

LAURA TACK

John 14:6 in Light of
Jewish-Christian
Dialogue

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Mohr Siebeck

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Laura Tack

John 14:6 in Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue

Sharing Truth on the Way to Life

Mohr Siebeck

Laura Tack, born 1988; studied Art History and Theology; 2019 MA in Art History; 2015 doctorate from the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at KU Leuven, Belgium; currently affiliated as a research fellow at KU Leuven, Belgium.
orcid.org/0000-0003-1758-0702

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To my grandfather
Henri Adam
(1933–2013)

Preface

Post-truth was named Oxford English Dictionary's Word of the Year 2016. Post-truth politics impacted global power relations. Truth has been declared dead. On the other extreme of the pendulum, absolutist truth claims are built like bulwarks.

This book navigates this tension by stating that truth matters, not because it is merely a mass product, nor because it is a firm monolith in the midst of relativism, but because truth stands at the intersection of interhuman encounter and dialogue. Truth is not dead. Truth means relationship. Truth is alive.

John's metaphorical language and theological outlook on truth still have the surprising capacity to upturn our views on reality. Truth in this gospel is related to transformation, time and the creation of a possible future for the whole of humanity. Truth, for John, is not relativistic but relational, because truth exists from the moment it is shared. Sharing truth, for John, is the dialogical process of revelation and the way that leads to life.

This book is the English translation of the revised version of my doctoral dissertation, which was completed at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the KU Leuven in 2015. I would like to thank the members of the jury Emmanuel Nathan, Tobias Nicklas and Gilbert Van Belle.

This dissertation was written as part of the research project *New Hermeneutics or Renewed Dialogues: A Catholic Perspective on Crucial Theological Issues in Jewish-Christian and Ecumenical Dialogues in the Perspective of a Future-Oriented Interpretation on Key Johannine Texts*, which was made possible by a grant from the Research Council of KU Leuven. I am grateful to my supervisors Reimund Bieringer and Didier Pollefeyt for their guidance and support. I would also like to thank Peter De Mey and my colleagues on the research project Ma. Marilou S. Ibita and Viorel Coman for the stimulating research environment.

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Björn Lapeire and Stijn Van Tongerloo assisted with the translation. Elisabeth Hernitscheck and Stefaan Neiryneck aided with the proofreading of the German and the Greek. I am thankful for their sense of language and their

attention to detail. I would also like to thank the editors at Mohr Siebeck for their patience and professional assistance.

This book would not have existed without the generous support of my parents Marian Adam and Frederik Tack and my husband Stijn Demaré, who is my unwavering companion on “the way to the dwelling of light” (Job 38:19).

I dedicate this book to my grandfather Henri Adam (1933-2013), who was a keen walker and who had the humble wisdom to nourish the truthfulness and the life in the hearts of the many friends and family members that crossed his path.

Leuven, September 30, 2020

Laura Tack

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List of Abbreviations

<i>AAS</i>	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
AGSU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
BDF	Blass – Debrunner – Funk. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</i>
BDR	Blass – Debrunner – Rehkopf. <i>Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch</i>
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BFC	Bible en Français courant 1997
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BW9	BibleWorks 9
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
ConBNT	Coniectanea neotestamentica or Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
DI	<i>Dominus Iesus</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ESV	English Standard Version 2011
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
EÜ	Einheitsübersetzung 1980
<i>ExAud</i>	<i>Ex Auditu</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FBBS	Facet books. Biblical series
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregorianum</i>
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JAC</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>Louvain Studies</i>
LSJ	Liddell – Scott – Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
LThK	Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche
NA	<i>Nostra aetate</i>
NA28	Nestle-Aland. <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , 28. Edition
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NIB	The New Interpreter's Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version 1989
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NRTh</i>	<i>La nouvelle revue théologique</i>
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
RST	Regensburger Studien zur Theologie
RevElber	Revidierte Elberfelder 1993
<i>RGG</i>	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTSU	<i>Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOB	Traduction Eucuménique de la Bible 1988
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>
TWNT	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WV	Willibrordvertaling

- ZNW *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der
älteren Kirche*
- ZTK *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Introduction

On May 31, 1934, the *Bekennende Kirche* publishes the *Barmer Theologische Erklärung* with which it formulates an accusation against the so-called *Deutsche Christen* of the National Socialist regime (1933–1945). The first thesis of this document begins with the following quote from Scripture: “Jesus Christus spricht: Ich bin der Weg und die Wahrheit und das Leben; niemand kommt zum Vater denn durch mich.”¹ With the help of John 14:6, this document denounces the nazification of Christianity and defends the autonomy of the Christian revelation in the face of worldly powers. Here, the focus on Christ counters the navel-gazing of any ideological abuse of Christianity in order to perpetuate its political power.

