

In a paper delivered to an International Lonergan Congress in 1970, George Lindbeck celebrated the ecumenical significance of the recognition, shared by Lonergan and himself, that 'dogmatic propositions, even though they represent a genuine and unrepealable advance in understanding beyond what was explicitly revealed, nevertheless do this by identifying formal rules of right belief and speech. The "substance" of orthodoxy is still to be looked for in the "ordinary language" of prayer, worship and preaching and must be constantly and primarily nourished by other sources, above all Scripture. Dogmas are "second-level propositions" which guide the use of primary religious language. They should not become the "content" of piety' (*Foundations of Theology*, ed. Philip McShane, p. 122).

I have quoted that passage at some length because it contains the kernel of the programme which, fifteen years later, Professor Lindbeck has worked up into a full-blown sketch of what he now calls a 'post-liberal way of conceiving religion and religious doctrine' (p. 7). Although questions of Christian ecumenism remain central, the net is more widely cast to cover a general theory of religions and their doctrines. Philosophically, the principal debt he acknowledges is to Wittgenstein; hermeneutically, to Frei rather than Ricoeur (this is very much a 'Yale' book); theologically, to Barth rather than to Schleiermacher; culturally, this impressively counterfashionable essay is, in its pessimism, closer to Alisdair MacIntyre (who is not mentioned) than to any form of the dominant 'liberal individualisms' of the Western world.

Contemporary debate is still largely polarised between 'cognitive' and 'expressive' accounts of religious doctrines. Over against these, Lindbeck sets what he calls a 'cultural-linguistic' account of religion, to which there corresponds a 'regulative' theory of doctrine.

On religion, he finds Lonergan and (to some extent) Rahner guilty of staying within the 'expressivist' assumption that the study of religions 'on the whole supports the crucial affirmation of the basic unity of religious experience' (p. 32). In contrast, his own 'linguistic-cultural model is part of an outlook that stresses the degree to which human experience is shaped, molded, and in a sense constituted by cultural and linguistic forms ... to become religious involves becoming skilled in the language' (p. 34); 'experience, like matter, exists only insofar as it is informed' (p. 35). Positively, this is all well said, but his criticisms of Rahner (especially) often seem to me to miss the mark largely because, working in a very different philosophical idiom, he appears to assume that what Rahner calls 'basic experience' (and the adjective is, I admit, unhelpful) is *itself* in some obscure way 'categorical' in character; this leads him simply to travesty the theory of the 'anonymous Christian' (cf. pp. 56–7).

Lindbeck is at his best when arguing for the 'regulative' character of doctrine: the primary function of 'church doctrines ... is their use ... as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action' (p. 18); more strongly, 'What is innovative about the present proposal is that this (regulative function) becomes the only job that doctrines do *in their role as church teaching*' (p. 19, my stress); the 'abiding and doctrinally significant aspect of religion' is located 'in the story it tells and in the grammar that informs the way the story is told and used' (p. 80). This view of things leads this Lutheran to offer an account of 'infallibility' which, even as a reading of *Pastor Aeternus*, is arguably more persuasive than are the views of those at present officially responsible, in Rome, for assisting the episcopate in its task of protecting Catholic doctrine: 'an infallible church or magisterium would be one that does not make definitive (i.e. dogmatic) mistakes about what beliefs and practices are vitally necessary—or perilous—to the identity or welfare of the community' (p. 98). This is a far cry from the insidious and pathological illusion that, if an utterance is 'official' it can,

for that reason alone, be trusted not to be mistaken.

The weakest chapter is that devoted to the theory of religion. Setting out from the announcement that 'religions can be compared with each other in terms of their propositional truth, their symbolic efficacy, or their categorical adequacy' (p. 47), we are soon told that Lindbeck has distinguished 'three senses of "true"' and has shown that 'notions of truth' may be 'incommensurable' (p. 49). Perhaps. But if three (or more) notions of truth are *simply* 'incommensurable', how does one decide, and from where, that they are all truly characterized as notions of truth?

In terms of intellectual style and temper, Professor Lindbeck's strengths are close cousin to his limitations. Admirably impatient with the mistiness of the 'meaningful', he wants to sort things out. It is not perhaps surprising that, in a *formal* study, there should be little sense of the unmanageable richness of our histories. Nevertheless, skilled taxonomists rarely make good story-tellers. He is, I think it fair to say, closer in spirit to Cano than to Congar. But, in our present confusion, we have cause to be very grateful for the kind of skills which, in this essay, he brings to bear—with such intelligence and integrity—on a cluster of quite central issues.

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GOSPEL LOVE, A NARRATIVE THEOLOGY by John Navone, SJ. *Michael Glazier, Delaware, 1984, 169 pp. \$7.95*

The Cree Indians of Northern Sakatchewan are renowned as a story-telling people. Asked to explain the importance of telling stories one elderly Cree grandmother pointed out that this practice is essential for keeping a right balance in life. If someone is afflicted in mind, by grief or depression, telling a funny story will help the person because it will enable the troubles that are trapped inside him to escape. It will enable him to alter his perspective, to see things through other eyes with a different perspective from his own. A similar conviction has led to the writing of this book. "We may know and understand the Gospel narratives; we are blessed only if we are transformed by them in our basic self-others-world-God relationship" (p. 47). According to the *Introduction* narrative theology is "the sustained reflection of the theologian on the way we react to and appropriate the story of Jesus in our own lives" (p. 15). "It aims to provide a wealth of new insights into what it means to be human" (p. 16).

To demonstrate this thesis the author provides an initial chapter of general remarks, highlighting some of the characteristics of the four Gospels as narratives, and indicating what he takes to be the dominant quality each seeks to arouse in the reader. This is followed by a chapter in which the pattern of "Living in God's Love" is traced in the Synoptics, and in St. John. The much longer chapter 3 is the heart of the book. It discusses the pattern of "Dying in God's Love" by a treatment of each of the four passion narratives, analysed separately in considerable detail, in order to find the distinctive motif of each. Two final chapters resume the theme of the *Introduction* in a paraenetic manner, drawing out more fully the kind of transformation that ought to take place in a serious and 'open' reader of the Gospels.

The central portion of the book is undoubtedly the strongest. The highlighting of a desired dominant quality produces some interesting and stimulating insights: "Commitment to the Father's will for ourselves and others entails the suffering of over-coming self-will.... The sacrifice is worthwhile because we shall never know what God's love is like without it" (p. 30). The author believes that "the evangelists were not just writing biography nor were they concerned with the purely historical. They were writing from the resurrection faith, from which stems all the theology of the New Testament. They narrate the death of Jesus from this perspective; consequently the meaning of his death, rather than physical detail is their central concern" (p. 48). A