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A Contested Relationship in Context

Edited by
R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson



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Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel Fifteen Years after the Leuven Colloquium

Reinmund Bieringer

Understanding of the text is never definitive but rather remains open because the meaning of scripture discloses itself anew in every future.

—Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?"

"Anti-Judaism" in the New Testament and more particularly in the Gospel of John is a phenomenon that has been studied extensively for at least fifty years (see the bibliography in Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001a; 2001b). Between 1998 and 2001 an externally funded research project at the Catholic University of Leuven offered a new, decidedly interdisciplinary approach to anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John. The climax of the project was an international interdisciplinary conference that resulted in the publication of two books that have become a point of reference in the recent discussion.¹ Moreover, this line of research has been continued in Leuven in the past fifteen years in various ways. This contribution will consist of two parts. In the first part, I will focus on the research project "Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," the resultant conference, and publications. In the second part, I will report on the developments after the conclusion of the project in the area of John and Judaism in Leuven.

* In memoriam C. K. Barrett (1917–2011) in the year of his one hundredth birthday

1. Our Leuven research line on anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John was conceived when I heard a paper on this topic by Alan Culpepper during the 1993 Society of Biblical Literature meeting in Washington, DC. I wish to express my gratitude to Alan for his many contributions to this subject and for the invitation to the 2015 Mercer conference on John and Judaism.

1. The Research Project (1998–2001)

In 1997 the Research Foundation Flanders approved a four-year research grant spearheaded by my Leuven colleague Didier Pollefeyt and myself as principal investigators. The grant proposal was titled "The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Dialogue: An Interdisciplinary Investigation of the Theology of Jewish-Christian Relations Taking John 8:31–59 as Starting Point" (FWO, 1998–2001). The two major fruits of this research grant were the Leuven colloquium in the year 2000, with its resultant publications and the doctoral dissertation by the project researcher, Frédérique Vannieuville (2001; see below). The project was decidedly and deliberately interdisciplinary, and as such it was marked by a real cooperation between biblical exegetes and a theorist of Jewish-Christian dialogue who is at the same time an ethicist.

1.1. The Leuven Colloquium "Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel and Jewish-Christian Dialogue" (2000)

The Leuven colloquium was one of the first conferences of the internet age, making full use of the opportunities this medium provided for the organization of conferences. The conference, which was held in cooperation with the Netherlands School of Advanced Studies in Theology and Religious Sciences (also known as NOSTER), the Institutum Judaicum, Brussels, and the Belgian National Catholic Commission for Relations with Judaism, was characterized by a unique methodology that was so different that we did not have the courage to follow it again afterwards, even though we remain convinced that it was effective and successful. With the letter of invitation, the potential speakers received a list of eight topics for discussion (see appendix). They were asked to write a paper that would deal with a minimum of two of the eight topics. The papers (nineteen from an exegetical perspective and six from a Jewish-Christian dialogue perspective) of the twenty-five presenters who accepted the invitation² were

2. The exegetical papers were by C. K. Barrett, J. Beutler, J. H. Charlesworth, R. F. Collins, R. A. Culpepper, M. C. de Boer, H. J. de Jonge, J. D. G. Dunn, J. Lambrecht, J. Lieu, M. J. J. Menken, S. Moyter, A. Reinhartz, J.-M. Sévin, P. J. Tomson, G. Van Belle, J. W. van Henten, U. C. von Wahlde, and J. Zumbstein. The papers in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue were by R. Burggraeve, J. Denker, H. H. Henrix, R. Hoet, B. Klappert, and S. Schoon.

collected before the conference, and two-volume sets of the bound hard copies and were distributed to the presenters before the conference. Meanwhile in Leuven, Didier Pollefeyt, Frédérique Vandecasteele-Vannieuville, and I spent several weeks reading the papers and identifying key quotations in their texts. We looked for similarities and differences, on the basis of which we determined a structure in and among the papers. This work resulted in a PowerPoint presentation of the core points of all the papers and their contributions to the discussion.

At the conference itself, which was held from January 17–18, 2000, three papers were presented in full during the public opening session, those by James D. G. Dunn (2001), R. Alan Culpepper (2001b), and Simon Schoon (2001). After this the colloquium continued as an expert seminar in the presence of a smaller number of interested students and colleagues who joined the presenters around a big oval table in the senate room of the rector of the Catholic University of Leuven. What was most characteristic for the methodology of the seminar was the fact that the participants did not read their papers, but their positions were presented by Pollefeyt and myself by means of the abovementioned PowerPoint presentation. This allowed us to discuss the content according to the central themes represented in the papers, which became the backbone of our introductory article in the book (Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vannieuville 2001c, 2001d). By virtue of this methodology, the discussion was very focused, and the invited scholars enjoyed extended time for seminar discussions among one another and with the audience.

The Leuven project was characterized by a strongly interdisciplinary perspective, which resulted in the need to supplement historical and literary-critical studies of the Gospel of John with a hermeneutical approach. This challenge is also present in the collection of contributions, which was published immediately after the colloquium.

