

Without the spin of some commentators on the council who say that Vatican II did not really intend any discontinuity with the Church's official self-understanding as it was before the council, O'C. shows how, on many matters, Vatican II constituted—to use his felicitous phrase—an “official ‘about-face’” (46). But these shifts were grounded in the rich Catholic tradition going back to the very origins of the church. O'C.'s first chapter on the impact of the so-called *ressourcement* scholarship of the decades before the council, a “return to the sources” that the council embraced, shows clearly its desire for continuity with the past, what O'C. calls “the apostolic identity of the church” (55–56). For that identity to be maintained, however, the council well knew that *aggiornamento* was needed: *ressourcement*, for the sake of *aggiornamento*. Proposing a distinction between “essential” and “nonessential” elements of the tradition (55), O'C. sees the issue underlying all the issues at Vatican II was the desire to rejuvenate this “apostolic identity” of the church within the contemporary world.

I suspect that O'C. submitted this manuscript before Pope Francis's election. I would imagine that, if O'C. had time to assess the vision of our present pope, a final chapter would have indeed shown that Pope Francis's interpretation of the message and meaning of the Second Vatican Council coheres with his own: the biblical vision of a merciful God proclaimed by the prophets, with primary concern for the suffering of the poor; a church less concerned about calling attention to itself but rather turning the camera on the God who calls the church into service as a missionary on behalf of God; a church that values equality of all in the church as much as proclaiming the equality of all Persons in the Trinity; a church that sees itself as a servant of humanity, working for unity and peace among religions and nations.

I highly recommend the book for a wide range of readers, from theologians to educated nontheologians, as a valuable contribution to the literature on the Second Vatican Council.

Ormond Rush
Australian Catholic University, Brisbane

No Irrelevant Jesus: On Jesus and the Church Today. By Gerhard Lohfink. Translated from the German by Linda M. Maloney. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2014. Pp. vii + 330. \$34.95.

Lohfink explains that his title refers to contemporary efforts to “tame” Jesus, presenting him as just another rabbi or prophet, rejecting his views on divorce, reducing his preaching to the psychological, his eschatology to the ethical, or individualizing his emphasis on the kairoic and the communal. But L. depicts Jesus as God's final and ultimate word, “the Word in which God has spoken God's self totally and without exception” (3). His book is about Jesus, but also about the church, the eschatological people of God Jesus founded and for whom he ultimately died. The book originated in a series of lectures given over the last several years; thus the chapters are relatively brief, easy to digest, and written to maintain the interest of the audience.

The topics L. treats are certainly contemporary. They include questions such as whether Jesus died for “many” or for “all,” how an individual could redeem the whole world, how the hungry will be filled in the reign of God, how sacraments mediate Christ through the community of the church, or whether the Qur’an sanctions violence in the name of religion. One chapter critiques Ernst Käsemann’s arguments about the canon grounding the many confessions rather than the unity of the church and his “scholarly fable” (129) about the Pauline church’s fundamentally charismatic structure. Another examines the contemporary notion of “values” disconnected from the fundamental nature of the human, and in the process repeats the “so-called Böckenförde Paradox” (267) that the modern liberal state is founded on political values that it cannot itself justify or guarantee, an argument made also by Pope Benedict XVI. L. also stresses that much of Jesus’ activity was directed to “gathering” and “uniting” Israel, a theme emphasized in his earlier *Jesus of Nazareth, What He Wanted, Who He Was* (2012). One of the best chapters is on how faith works, arguing that it must be learned, that it is mediated in the intimacy of the family, that it must grow, be ritually expressed, and that it lays claim to the whole of life. Another chapter that stands out treats the church’s proper name as assembly, tracing the roots of the word *ekklēsia*, contrasting its essentially visible, communal nature with various personal religions and pop purveyors of salvation.

A particular strength of the book comes from L.’s years of teaching the New Testament, while his long association with the *Integrierte Gemeinde* gives him a profound appreciation of the Jewish roots of Christian faith. Indeed at times the book reads like a rabbinical commentary on the biblical text. At other times, however, L. might have shown greater appreciation of religious traditions other than Judaism and Christianity. His reduction of Buddhism to a religion of escape from the world does not move beyond the “negative soteriology” of John Paul II’s *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1995), overlooking Buddhism’s profound teaching on compassion and its world-embracing ideal of Bodhisattva. L. dismisses other world religions, including Buddhism, as promoting self-redemption, rather than trying to see how God might work through other religions. He contrasts the Sermon on the Mount with Sura 9.5 from the Qur’an, the “sword verse” used by Islamic fundamentalists to justify violence against those they see as godless. Though he acknowledges that the verse is disputed in Islam, he argues that if Christians in Europe fail to reclaim the physicality of their faith, faced with the concreteness of Islam, Christianity will not have a chance.

The book harbors considerable wisdom. L. emphasizes that God always respects our freedom; describes the risen Jesus as “pure, unimaginable presence” (195); stresses the essential diversity of the church, which can never be a ghetto of like-minded people; and, through meditation on the story of David and Bathsheba, shows how the consequences of even forgiven sin linger in history with tragic effect. He argues that the failure of Christians to acknowledge Paul’s theology of history in Romans 9–11 resulted in the anti-Judaism that ultimately made possible the Holocaust. The book, with its exposition of Scripture, social commentary, and accessible chapters, is well suited for retreat reading, adult education groups, or homiletic material.

Thomas P. Rausch, S.J.
Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles