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## Review of “The Church in a Postliberal Age,” by George Lindbeck

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which “we sanctify the quotidian” (260). Joann Heaney-Hunter, using the patristic image of the inner life of the Trinity as *perichoresis*, investigates the various ways families can be seen as sacraments of this trinitarian dance, both in terms of the inner family relationship and in terms of an outward movement of service to the larger community. William Roberts develops the concept of the family as domestic church, specifically as sacrament of Christ’s presence in the world, an image which he extends beyond the traditional family structure to include such alternate family forms as the single-parent family.

Considering the variety of topics in these essays, as well as the range of complexity in their presentation, it seems that the book would be more useful as thought-provoking for faculty than as an assignment for students, although specific chapters could be usefully assigned. Still, these very qualities testify to the breadth of Bernard Cooke’s theological interests and writings, as well as to the significance of his contribution to American Catholic theology.

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*The Church in a Postliberal Age.* By George A. Lindbeck. Edited by James J. Buckley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002. xviii + 300 pages. \$27.00 (paper).

This collection of George Lindbeck’s essays, written over a thirty-year period, is an offering of Eerdmans’ “Radical Traditions” series compiled, with commentary, by James Buckley. It is an important collection, rewarding to read and helpful for those who teach and practice theology.

The volume begins with two autobiographical essays. In the first, Lindbeck traces the immense influence on his life’s intellectual projects of being raised in China as the child of missionaries. The second contains “Reminiscences of Vatican II” from his three-year stint as a Delegated Observer representing the Lutheran World Federation, another deep and significant influence on his theological project.

Although the book is divided into three parts (subtitled, respectively, “Evangelical,” “Catholic” and “Postliberal”), the essays throughout demonstrate Lindbeck’s deepest theological commitments and how they bear methodological and constructive fruit. First is the priority of the Church and the practice of the Christian life. In his “Foreword to the German Edition of *The Nature of Doctrine*,” he comments that if were to write his landmark 1984 book over again, “it should start with ecclesiology.” All the essays touch, in some way, on the nature of the church. In two that specifically focus on the question, he develops a vision of the church as at once an “ecumenically catholic and sectarian Christian *internationale*,” whose primary responsibility is to care for the quality of its communal life, and by doing so to be God’s witness to the world.

Although he uses the word “sectarian,” his is not an exclusively inward vision, as is reflected in his further commitments. One of these is the necessary relationship between the Jewish and Christian traditions, or between Israel and

the Church. If his reworked *Nature of Doctrine* would start with ecclesiology, this ecclesiology would include, as he calls it, "Israel-ology." Building on his ecumenical commitments, Lindbeck has made important contributions to the growing understanding of how the church has not "superseded" Israel but must rightly be understood as in fact "part of Israel," continuing and expanding the story of God's chosen people as it witnesses to the world. This vision of the church as co-mingled with Israel is clear not only in his final essay, where he takes on the question explicitly, but also in his exposition of scriptural hermeneutics, and a delightful essay where he offers an important re-reading of Martin Luther, tracing the similarities between Luther and "the rabbinic mind."

His commitment to ecumenical progress—or rather, the unity of the church—characterizes most of the essays. His essays on infallibility or on the doctrine of justification by faith are impressive, both in their scope and their constructive results. In these, he carefully dismantles deeply divisive doctrinal divisions by making what he calls a "metatheological" move—by transcending particular verbal formulations rooted in specific historical contexts (that apart from those contexts have become reified and nonsensical) to identify the more fundamental theological commitment at the heart of the doctrine. In doing so, he seeks to show how faithful Christians on both sides of a supposed denominational divide follow the same "grammatical rules," opening the way for progress toward unity.

His method is not restricted to doctrines but rather can be extended to the range of Christian practices. A rewarding example is his consideration of the Eastern Orthodox practice of the "Jesus Prayer." This mode of prayer regarded with suspicion by many Protestants is deftly demonstrated to be not only subversive of the Platonic presuppositions that shape it but largely in conform with fundamental Reformation principles. As with his essays on the church, Lindbeck shows how this practice—seemingly narrowly focused on God and individual or communal perfection—results, in fact, in the most sacrificial sort of service to the world.

Buckley notes that the book was compiled with "an audience of educated readers in mind." It seems on target. With the assistance of one who understands Lindbeck's work and the broader conversation in theology, well-formed adult lay persons and upper-level undergraduates should be able to understand most of these essays. Importantly, the book includes the final chapter from *The Nature of Doctrine*, providing the uninitiated with a starting point into his typology and the key features of postliberal theology.

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*Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context.* By Lieven Boeve. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003. 183 pages. \$30.00 (paper).

The challenge of postmodernity to the Christian faith in Europe has taken the forms of pluralism, secularism, detraditionalization, relativism



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