1.2. The Publications titled *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (2001)

After the conference our research team, Pollefeyt, Vandecasteele-Vannieuville, and I, composed the introductory article of the planned volume of the conference papers (Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vannieuville 2001c, 2001d).³ As none of us had participated in the colloquium with a

3. An adapted and abridged version of the introductory article is also available

paper, in this introductory article we presented our position in dialogue with all the papers to be published in the book. The full book with all the twenty-four contributions plus our introductory article was accepted for publication by Deo Publishing, a new publisher that worked closely with NOSTER at the time. When the book was first published in 2001 it had become volume one of the Jewish and Christian Heritage series published by Royal Van Gorcum. Since then the book has migrated to Brill (Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001b). In addition to the hardcover edition, a concise paperback edition with thirteen of the twenty-five contributions (all taken from the exegetical part) was published by Westminster John Knox on the basis of an agreement between publishing houses and with no involvement of the editors of the volume. We were not consulted in the decision about which articles were to be taken up into the original edition (Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001b). The book publication was supported by a website featuring the bibliography, the table of contents of each edition of the book, a list of book reviews, and an excerpt of the introductory article (Bieringer, Pollefeyt, & Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001c; 2001d).⁴ Between 2001 and 2005 about twenty-five book reviews appeared in a broad spectrum of exegetical journals.⁵

The impact of the book is very difficult to gauge. To be sure, it appears in a large number of bibliographies and in many synthetic bibliographical footnotes as an informative volume on John and anti-Judaism. For some time and sometimes still today it has been referred to as a book that offers the state of the question. As such it seems to be a welcome reference work that saves many authors the work of a composing a *status quaestionis* on the subject. The diversity of the contributions of the book offers a broad spectrum of positions that has something to offer for everyone. While the

online: Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, "Wrestling with Johanne Anti-Judaism: A Hermeneutical Framework for the Analysis of the Current Debate," <http://tinyurl.com/SBL0398b>.

4. "Ancient Judaism and the Fourth Gospel" n.d.

5. De Kruijf 2001; Lincoln 2002; Sertor 2002; Burnett 2002; Danker 2002; Gutierrez 2002; Ashton 2002; Kysar 2002; Edwards 2002; van Tilborg 2002; Porter 2002; Smalley 2002; Scholtissek 2002; 2003; 2004; Fuchs 2003; Köstenberger 2003; de Ruiter 2003; Good 2003; Labahn 2003; van der Watt 2004; Chilton 2004; Devillers 2004; Gourgues 2005.

general references to the book are mostly in summary fashion, the specialized academic interaction is focused on individual scholars' contributions.

The actual contribution of the volume to the scholarly discussion on John and anti-Judaism can perhaps be summarized in the following five points:

1. The volume documents the great variety of positions among contemporary scholars concerning the issue: Is/was the Gospel of John anti-Jewish?
2. The volume clearly illustrates the choice before which the gospel places every reader/interpreter, namely: Do we defend John or consider John as part of the problem (dangerous potential)? Here again the book is a mirror image of the great diversity of answers among contemporary scholars.
3. The book is a strong plea for contextualizing the problem of John and anti-Judaism, and as such it is a warning against all those who use decontextualized readings to construct a clear allegedly Johannine position, either to use it in support of their own highly problematic views or to condemn the alleged Johannine anti-Judaism.
4. The volume also is a clear witness to the need of hermeneutics in any exegetically and theologically responsible approach to John and anti-Judaism. This remains true even if we have to admit that the specific hermeneutical approach spearheaded in the introductory article of the book was far from gathering a following.
5. The volume prefigures the subsequent shift of focus from "John and anti-Judaism" to "John and Judaism," which is the consequence of the realization that before one wants to speak in earnest about John and anti-Judaism, one needs to pay close attention to John and Judaism.⁶

We also need to ask what got lost or was opposed as much as what was not taken note of and continues to be a challenge fifteen years later. We have identified five areas to be discussed here: the interdisciplinary approach, the interfaith dimension, the ecumenical dimension, the theological challenge, and the need for hermeneutics. First and foremost, we

6. It may be noted that the analogous publication to *John and Anti-Judaism* about Paul, which was edited by Bieringer and Pollefeyt, follows this trend and is titled *Paul and Judaism* (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2012a).

needed to mention the interdisciplinary character of the conference and the volume. This clearly was one of the most important challenges that the conference and the volume offered. It is symptomatic that this interdisciplinary character was already lost in the paperback edition where only contributions from one discipline, namely, biblical exegesis, were retained. Even the complete volume seems to have been received more strongly in exegetical circles than in those of Jewish-Christian or Christian-Jewish circles. Despite the efforts of the project and the colloquium, we do not see a lasting effect of interdisciplinary dialogue and cooperation on this topic, which is needed more today than ever before.

There was also an initial, timid interfaith dimension, which was most clearly reflected in the concluding ritual of the conference. This dimension has since then increased in international critical scholarship (see, e.g., Donahue 2005) and is thankfully also an important dimension of the present volume.