In 2012, the blogger Andy Wrasman developed the *Contradict* bumper sticker with which he intended to react against the pluralist *Coexist* logo. The latter advocates the peaceful coexistence of the different religions. Wrasman, on the contrary, emphasises the impossibility of this project. According to him, the world religions are not in coexistence but in contradiction with each other. To support his thesis, he provides the *Contradict* logo with the following caption: “They can’t all be true – John 14:6.”² John 14:6 in this context, provides the slogan to express the superiority of Christianity over other philosophies of life and this in an ideological struggle against pluralism.

The above examples illustrate how John 14:6 is tailored to measure entirely different purposes. Invoking John 14:6, the *Bekennende Kirche* calls any institutional manifestation of Christianity to humility in the face of the autonomous revelation of Christ himself, whereas Wrasman uses the same verse to express the superiority of Christianity as a religion. John 14:6 functions in both cases as a truth claim. In the latter case, however, it expressly functions as an exclusivist claim also. This book navigates the existing tension in between both forms of truth claims. I ask how it is possible that John 14:6 can be used to challenge an intolerant ideology or to construct an intolerant identity toward the non-Christian religions at the same time.

¹ EKD, “Barmer Theologische Erklärung,” n.p. [cited 16 August 2020]. Online: http://www.ekd.de/glauben/bekenntnisse/barmer_theologische_erklaerung.html.

² Contradictmovement, “Contradict,” n.p. [cited 16 August 2020]. Online: <http://contradictmovement.org/>. The *Coexist*-bumper stickers are developed by Peacemonger (www.peacemonger.org).

1. Formulating the Problem in View of the Existing Research

John 14:6 has often been called the high point of Johannine Christology.³ Surprisingly, therefore, there are relatively few studies devoted to this biblical verse.⁴ Except for Peter G. Kirchschräger's 2010 publication on the truth claim of this verse, to date, no monograph has been published that examines how the

³ Helmut Gollwitzer, "Außer Christus kein Heil? (Johannes 14,6)," in *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament? Exegetische und systematische Beiträge* (ed. Willehad P. Eckert et al.; Munich: Kaiser, 1967), 171–194, 171; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*. (4 vols.; HTKNT 4; Freiburg: Herder, 1965–1992), 3:73; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 252; Gail O'Day, *The Gospel of John* (NIB 9; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1995), 743.

