

# The Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Dialogues



Edited by

Reimund Bieringer, Peter De Mey,  
Ma. Marilou S. Ibita, and Didier Pollefeyt

PEETERS



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ANNUA NUNTIA LOVANIENSIA  
LXXVI

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LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT  
2019

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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© Uitgeverij Peeters, Bondgenotenlaan 153, B-3000 Leuven (Belgium)  
ISBN 978-90-429-3911-0  
eISBN 978-90-429-3912-7  
D/2019/0602/52

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## Preface

On May 25-27, 2016, the international and interdisciplinary conference entitled "The Spirit, Hermeneutics and Dialogues" was held at the Maria Theresia College and the Rector's Salons in Leuven. This conference was the climax and conclusion of a four-year research project which was made possible by a grant from the Research Council of Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

This research project (2013-2016) is the fruit of an interdisciplinary cooperation between three Leuven professors from three different research units of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies: Prof. Reimund Bieringer from the research unit Biblical Studies, Prof. Didier Pollefeyt from the research unit Pastoral and Empirical Theology and Prof. Peter De Mey from the research unit Systematic Theology and the Study of Religions. The project proposal submitted in 2012 was entitled *New Hermeneutics for Renewed Dialogues. A Catholic Perspective on Crucial Theological Issues in Jewish-Christian and Ecumenical Dialogues in the Perspective of a Future-Oriented Interpretation of Key Johannine Texts*. As the title indicates, the goal of this project was to start from an interpretation of texts of the Gospel of John that played a key role in Jewish-Christian and ecumenical dialogues and to examine a future-oriented hermeneutics that could provide new perspectives on the key issues of the dialogues, and notably from a Catholic perspective.

Three researchers were hired to work in this project. Viorel Coman finished a 2017 doctoral dissertation on the issue of the *filioque*, including its postulated Johannine background, from an Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic perspective (supervisor: Peter De Mey, co-supervisor: Reimund Bieringer). The second person in our project team, Laura Tack, completed her doctorate in December 2016 with a dissertation entitled *Weg van de waarheid. Een historisch-kritisch en hermeneutisch onderzoek van Joh. 14,6 in het licht van de joods-christelijke dialoog*, freely translated: *(A)Way from/A Way of the Truth: An Historical-Critical and Hermeneutical Study of John 14:6 in Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue*. This dissertation covered the dimension of the Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian dialogue (supervisor: Reimund Bieringer, co-supervisor: Didier

Pollefeyt). A post-doctoral researcher, Dr. Ma. Marilou S. Ibita worked on Jewish-Christian dialogue, education and exegesis. She had completed her doctorate at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Leuven in 2012 with a dissertation entitled: "*If anyone hungers, he/she must eat in the house*" (1 Cor 11:34): *A Narrative-Critical, Socio-Historical and Grammatical-Philological Analysis of the Story of the Lord's Supper in Corinth (1 Cor 11:17-34)*. Dr. Ibita joined the team to cover the dimension New Testament, Jewish-Christian dialogue and practical theology. In many conference papers at SBL, EABS and CBL she presented the results of her research and authored a series of articles which have been or are about to be published.

The overview of the starting point and the goals of this research project can be summarized in three points. First, one of the main issues in Jewish-Christian dialogues centres on the question of how salvation is realized for both Jews and Christians. The central question 'after Auschwitz' (1933-1945) and 'after *Nostra Aetate*' (1965) is, if and how Christians can positively accept that the covenant of God with Abraham and Moses is still being honoured by God after the coming of Christ, and that through it God has provided Jews with unfailing access to truth and life.<sup>1</sup> In the attempts of developing such a consistent Christian theology of the 'never revoked covenant' (John Paul II, 1980) biblical texts often continue to be stumbling blocks. The most pertinent Scripture text in this discussion is: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NRSV).<sup>2</sup>

In the era of Pope Benedict XVI within official Catholic thinking about the relation between Judaism and Christianity we noted a reaffirmation of a Christocentric exclusivism, focusing on Christ as God's exclusive salvific mediator for all people, including the Jewish people. The document *Dominus Iesus* (2000) of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and more recently Benedict XVI's reformulation of the Good Friday Prayer (for the conversion of the Jews) (2008) are regarded as major crises in Jewish-Christian dialogue and demonstrate that Christian theology did not succeed to enter into a deeper post-supersessionist

<sup>1</sup> See John Pawlikowski, *Nostra Aetate Today: Reflections 40 Years After Its Call for a New Era of Interreligious Relations* (plenary address, Rome, Pontifical Gregorian University, September 25, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Laura Tack, "Weg van de waarheid? Een historisch-kritisch en hermeneutisch onderzoek van Joh 14,6 in het licht van de joods-christelijke dialoog." PhD. Diss., Catholic University of Leuven, 2015.

understanding of the paradoxical nature of the relationship between Judaism and the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the main areas of divergence among the Christian churches are related to the understanding and implementation of authority in the Church. Still, many scholars are of the opinion that these ecclesiological differences find their root cause in denominational differences involved in explaining the interplay of unity and diversity within the Trinity. In its ecumenical part, this publication contributes to the contemporary debate on the link between Church and Trinity, with particular attention to the issue of the *filioque*. The decision in the Latin Church to add this word to the Latin translation of one of the major creeds, approved by an ecumenical council, thereby indicating that the Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son, was one of the reasons for the great schism between East and West in 1054. For the interpretation of the *filioque*, for better or for worse, the following text has been crucial in the theological debate: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf" (John 15:26 NRSV).