In fact, the colloquium and the book had a stronger albeit implicit intra-Christian ecumenical dimension, which admittedly, however, did not transcend what is (and was already fifteen years ago) a reality in academic circles of New Testament scholars, namely, that scholars from different Christian traditions freely communicate and exchange scholarly views without all too quickly focusing on what divides them. Neither the interfaith nor the inner-Christian ecumenical dimensions of this issue have received much attention in the past fifteen years. The attempts noticeable in some parts of the conference and the book to suggest that an exclusively historical contextualization of the problem is not sufficient for a scholarly debate on "John and Anti-Judaism" already met with a certain skepticism during the conference. This has not changed in the fifteen years of effects of the book on scholarship.

Our research project and our contribution to the conference volume started from the premise that in a theological perspective readers of the Gospel of John who accept that it has a revelatory authority have to choose between three possibilities: (1) John is anti-Jewish (supersessionist), and this is authoritative for believers; (2) John is not anti-Jewish (supersessionist), and this is authoritative for believers; and (3) John is anti-Jewish (supersessionist), and this is not authoritative for believers.⁷ To our

knowledge in academic scholarship there is no one who holds that those who consider the Gospel of John to have revelatory authority need to be anti-Jewish or supersessionist. They reach this goal by either claiming that the gospel is not anti-Jewish or by holding that the gospel is anti-Jewish but that these anti-Jewish aspects themselves have no revelatory authority and are therefore not binding for believers. Most of scholarship has invested its efforts in trying to demonstrate that the gospel of John is not anti-Jewish. But as scholarship in general and the Leuven colloquium as well as the collection of essays in particular demonstrated, there are also those who admit that there are issues or problems in the gospel but try to explain them as not binding for the contemporary reader since they were contextual elements of a particular conflict situation between the first-century synagogue and the church that have since changed, or they were part of an inner-Jewish dispute. However, the research project, the introductory article, and the dissertation that was completed as part of the project research came to the conclusion that there is a dangerous potential in the theology of the Gospel of John that goes beyond the first-century conflict and inner-Jewish dispute, a dangerous potential that continues to be an issue in the world before the text and that can only be addressed adequately in a hermeneutical approach. After fifteen years we need to face the fact that this aspect of the project has hardly been engaged in research, which has only tended to revisit previous positions.

Finally, we also note that our plea for a theological-hermeneutical reading of the issue of anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John that follows, builds on, or replaces the historical-hermeneutical readings that have generally been practiced went largely unheeded. This is, of course, closely related to the previous point. The conviction that historical criticism can solve the issue has continued to be the prevalent position in the time since the colloquium. Theological-hermeneutical studies, if they are at all seen as necessary, are considered to be the responsibility of systematic theologians, not of exegetes.

Looking back over the past (more or less) fifteen years of research in the area of John and (anti-)Judaism we realize that despite the frequent references to the collective volume *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*,

7. The fourth logical possibility (John is not anti-Jewish [supersessionist], and this is not authoritative for believers) is not considered in the discussion. It would imply

that people are defending being anti-Jewish or supersessionist against the Gospel of John, which they understand as not anti-Jewish or not supersessionist.

the unique contributions of the book have not had a lasting effect on the ongoing research in this area.

2. Ongoing Research in the Area of John and (Anti-)Judaism in Leuven (2000–2016)

In the second part of this contribution we shall give an overview of the continuation of the research carried out in Leuven in the area of John and (anti-)Judaism since the Leuven colloquium in 2000. This section will be subdivided into two parts. The first will focus on the last part of the project research until about 2005. The second part will treat the continuation and new developments in Leuven research in this area.

2.1. Research in the Period Immediately Following the Colloquium (2000–2005)

In addition to composing their own introductory article for the collection of the colloquium papers and editing those papers for publication, the researchers of the project made two important additional contributions to the research, the completion of a doctoral dissertation and the drafting of a comprehensive article.

In the year after the colloquium, project researcher Yanneuville (2001) completed and defended her doctoral dissertation, titled “Jesus and ‘the Jews’ in John 8:31–59: An Interdisciplinary Investigation into the Problem of Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John.” This historical and literary-critical study of John 8:31–59 in light of the anti-Jewish potential of this text includes a hermeneutical approach. In the epilogue the author writes:

Our main concern was to develop a Christology that is not supersessionist and not simply exclusivist, consciously taking into account the Jewish perspective, in order to deal with the potential violence towards Judaism in Christian identity affirmation as developed by the Fourth Evangelist. In the present study we have been looking for the key to such a hermeneutics in the theology of the Fourth Gospel itself.

At the end of the epilogue she concludes: “In this study we have argued that John’s gospel itself contains elements that can overcome its exclusivist claims in order to restore the primacy of God’s dream of salvation for all in his message” (222–23).