⁴ Juan Leal, "Ego sum via et veritas et vita (Jn 14,6)," *VD* 33 (1955): 336–341; Ignace de la Potterie, "'Je suis la Voie, la Vérité et la Vie' (Jn 14,6)," *NRTh* 88 (1966): 907–942; Gollwitzer, "Außer," 171–194; Frank Charles Fensham, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," *Neot* 2 (1968): 81–88; Marie-Louise Gubler, "'I am the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14:6)," *TD* 41 (1994): 147–151; Geoffrey Parrinder, "Only one Way? John 14:6," *ExpTim* 107 (1995): 78–79; Reinhold Mayer, "'Ich bin der Weg, die Wahrheit und das Leben': Ein Versuch über das Johannes-Evangelium aus Anlass der neu erwachten Debatte zur Judenmission," in *Johannes aenigmaticus. Studien zum Johannesevangelium für Herbert Leroy* (ed. Stefan Schreiber and Alois Stimpfle; BU 29; Regensburg: Pustet, 2000), 183–195; James H. Charlesworth, "The Gospel of John: Exclusivism Caused by a Social Setting Different from That of Jesus (John 11:54 and 14:6)," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel: Papers of the Leuven Colloquium. 2000* (ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville; Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2001), 479–513; Craig R. Koester, "Jesus the Way, the Cross, and the World according to the Gospel of John," *Word and World* 21 (2001): 360–369; John Ashton, "Riddles and Mysteries: The Way, the Truth, and the Life," in *Jesus in the Johannine Tradition* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 333–342; Michael Theobald, "Das Weg-Wort (Joh 14,6)," in *Herrenworte im Johannesevangelium*, by Michael Theobald (HBS 34; Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 305–329; Angelo Colacrai, "Gesù Cristo Salvatore e Signore: Via, Verità e vita secondo Gv 14,6," in *Studia Missionalia* 52 (2003): 117–168; Craig R. Koester, "Jesus as the way to the Father in Johannine Theology (John 14,6)," in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Essays by the members of the SNTS Johannine Writings Seminar*. (ed. Gilbert Van Belle et al.; BETL 184; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 117–133; Nicolas Farelly, "'Je suis la vérité' dans l'évangile de Jean," *RRef* 56 (2005): 1–20; Hartwig Thyen, "Joh 14,6 und ein Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums," in *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum*, by Hartwig Thyen (WUNT 214; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 635–637; Alistair I. Wilson, "Send your Truth: Psalms 42 and 43 as the Background to Jesus' Self-description as 'Truth' in John 14:6," *Neot* 41 (2007): 220–234; Peter G. Kirchschräger, *Nur ich bin die Wahrheit: Der Absolutheitsanspruch des johanneischen Christus und das Gespräch zwischen den Religionen* (HBS 63; Freiburg: Herder, 2010); Peter G. Kirchschräger, "'Ich bin der Weg, die Wahrheit und das Leben' (Joh 14,6): Der Wahrheitsanspruch des johanneischen Christus und Wahrheit in anderen Religionen," *Liturgie und Bibel* 85 (2012): 123–147.

key concepts of the way, the truth and the life are anchored in the Christology of the Fourth Gospel.

In the field of exegesis, hardly any new approaches to this verse have appeared in recent decades. To this day, the most detailed exegetical study of this verse is offered by Ignace de la Potterie in his 1966 article.⁵ De la Potterie attaches much weight to the parallels of John 14:6 with the Gospel's prologue and explains this verse in the light of the Johannine theology of the incarnation. He maintains that John 14:6 deals with the "Christ-Chemin", which is the counterpart of the incarnatory "Christ-Vérité". The last term includes the downward movement of the incarnation in Jesus Christ. The first term encompasses the ascending movement of Christ – and of humanity in his wake – to the life with the Father.⁶ De la Potterie's exegesis influenced inter alia Hartwig Thyen⁷ and Nicolas Farelly⁸.

However, the exegesis of Rudolf Bultmann in his 1941 commentary turned out to be the most influential. Bultmann regards John 14:6 as a Johannine critique of the mythological conceptualisation of the mystical road towards a divine goal beyond this world. John, conversely, according to Bultmann, presents Jesus as the way that is already the goal. In other words, the verse reflects John's realised eschatology.⁹ In the recent exegesis, Bultmann's approach has been adopted by, among others, Jean Zumstein¹⁰ in the Protestant exegesis and by Michael Theobald¹¹ and Kirchschräger¹² in the Catholic exegesis.

The research of the last decades is mainly concerned with developing a hermeneutical approach to John 14:6. Although this seems to be a relatively recent evolution, a similar approach had already been suggested in the article by Helmut Gollwitzer from 1967.¹³ Only in the course of the last two decades have various commentaries on the Fourth Gospel also become aware of this particular concern, such as the commentaries by Gail O'Day (1995)¹⁴, Andreas

⁵ de la Potterie, "Je suis," 907–942.

⁶ de la Potterie, "Je suis," 938.

⁷ Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 623–625.

⁸ Farelly, "Je suis," 19.

⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1941), 468.

¹⁰ Jean Zumstein, *L'évangile selon Saint Jean (13–21)* (CNT IVb; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2007), 66.

¹¹ Theobald, "Weg-Wort," 321–322.

¹² Kirchschräger, *Nur ich*, 213; Kirchschräger, "Ich bin," 123.

¹³ Gollwitzer, "Außer," 171–194.

¹⁴ O'Day, *John*, 743–745.

