

J. sums up his life in these words: “I am both a serpent and a dove. The government thinks I’m too close to the Vatican, and the Vatican thinks I’m too close to the government. I’m a slippery fish squashed between government control and Vatican demands” (xvi).

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Liberalism versus Postliberalism: The Great Divide in Twentieth-Century Theology. By John Allan Knight. New York: Oxford University, 2013. Pp. x + 313. \$74.

We are starting to get enough distance from the twentieth century to begin proposing narratives of its theological unfolding. K.’s book is such a proposal, taking as its protagonists liberal and postliberal thinkers viewed through the lens of analytic philosophy. More specifically, he proposes that the “great divide” between liberal and postliberal theology is a matter of understanding the function of religious language, specifically around questions of validation and truth. His case for this proposal is an impressive one.

K. recounts the development of liberal theology from the nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries that was built on an apologetics directed at the Enlightenment and a shift to a focus on human subjectivity as the point of departure for theology. Taking an apologetic stance, liberal theology sought to validate religion’s claims in the face of skepticism and objections from Enlightenment thinking. It sought to ground this validation in epistemology, in the relation of the knowing subject to the object of faith. Epistemology and truth claims, in turn, were to be constructed according to the descriptivist theories of language first proposed by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell and then developed further by such figures as Anthony Flew and R. M. Hare. Flew’s falsification hypothesis, developed elsewhere in the philosophy of language, became the touchstone for the validity of religious truth claims.

Theologians struggled with these problems in the 1950s and 1960s. Schubert Ogden effectively demolished the premise of the falsification hypothesis by showing that the hypothesis itself was unfalsifiable. He went on to develop a plausible response to this approach in his own theology. At the same time, the referential theory of truth proposed in this philosophy of language began to show its limitations.

One response to liberal directions in theology worked out of a different take on modernity and philosophy of language. It sought its theological point of departure in the work of Karl Barth, where ontology had priority over epistemology; in other words, an understanding of belief had to be derived from a theology of God, not from the religious believer. A philosophy of language amenable to giving priority to the circle of faith (rather than to the claims of the world) could be found in the later Wittgenstein’s theory of language as the “language games” of the community that employed them, and in a theory of meaning not built on reference, but on meaning as used within those language games. This theory would be developed by Hans Frei,

especially in his work on biblical narrative, and by his colleague George Lindbeck with his notion of expressive-linguistic communities. While this notion gave inner coherence to a postliberal theology, it did not entirely satisfy the claims for truth: did truth have any referent beyond the community?

K. then turns to the question of meaning as articulated in liberal and postliberal approaches, and finds a resource in William P. Alston's work on meaning as a possible bridge between liberal and postliberal approaches to truth, and the limitations of each. K. does not pursue the works of those who have used Alston's insights to resolve the problems in this area; rather he analyzes the philosophical differences that have been at the basis of liberal and postliberal theology from the point of view of understandings of religious language and truth. And in so doing he has made a signal contribution to our understanding of twentieth-century theology.

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Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was. By Gerhard Lohfink. Translated from the German by Linda M. Maloney. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012. Pp. xvi + 391. \$39.95.

Lohfink, professor of New Testament at Tübingen from 1973 to 1987, resigned his position to live in the Integrierte Gemeinde after the model of Acts 2:42–47. This volume is the fruit of 50 years of scholarly research and faith-filled living.

Chapter 1 is decisive. Against many “historical Jesus” critics, L. demonstrates what Carl Becker had shown American historians in 1931: there are no uninterpreted facts, and bald facts communicate no meaning. The evangelists did what documentary filmmakers do—cut, recombine, allude, and comment—to interpret the meaning of Jesus for their community. The task is to find not “the facts” but the right interpretation of Jesus’ life. For this, faith is indispensable. L. interprets Jesus not against the Gospels, but as a member of a community that has given us the only credible interpretation of the facts.

L.’s 18 chapters follow the usual outline of Jesus books. The first 12 chapters describe what Jesus wanted, under the topics of the proclamation and meaning of the reign of God, the gathering of Israel, and the call to discipleship in many forms: Jesus’ parables and his miracles, his warnings about judgment, and his view of the OT and the Torah. The next six chapters describe who he was, living his Father’s will unconditionally, his commitment to the reign of God, and the ways his life and death for Israel laid a sovereign claim to which the church responded in faith. In brief, Jesus wanted a response to the reign of God breaking into history through his proclamation, teaching, and healings. His absolute commitment to that reign was both the eschatological fulfillment of Torah and the basis for his scandalous claims to ultimate authority. Those claims ground the church’s calling him Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, Lord.