The concluding article of the project, authored by Pollefeyt and myself, was published in the *Festschrift* for Johannes Beutler in 2004.⁸ In this contribution we attempt to make a synthesis of the findings of our project and in important points go beyond our introductory article to *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*. We argue that in the context of this gospel, the term *oi Ioudaioi* has a very specific, unprecedented meaning. It is clear that the polemic that is expressed by means of this term does not go against *oi Ioudaioi* as an ethnic designation or against Judaism as a faith. Rather, the evangelist frequently refers to *oi Ioudaioi* as people who share the same *ēthos* and faith tradition as he but who fundamentally differ from him by not becoming disciples of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. It is against these people that the evangelist uses the expression *oi Ioudaioi*. In fact, the evangelist considers himself and the disciples of Jesus to be more faithful to the faith tradition of his own Jewish people than those who do not follow Jesus. In the words of the 2004 article:

we note that the fourth gospel is in no way opposed to Judaism as an ethnic or racial entity nor to Judaism as a religion as such. The gospel of John is never critical of all⁹ the Jews of his time or of previous centuries. His distinction within the Jewish people between those who are faithful to God’s covenant and those who are not reminds us of a central feature of the Biblical tradition where the Israelites or the Jews are constantly

8. For other contributions of the same period, see a short entry on “*Ἰοὶ Ἰουδαῖοι*” in the *Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Pollefeyt and Bieringer 2005). See also Pollefeyt 2001, 2002.

9. It should, however be noted, that, by using *oi Ioudaioi* about seventy times in his gospel, by using it with frequently changing referents, and by often using it in a negative sense, the evangelist has created a potentially dangerous expression. For the frequency of the expression and its general undifferentiated semantic quality facilitate the formation of stereotypes and generalizations. When using the expression *oi Ioudaioi* with a negative connotation, he restricts it to one group within Judaism, namely, his own contemporaries and neighbors who did not believe in Jesus. By using such a general expression for such a specific group, he creates the danger that his statements might be generalized to all the Jews of all places and times. Perhaps we even need to admit that it would be in keeping with the logic of the gospel (though not consciously intended) to transfer the statements about *oi Ioudaioi* to all the members of the Jewish people (of all places and times) who decide not to believe in Jesus. It is for this reason that the problem of John and anti-Judaism cannot simply be solved by placing the anti-Jewish statements into their original historical context.

reproached for their infidelity to the covenant with God. (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2004, 20)

The most important implication of this is that it would be more precise to speak of "anti-unbelievers-in-Jesus-ism" instead of anti-Judaism.

In addition to this terminological clarification, in our article we also discuss whether this interpretation of *ἡ τοῦδαίου* makes John's polemic any less dangerous. The result of our line of argument is that this "anti-unbelievers-in-Jesus-ism" has at least as much dangerous potential as what is called anti-Judaism.¹⁰ The problem is that the sole criterion for dividing the Jews into good ones (disciples) and bad ones (unbelievers) is whether they believe in Jesus or not. The Fourth Evangelist proves to be incapable of thinking of any explanation for Jewish unbelief in Jesus except their alleged moral corruptness and their lack of understanding of or their infidelity to their own Jewish faith.¹¹

We state in our 2004 article:

Faith in Jesus thus becomes the litmus test for any faithful Jew. Thus the fourth gospel leaves no room for the possibility of people who are faithful to their Jewish faith but do not believe in Jesus. In addition and closely related, the Gospel of John gives as the deepest reason for a persons refusal to believe in Jesus human sinfulness.¹² In this way of thinking, all those who refuse to believe in Jesus prove by their refusal that they are morally corrupt.¹³ Virtuous unbelievers (in Jesus) are unthinkable in

10. "Our interpretation of the fourth gospel also implies that the harsh reproaches which the Johannine Jesus addresses to 'the Jews' are, in John's perspective, not addressed to Judaism as such, but to those whom the evangelist considers to be unfaithful to their own Jewish faith. He could have addressed most of those reproaches to many Jews of the pre-Jesus period as well" (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2004, 20). For instance, they do not keep the law (7:19); have never heard God's voice or seen his form and do not have God's word abiding in them (5:37–38); do not know God (7:28; 8:19–55; 15:21; 16:3); are from below (8:23); do not know the truth (8:32); are from their father, the devil, and choose to do their father's desires (8:44); and hate the Father (15:23–24).

11. See, however, Rom 11:11, where the apostle Paul understands Jewish unbelief in Jesus as part of God's plan to bring the gentiles into the church.

12. See "Christology and anthropology are thus inseparably linked in the Fourth Gospel. Who people are is determined by their response to Jesus" (O'Day 1995, 555). The surprising thing is that she does not seem to see anything wrong with this.

13. In later theological debates about this issue, provision was made for the pos-

such an approach. This religiously and ethically disowns and disinherits all those Jews who decide not to believe in Jesus and leaves no room for any authentic Jewish faith for those who have chosen not to become followers of Jesus. (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2004, 21–22; for a similar argument see also Bieringer 2005)

It is clear that all those who follow this line of argument by allowing their own faith perspective to be challenged by the faith of Jewish believers are faced with very fundamental questions concerning the ethical foundations of their own faith documents and ultimately faith itself. In 2004 we formulated it as follows,

A challenge for Jewish-Christian dialogue is how it is possible to develop a 'Christology' which does not continue to establish the authenticity of the Christian faith in Jesus at the cost of authentic Jewish faith. In the same way, Jewish-Christian dialogue will only be possible if Jewish believers are found ready to accept that scripture allows for the possibility of authentically embracing faith in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2004, 22; see also Reinhartz 2001a, 88–95; Diefenbach 2002, 258–62)¹⁴

ability that a person who rejects faith in Jesus might ultimately be guided by a misunderstanding, so that the person *de facto* is not rejecting Jesus but an erroneous image of Jesus. This position assumes that any virtuous person who would come to know Jesus truly and without distortions would come to faith in him. The question must be raised whether we need to go one step further and assume that it is also possible that under certain circumstances a person who is morally good and has a correct image of Jesus might still not believe in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God.