Undoubtedly relations between Orthodox and Catholic Christians have improved in recent decades, including on this point.<sup>4</sup> Important steps in this direction are the occasional omission of the *filioque* in official liturgies, a decision taken by Pope John Paul II, and his request of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to clarify the current Catholic position in the debate in the document *The Greek and the Latin Traditions regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit* (1995), even if the reception of the latter text was not unambiguously positive.<sup>5</sup> Thanks to the Vatican document the theological dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics in the U.S.A. was able to issue an agreed

<sup>3</sup> See Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York, NY/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2000) and Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, eds., *Christians & Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Nashville, TN: Skylight Paths, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Reinhard Flogaus, "Wurzel allen theologischen Übels oder soteriologische Notwendigkeit? Zum Verständnis des Filioque in der orthodoxen, römisch-katholischen und evangelischen Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Die Filioque-Kontroverse: Historische, ökumenische und dogmatische Perspektiven 1200 Jahre nach der Aachener Synode*, ed. Michael Böhnke, Assaad Elias Kattan and Bernd Oberdorfer, *Quaestiones Disputatae* 245 (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2011), 134-179 and Johannes Oeldemann, "Das Filioque im ökumenischen Dialog: Die Ergebnisse der bisherigen Dialoge im Überblick," *ibid.*, 180-200.

<sup>5</sup> See Alfred Stirnemann and Gerhard Wilfinger, eds., *Vom Heiligen Geist: Der gemeinsame trinitarische Glaube und das Problem des Filioque* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1998).

statement on *The Filioque: A Church-dividing Issue* (2003). Yet, there is still no ecumenical convergence on the *filioque* at the level of international dialogue.

Third, at the heart of the obstacles in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, there is the role of Jesus Christ for salvation. Reflection on the relationship between Christ, the Spirit and the Father occurs in many ecumenical dialogues. The different and frequently opposing views of the participants in Jewish-Christian and ecumenical dialogues are in many cases based on certain established and mostly unquestioned interpretations of key texts in the New Testament. For this reason we are convinced that the divisive problems cannot be overcome without fundamentally new approaches to these texts. Therefore, it is one of the goals of this research project to investigate the role which specific interpretations of John 14:6 and 15:26 have played in the respective dialogues. Moreover, this project proposed a new hermeneutic which focuses on the dimensions of the Scripture text which project a vision of the (eschatological) future. A future-oriented hermeneutics represents 'what may be'. It projects a biblically inspired real and possible future from which a critique may be carried out regarding the *status quo* and a reversal towards exclusivism. This future-oriented hermeneutics fulfills the important role of rupture and transformation and is closely related to liberation-oriented approaches, which are concerned with giving a voice to the voiceless other, as well as to critically engage texts which express an eschatological and prophetic vision of solidarity, relationality and inclusion.<sup>6</sup> On the basis of this the project has worked on new interpretations of John 14:6 and 15:26. These new interpretations will substantially contribute to the Catholic position in the dialogues. They will also be a challenge to partners who participate in the dialogue from other faith convictions.

This conference was designed to foster interdisciplinary dialogue between the international guests and the international Leuven project team members as well as other researchers from our Faculty, as the list of contributors demonstrates. It is our hope that this scholarly dialogue will be fruitful for the continued ecumenical and Jewish-Christian dialogues on all levels. We are grateful for an exciting and challenging

<sup>6</sup> See Reimund Bieringer, "The 'Normativity of the Future Approach': The Authority of the Bible for Theology," in *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, *Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia* 61 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 27-45.

conference with creative papers, unsettling responses and fearless debates which are now made available to a greater public in this book.

We express our deep gratitude to all our contributors in this book as well as the Research Council of Katholieke Universiteit Leuven for the grant which made this project and this book possible. We thank Prof. Leo Kenis who as editor of *Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia* accepted the book and helped prepare it for publication. We also thank Prof. Anthony Dupont, the new editor of *Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia*, for his continued support and interest in this publication. We express our gratitude to Mrs. Rita Corstjens for her efficient and supportive work as well as Mr. Paul Peeters of Peeters Publishers for the pleasant cooperation.

*The Editors*

Shavuot/Pentecost 2018

Leuven