Dettwiler (1995)¹⁵, Klaus Wengst (2001)¹⁶, Christian Dietzfelbinger (2001)¹⁷ and Hartwig Thyen (2005)¹⁸. The specific questions raised by the interreligious dialogue for the hermeneutical approach to John 14:6 also gave rise to Kirchschräger's 2010 monograph. While Kirchschräger's research falls within the framework of interreligious dialogue in a broad sense, the other authors mainly explore the particular problems of John 14:6 for the Jewish-Christian dialogue.

In this context, mainly the claim that Jesus is the truth is considered problematic. The authors mentioned above, therefore, attempt to provide some hermeneutical keys for the interpretation of this verse to challenge the christological exclusivism considered problematic. These hermeneutical approaches to John 14:6 belong to three groups.

A first group chooses the path of historicising and contextualisation and considers John 14:6 as an expression of a particular group in a specific situation¹⁹ or as directed towards an 'in-group'²⁰. To mitigate the negative impact of the verse, John 14:6cd, which is considered a more exclusive expression than John 14:6ab, is attributed to a redactor.²¹ According to Andreas Dettwiler, however, a far-reaching historicising of the verse ignores the real nature of the problem, which presently lies mainly on a systematic-hermeneutical level.²² I too believe that historicising and contextualisation are not sufficient bases for an adequate hermeneutical approach to John 14:6, since these not only try to neutralise the problem but ultimately also make (parts of) the verse useless for the contemporary context.

A second group emphasises the Jewish character of the Gospel, based on which John 14:6 could probably in no way be read as an attack against Judaism.²³ In this case, Ulrich Wilckens even goes so far as to give up the difference between Christianity and Judaism finally.²⁴ Klaus Wengst, in my opinion,

¹⁵ Andreas Dettwiler, *Die Gegenwart des Erhöhten: Eine exegetische Studie zu den johanneischen Abschiedsreden (Joh 13,31–16,33) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihres Relecture-Charakters* (FRLANT 169; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995), 166–168.

¹⁶ Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*. (2 vols.; TKNT 4; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 2:120–121.

¹⁷ Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 vols.; ZBK.NT 4; Zürich: TVZ, 2001), 45–46.

¹⁸ Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 623–626. cf. Thyen, "Joh 14,6," 635–637.

¹⁹ O'Day, *John*, 743–745.

²⁰ Silke Petersen, *Brot, Licht und Weinstock: Intertextuelle Analysen johanneischer Ichbin-Worte* (NovTSup 127; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 337–338.

²¹ Charlesworth, "The Gospel," 493–509.

²² Dettwiler, *Gegenwart*, 166.

²³ Gollwitzer, "Außer," 181–183. Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1998), 224.

²⁴ Wilckens, *Johannes*, 224.

rightly notes that Wilckens describes Judaism according to Christian standards.²⁵ The second approach thus ignores not only the uniqueness of the Christian perspective that the Gospel develops – and with it the anti-Jewish elements it employs to give shape to that uniqueness (e.g. John 8:44) – but it also ignores the uniqueness of Judaism itself.

A third group, finally, emphasises the universal orientation of the Gospel and states that, in the end, there is no real problem. Even though Christ may be the only point of access to God, God ultimately wishes for the salvation of all humanity.²⁶ This one-sidedly positive approach, however, ignores the dualistic passages of the Gospel which severely judge the unbelievers (e.g. John 12:48; 15:6).

Neither the exegetical nor the hermeneutical possibilities with this verse are exhausted in my opinion. On the exegetical level, a detailed study of John 14:6 in the context of the first part of the Farewell Discourse (13:31–14:31) calls for an adjustment of the perspectives of both de la Potterie and Bultmann. Against de la Potterie, it can be argued that the incarnation is not the theme of the text unit. The subject is rather the relational network between the Father, the Son, the Paraclete and the disciples. Against Bultmann's exegesis, it can be argued that the text-unit not only shows a realised eschatology but also contains passages with a future-oriented perspective, such as John 14:2–3. De la Potterie, moreover, points out that John 14:6 is a hinge point between the part of the text dealing with the future and the part dealing with the present.²⁷ However, these are not the only new perspectives for the exegesis of the verse. There also exists the need to study John 14:6 in the light of the overarching Johannine Christology, which also outside the Farewell Discourse is built around the key concepts of truth and life.