14. Reinhartz (2001a, 89) works out "the Jews' point of view" in John 8:31–59 along the lines of monotheism and monolatry and identifies "the basic issue at stake" as "whether or not Jesus and the claims made for him are an enhancement of monotheism, that is, a 'new and improved' but fundamentally recognizable revelation or, conversely, a radical infringement on this basic Jewish belief" (95). We are convinced that the challenge is for Jews and Christians to accept that the respectively other arrives at opposite answers to this question and has, at least in their own judgement, authentic reasons for doing so. See also the section "3.2.3.2 Der exklusive Glaubensanspruch Israels" in Diefenbach 2002, 258–62. In an attempt to understand how contemporary Jewish believers at the time of Jesus might have reacted to the claims of Jesus he arrives at the conclusion: "Die Juden wollten so einerseits den exklusiven monotheistischen Glauben Israels nach innen wahren und andererseits sich als Glaubensgemeinschaft konsolidieren. Denn die obsolekte inklusive Glaubensüberzeugung Jesu, er sei der Sohn Gottes' und Gott jahwe sein Vater, musste den 'Juden' zur Zeit Jesu als nicht

Finally, we also dealt with the question of what responsible but honest interpreters can be expected to do with the problematic, potentially violent dimensions of authoritative texts of their own (or others') traditions. The final point that we reached in this article is put into words as follows:

we are convinced that one may not reduce the Gospel of John to its anti-Jewish dimensions, nor overlook the universal concern of God's saving love, expressed so eloquently by the Fourth Evangelist. The Johannine Jesus says about himself: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). God's ultimate concern is life and salvation for the world in an all-inclusive sense. We understand God's desire of salvation for all to be so strong that the rejection of Christ as mediator of salvation is not necessarily a reason for excluding people from salvation. (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2004, 31–32; see also Bieringer, Pollefeyt, and Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001c, 38–44)

In the first years after the scheduled end of the funded research project, very significant developments happened in a few additional publications. A more nuanced understanding of both the semantics of *oi Ioudaïoi* and the theological background of the alleged Johannine anti-Judaism was proposed. Finally, the biblical hermeneutics of the project were deepened as a hermeneutics of life. In this period the foundations were deepened for our research of the following ten years.

2.2. Continuation of the Leuven Research after the Completion of the Project (2006–2016)

In the period between 2006 and 2016 (and beyond) we distinguish two phases. In the first we turned to the letters of Paul with analogous research questions (2006–2011), only to return to different aspects in Johannine studies that continued and deepened the earlier project (2011–2016).

2.2.1. Paul and Judaism

In 2007 both the Research Council of Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and the Research Foundation Flanders approved a research project titled

thorakonform erscheinen" (260). This, however, raises the question how it was possible that some Jews were able to accept Jesus's claims and believe in him.

"New Perspectives on Paul and the Jews: A Critical Investigation into the Significance of the Letters of Paul in Light of the Historical Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity with Particular Attention Paid to 2 Cor 3:6.7–18 in Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue." The project was again directed by Didier Pollefeyt and me (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2007–2010). We conceived this research project in close continuity with the previous project.

In the project proposal we wrote the following:

The intended project is a logical continuation of our earlier research in so far as we shall concentrate on the role of the theology of Paul in the process of early Christian self-definition in relation to contemporary Judaism. The research gives special attention to 2 Cor 3:6.7–18, a text which has not played an important role in the context of research on Paul's relationship to the Jewish people (cf. Duff 2004).

We formulated the research question as follows: What does 2 Cor 3:6.7–18 tell us about the continuity or discontinuity between Paul's own "Jewish faith" and his newfound faith in Jesus? We described the significance of this project as follows: "The answer to this question has significant implications concerning the crucial question for Jewish-Christian dialogue, namely whether Paul became the founder of Christianity in this process of separation while Jesus had stayed completely within the boundaries of Judaism." In an initial way we described the intended contribution of the project as follows:

The innovative nature of this project is to be found in the critical rejection of the prevalent paradigm which dissolves the tension between Paul and Judaism by understanding Paul exclusively as being in harmony with his Jewish background (much of the so-called "New Perspective"). In the alternative position which our research shall develop it is, however, not our intention to support reactionary tendencies which deconstruct the "New Perspective" in order to simply reaffirm Christian identity against Judaism (cf. Gundry, 2005).

This research project was again characterized by a strong interdisciplinary dimension and by a decidedly hermeneutical approach. It resulted in two conference volumes (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2012a; Bieringer et al. 2014) and two essentially interdisciplinary doctoral dissertations, one with a strong focus on the study of Christian-Jewish dialogue (Bolton 2011) and

one with a primarily biblical-hermeneutical approach (Nathan 2010; see also Nathan and Bieringer 2011).

