of all cited works appear in the bibliography in Author-Date order.