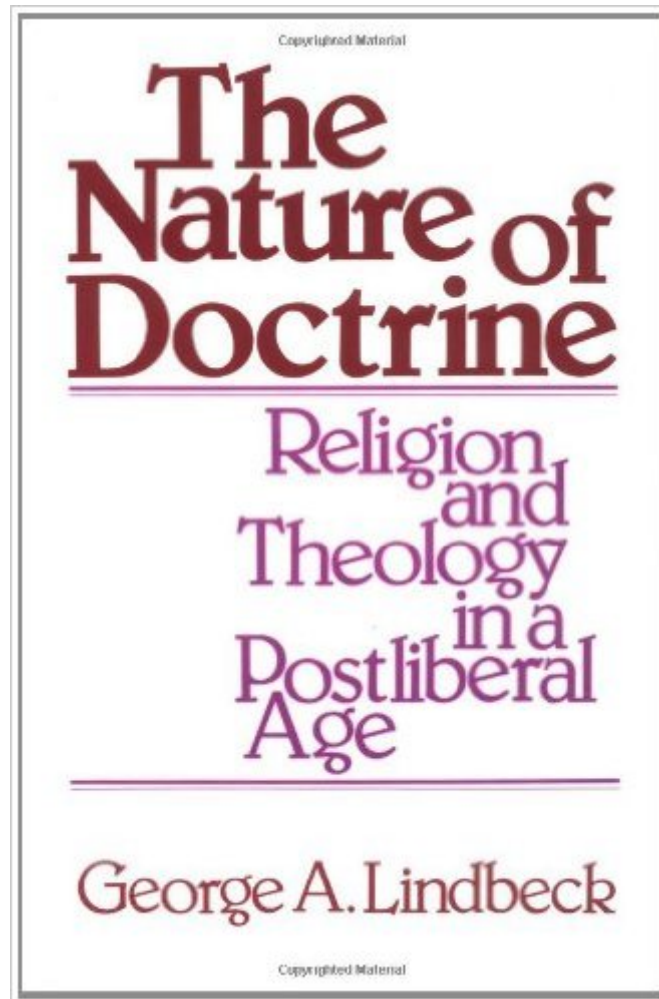


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The Nature Of Doctrine: Religion And Theology In A Postliberal Age



Synopsis

This groundbreaking work lays the foundation for a theology based on a cultural-linguistic approach to religion and a regulative or rule theory of doctrine. Although shaped intimately by theological concerns, this approach is consonant with the most advanced anthropological, sociological, and philosophical thought of our times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This work is a small classic in the 'postliberal' movement which originated under the influence of Lindbeck and Hans Frei. Other theologians who bear some of the same characteristics include Placher, Hunsinger, Thiemann, Tanner, Kelsey, and Hauerwas. Postliberals emphasize the specificity of Christianity (and all religions) and a Christological and intratextual method of theology that finds the meaning of Christian language within Scripture. This meaning is given in the praxis of the church and the task of the systematic theologian is to give a normative self-description of the community as well as to discern deficiencies and distortions in communal practices. New proposals are primarily pragmatic in that they aim to 'build up the body of believers.' Accusations of relativism and fideism naturally follow the postliberal denial of a universal ground of knowledge and their stress on internal description over external description (usually philosophy). However, Lindbeck believes the cultural/linguistic model will generate more conversation with other disciplines than the usual models (cognitive and experiential) since many historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers also employ approaches that utilize a cultural and/or linguistic scheme. Postliberal

theology is open to rational testing, but reasonableness is assessed by its ability to provide an intelligible interpretation, in its own terms, of the relevant practical and cognitive data of Christian believers. Ad hoc apologetics is preferred over systematic. The main argument of this book is twofold: religion (Christianity included) as a cultural/linguistic community and a regulative view of doctrines. The religion provides a frame of interpretation that shapes life, thought, and actions of the believer.

Ben Kickert. Review of George A Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984). In 1984 George A. Lindbeck presented a new approach to viewing religion and doctrine in his book *The Nature of Doctrine*. As the subtitled indicates, it was his desire to provide a "framework for discussion" (10) that was compatible with the emerging postliberal movement. What he came up with is non-theological approach that advocates a cultural-linguistic view of religion and a rules-based understanding of doctrine. He then evaluates his proposal in light of various test cases. This review will assess the usefulness of this approach and evaluate the book as a whole. The author makes his personal religious convictions clear. He is a Christian, with a great interest in unity in the midst of diversity (7-8). He wants to be able to adequately address not only divergent beliefs, but the dynamic nature of beliefs (9). In order to do this, he calls for a paradigm shift on behalf of theologians and students of religion (8). Lindbeck admits the approach he lays out is mostly theoretical, but invites others to evaluate it (11). The book is laid out in 6 chapters. The first serves as an introduction while chapters 2-3 address the cultural-linguistic approach. Chapters 4-5 deal with rules theory of doctrine while chapter 6 outlines a larger theological framework. In his introductory chapter, Lindbeck critiques the approaches to religion that were dominant in his day. He describes two major methods: the cognitive and the experiential-expressive. The former focuses on truth claims as the primary determinate of religion while the later uses experiences.

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