The interdisciplinary and hermeneutical preferences of this project and of its research results are evident in the concluding section of the introductory contribution by Pollefeyt and me in the first conference volume:

In our understanding, from a Normativity of the Future approach, we are encouraged by our vision of the future to position ourselves on the borderlands of inclusivism-pluralism, certainly as it concerns the Jewish-Christian relationship. God is in a permanent relationship with the Jewish people. That guarantees their salvation. Where Paul lost sight of that in his writings, the contemporary church community needs to enter into constructive dialogue with him in light of his own future vision. We can also agree with those who, like Sanders, critique the all too common power plays attendant to soteriological debates. Christ does not need to save everybody directly in order for him to remain as the Christ. God has many ways to express his commitment and love to creation. Regaining a theocentric vision, the real *telos* of Paul's new creation, is actually continuing the Pauline project and exploring further the avenues he all too vaguely mapped out. (Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2012b, 14)

By way of conclusion we would like to stress that the "Paul and Judaism" project benefited enormously from the preceding "anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel" research. At the same time its focus almost automatically became broader as the narrow focus on anti-Judaism or anti-Jewish potential was replaced by the new focus on Judaism as a whole. This widened perspective became crucial for the research of the following years.

2.2.2. The Return to the Gospel of John

After a five-year excursus into the realm of Paul and Judaism, our research returned to the Gospel of John by many avenues and in a much broader perspective. Our research reached its broadest perspective in our attempt to earn research funds through a GOA¹⁵ grant from the Research Council of Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. The project proposal was titled "Dialogue as Future—The Future of the Dialogues: Towards an Adequate Hermeneutics of Sacred Texts in Jewish-Christian, Ecumenical and

Christian-Muslim Dialogues." In this interdisciplinary research program Pollefeyt and I proposed to cooperate with Peter De Mey, a specialist in inner-Christian ecumenical theology, and Maha El Kaissy, a researcher in Islamic studies. This proposal was not able to garner support from the funding body and as a result was never carried out. The intended research was described as follows in the research proposal:

We will investigate *how* Jewish-Christian and ecumenical dialogues are impacted by interpretations of the Bible and the way in which this can *mutatis mutandis* also be said of the Qur'an in Christian-Muslim dialogue. But we will also examine the ways in which religious concepts of the future function or might function in biblical studies/Qur'an studies and how a future-oriented hermeneutics can inform the study of Jewish-Christian, ecumenical and Christian-Muslim dialogues. Conversely, we will analyse how research on these dialogues informs, challenges and possibly transforms the future-oriented biblical hermeneutics. *Four research groups*—which are embedded in biblical theology, pastoral theology, systematic theology and religious studies respectively—plan on following the thematic framework of the future-oriented hermeneutics as a means of focusing and structuring their research in the coming years, while employing the expertise and critical mass they have already acquired in previous years.

With this proposal our research agenda had reached its broadest perspective. Its goals were only partially realized in a much smaller research project, which we shall describe in the next section.

2.2.3. The Dialogues Project

In 2013 the Research Council of the Catholic University of Leuven approved a four-year interdisciplinary project titled "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" (2013–2016). The promoters of this project were Pollefeyt (Jewish-Christian dialogue), De Mey (ecumenism), and I (exegesis). There were three researchers working in this project: Viorel Coman (2016) worked on the issue of the *filioque*, including its postulated Johannine background, in an Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue perspective. Laura Jack (John and Jewish-Christian dialogue) and a postdoctoral researcher, Marilou Ibita,

15. GOA stands for "geconcentreerde onderzoeksactie", i.e., concerted research programme.

concentrated on the dimension of Jewish-Christian dialogue, education, and exegesis. In what follows, due to our focus in this contribution, we shall focus on the work of Tack and Ibita.

Tack (2015) wrote her dissertation on John 14:6 in exegetical and Jewish-Christian dialogue perspective. She interprets the "way" in Johannine, synoptic, and Philonic perspective as the way to the Father and as such as relational. According to her, an isolated reading of "the way" in 14:6 as a proof text is particularly dangerous because the role of the Father in the process of salvation is not focused on (see, however, 6:44) and because nothing is said about the Spirit in this verse. "Truth" is equally interpreted as relational, as the truth concerning Jesus's identity, which is shaped in relationship with the Father. Tack interprets "life" as a gift that comes forth from the loving union between the Father and the Son. As relational terms, "way," "truth," and "life" are thus not to be read as exclusively referring to the Son but as relational, demonstrating how the Son is way, truth, and life in relation to the Father, illustrating their unity in diversity. Tack notes the significant absence of the Spirit or Paraclete in this context.

Tack further argues that the "I am" sayings and 14:6 in particular are not to be understood as theophanic or epiphanic, nor as identification formulae ($A = B$) but as metaphoric (A is B and not B), which implies that in John 14:6 Jesus is not presented simply as identical with way, truth, and life in the literal sense. Tack interprets the *kal* between way, truth, life as exegetical. This implies that the nouns "truth" and "life" explain in which way Jesus is seen as the way. Moreover, the tension and ambiguity created by the metaphors suggest in the context of the entire gospel that Jesus's identity is shaped by his relationship with the Father, that Jesus is part of the dynamic and relational unity in diversity between Father and Son. By formulating 14:6 in a christocentric way, however, without making explicit the relations of the Son with the Father and the Spirit, the author of this verse created a dangerous potential of Christomonism. Tack tries to counter this dangerous potential in her hermeneutical part by thoroughly contextualizing the verse and reading it in light of the vision of 14:2–3, the many "mansions" in the Father's house, which she reads as inclusive.

In a recent contribution by Ibita (2015b, see also Ibita 2014; 2015a; 2017), under the title "The 'I Am' Sayings at the Johannine Farewell Meal: Exploring the Possible Influence of Segregative Association Meals and the Implications for Jewish-Christian Dialogue," she studies the statement "no one comes to the Father except through me" in John 14:6b in its literary context of a meal. She applies Claude Grignon's concept of "segregative

commensality" to John 14:6b. "This kind of exclusivity in a segregative meal can help provide the context in understanding Jn 14:6, a part of the Johannine Farewell Discourse located in a meal setting" (2015b, 11). Ibita understands these exclusive claims as a strong affirmation of the identity of the Johannine community. This need to affirm their identity can explain the exclusive claims of 14:6b, but its dangerous potential for later readers needs to be dealt with separately. Ibita tries to achieve this by following the future-oriented hermeneutics that we developed in the introductory article in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (see also Bieringer and Elsbend, 2010).

2.2.4. The Docetism Project

In 2013 the Research Foundation Flanders approved a grant proposal submitted by my Leuven colleague Joseph Verheyden and me and titled: "Hunting Down a Ghost: A Critical Study of the Concept of Docetism and Its Use and Abuse in Ancient and Modern Discussions on Early Christian Christology and Soteriology." In the grant proposal we wrote:

the hypothesis that will be defended here is that "Docetism" is only a useful term if it is understood to denote a "range" of phenomena, teachings and arguments, not the name of a heresy or a clearly defined group of people. While this hypothesis was not proposed here for the first time, it has never been tested in detail nor has it been systematically worked out taking into consideration the latest developments in research.

While this project is mainly focused on the second-century evidence (the doctoral research of this project concentrates on the letters of Ignatius), there is also a Johannine dimension. The project proposal describes the goal of this part as follows:

The central question will be whether at the background of certain ... Johannine texts, the alleged "docetic" controversies or sensitivities could have played a role... Concerning the Fourth Gospel and 1–2 John ... [we] will investigate certain texts which some scholars perceived (rightly or wrongly) as "docetic" (cf. Käsemann 1980) or "anti-docetic" (Schnelle 1987)... We will study whether "docetism" is nothing more than a projection by modern scholars. If the latter is the case, we need to study the conditions and reasons of the origin of such allegations.

In this project Ines Lurhe (now Jäger) (2013–2017) is preparing a doctoral dissertation with the working title "In Search for Docetism: A Critical Study of the History of Research, with Special Attention to Ignatius of Antioch and the Johannine Literature." While not directly related to anti-Judaism, the question of a docetic or antidoctetic understanding of the Gospel of John has obvious important implications for the issue of John's relationship to Judaism (see appendix, no. 3, p. 263).

At the 2014 joint meeting of the International Society of Biblical Literature and European Association of Biblical Studies we organized a workshop on docetism and the Gospel of John. In December 2014 we held an expert seminar on docetism titled "The Quest for an Elusive Phenomenon: Docetism in the Early Church" (Leuven, December 3–5, 2014). During the Oxford Patristics Conference in August 2015 we organized a workshop on early-Christian Christologies with special focus on docetism. The papers of both seminars have been collected in a publication (Verheyden et al. 2017). In my own contributions to the project I have studied John 1:14 and the passion narrative and reached the preliminary conclusion that these Johannine texts do not have anything to do with what has been called docetism (Bieringer 2017).

2.2.5. The Kosmos Project

While the meaning of *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* has been frequently and extensively studied, the same cannot be said for *ὁ κόσμος* (see Kierspel 2006). This doctoral project, which is being carried out by Joan Infante (2017), investigates the meaning of *ὁ κόσμος* against the background of conflict studies from a social-science perspective. The results of this project will have important implications for the understanding of *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* and for the ethnic versus transethnic debate (see below).

2.2.6. The Ethnicities in the Gospel of John Project

The most recent project intends to focus on the concept of ethnicity in the Gospel of John. The goal is to study how the Fourth Gospel constructs ethnicity in comparison to Paul in his letters. Special attention will be given to the question how the concept of ethnicity (Fortes 2016–2019; Buell 2005; 2010, 159–90; Nasrallah and Fiorenza 2010; Wan 2010, 129–58; Tölgner 2007; Hall 2002) can help or hinder the understanding of *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* in the Gospel of John. This will require a study of *Ἰουδαῖοι* in comparison to the

Samarians (4:1–42), the *Ἑλλήνες* (7:35; 12:20), the Romans (11:48), and the *κόσμος* (esp. 12:19). A careful analysis of 11:47–52 will also be required in comparison to Gal 3:28. In his *Society for New Testament Studies* main paper in Amsterdam, David G. Horrell (2016) spoke of "a recurring and persistent depiction—namely a dichotomy between an ethnically particular Judaism and a trans-ethnic, inclusive universal Christianity" and concluded, "its basic form and prominence seem to endure, up to the present-day." The main question will be how this lens of ethnicity and of the ethnic versus transethnic dichotomy can contribute to the John and anti-Judaism debate.

3. Conclusion

The goal of the Leuven colloquium was to foster dialogue between representatives of the major positions and approaches to the issue of "anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John," both in the perspective of exegesis and in Jewish-Christian dialogue. At the same time, in our research team in Leuven, we had a clear position of our own, which we presented in the introductory article of the book and which we developed further after the conference. In this contribution we opted for a position that accepts that there are anti-Jewish elements in the Gospel of John but at the same time tried to show that these elements are in tension with the inclusive future horizon or vision that, at least in our reconstruction, the gospel projects. In a later publication we nuanced this position considerably. We emphasized that John's anti-Judaism is a dangerous potential. We tried to give a more precise description of the meaning of "anti-Judaism," which in our conviction was not ethnic, nor religious, but rather what one might call ethical(-religious), as it distinguishes between genuine and not genuine Jews, admitting that this understanding uncovers a potentially even more dangerous dimension of Johannine "anti-Judaism." Finally, we discussed the inclusive potential of the gospel on a deeper theological level.

Since then in Leuven we have been involved in research that intends to contextualize the issue of "anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel" by comparing it to the letters of Paul, by viewing it in the context of John's use of *κόσμος*, by relating it to the docetism discussion, and by seeing it in light of constructions of ethnicity. In addition, we have continuously developed the future-oriented hermeneutics that we proposed in 2001 as a way of confronting the anti-Jewish potential on a theological level.

One other element that this overview of the past years brought to my awareness is how difficult it is to work in a truly interdisciplinary way. It

seems that sixteen years after the conference the contributions of the Jewish-Christian dialogue scholars have receded into the background—not the least since they are only found in the much less accessible full edition of the papers. If the impact of the papers of the conference on exegetical research is already difficult to measure, as we have seen, their impact on the study of Jewish-Christian dialogue is even more difficult to gauge. Then we are not even focusing on the question of the impact on preaching or catechesis or Christian-Jewish/Jewish-Christian dialogues as such. It is, however, a long-term effect of the Leuven colloquium that I have been asked to become a member of the "Promise, Land and Hope Project: Jews and Christians Seeking Understanding to Enable Constructive Dialogue, within the International Council of Christians and Jews."

My last remark is focused on the future. In her contribution to this volume, Adele Reinhartz moves from a purely past-oriented, static understanding of the reconstruction of the Johannine community to a future-oriented, dynamic reading of what the author of John would envision the Johannine community to be. If I understand correctly, her future-oriented reading of the Johannine community is author-centered. In our introductory article to *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, which was published in both volumes, we proposed a future-oriented or vision-oriented reading of the elements of anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel. I would call our future-oriented hermeneutic reader-centered. This proposal did not have any real impact on the scholarly echoes of the Leuven colloquium over the past sixteen years (if at all, it met with irony). It is clearly a neglected factor. With the distance of fifteen years I realize that our reader-centered approach needs to be preceded by an author-centered and a text-centered approach and that any future-oriented reading needs to have a stronger awareness of the dangerous potential that is present in any future vision. But this, it seems to me, makes a future-oriented reading of authoritative texts, and John's Gospel in particular, all the more important.

Appendix: Topics for Discussion for the Leuven Conference 2001

1. Are the anti-Jewish elements that allegedly are found in the Fourth Gospel rooted in the spirit of the interpreters, or do the texts themselves contain such elements? If the latter is the case: Are they concentrated in specific passages (such as John 8:12-59) and on specific themes (e.g., the disputes between Jesus and the Jews), or do they penetrate the entire gospel?

2. Did the Fourth evangelist intend to present a historical conflict between Jesus and the Jews? Or do we have to consider this conflict in the Fourth Gospel as a product of John's creative mind, a literary means of presenting his high Christology?

3. Is affinity of John's Gospel with Gnosticism a possible (partial) explanation for his anti-Jewish statements?

4. Does the Christology of the Fourth Gospel include salvation for nonbelievers (esp. for the Jews)?

5. How does the Fourth Evangelist differ from the other so-called anti-Jewish New Testament writers?

6. What role did the effective history of the Fourth Gospel play in the development and legitimization of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism?

7. What does canonicity of biblical texts mean, taking into consideration passages that present Jews in a way that is seen as ethically problematic in our time? How can divine revelation take place in texts that are considered to be unacceptable? Is the canonicity of biblical texts still a basic criterion for their authority for theology today? Do theologians have the freedom or even the duty to practice *Sachkritik*?

8. What is the relationship between Jewish-Christian dialogue and the exegetical study of the Gospel of John and other Christian Scriptures?