From a hermeneutical point of view, also the problems mentioned above with the existing hermeneutical approaches present us with new challenges. After all, to date, an approach to John 14:6 is lacking that both recognises the negative aspects of the verse in the light of Christian exclusivism and does justice to the continuing positive potential of the verse as a revelatory Christian text. In other words, it is necessary to develop an appropriate hermeneutical approach that incorporates both tensions mentioned at the beginning of this introduction.

²⁵ Wengst, *Johannesevangelium*, 2:121.

²⁶ Cf. Gollwitzer, "Außer," 185–187. Koester, "Jesus the way," 368.

²⁷ de la Potterie, "Je suis," 927–928.

2. Research Questions and Methodology

This above formulation of the problem translates into the following research questions:

1. How is John 14:6 embedded in the first part of the Farewell Discourse (John 13:31–14:31)?
2. How do the terms of the way, the truth and the life function as key concepts for John's implicit theological design?
3. To what extent does the Christology of John 14:6ab differ from the Christology in John 14:6cd?
4. In what way can we best explain the meaning of the Johannine 'I am' saying with the predicate in John 14:6ab?
5. In what way does the interpretation of John 14:6 contribute to christological exclusivism? How does this exclusivism lead to anti-Judaism?
6. In what way is John 14:6 part of the inclusive future vision of the text? What are its implications for the Jewish-Christian dialogue?

These research questions require an appropriate methodology. After all, the above formulation of the problem requires the combination of an exegetical and a hermeneutical approach. However, this is not the only reason why I use both approaches together. Indeed, I understand interpretation as the dialectic between explaining and understanding. Sandra M. Schneiders describes the two poles of interpretation as follows:

[E]xplanation is the analytical and synthetic work by which we distance the text, that is, establish it in its otherness [while u]nderstanding is the event in which the text's meaning comes home, that is, in which we overcome the distance by appropriating the meaning, incorporating it into our own world.²⁸

Schneiders bases herself on the dialectic between explanation and understanding as formulated by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. According to him, after an initial reading, the reader has a naïve understanding of the text. The reader still guesses at the meaning of the text with a gut feeling. Through the explanation, the beacons are set out within which a valid meaning can arise. The explanation is the necessary critical phase that leads to a deeper understanding of the text as what Ricoeur calls *la naïveté seconde*. This is "a sophisticated mode of understanding, supported by explanatory procedures".²⁹

²⁸ Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (2nd ed.; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 17.

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation theory: Discourses on the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Christian University Press, 1976), 74–75.

On the one hand, the historical-critical method is necessary for the hermeneutics of the verse because this method functions as the critical moment of explanation. A historical-critical exegesis of the biblical text delineates the valid field of meaning and creates awareness of the historical and contextual distance between the interpreter and the biblical text.

On the other hand, the hermeneutical approach is necessary in combination with the historical-critical exegetical approach, because the hermeneutical approach accompanies the train of thought from the explanation to the deepened understanding. Once the field of possible meanings of the text has been delineated by the exegesis, hermeneutics is needed as the referee providing the valid interpretative keys. This guides the interpretation game that takes place in the contemporary context on the field of the text. As such, historical-critical exegesis is also an integral part of the hermeneutical approach.

The exegetical approach is characterised by the following presuppositions. First, the corpus is limited to the Fourth Gospel and does not include the Johannine epistles. The primary concern is to see how I can understand the Christology of John 14:6 against the background of the Gospel of John. I consider the Fourth Gospel as a meaningful literary unity. In this respect, I join the *Leuven School* which, in response to source criticism, defends the literary unity of the Gospel and the creativity of the fourth evangelist.³⁰ To demarcate the historical context of the Gospel, secondly, I also follow the *Leuven School* which defends that John was familiar with the three Synoptic Gospels in their final redactions.³¹ This means that in the search for parallels from the historical context, if possible, the parallels with the synoptics are preferred.

³⁰ Gilbert Van Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis* (BETL 116; Leuven, University Press – Peeters, 1994), 372–377, 404; Gilbert Van Belle, “Theory of Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: A Neglected Field of Research?,” in *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation* (ed. Gilbert Van Belle, Michael Labahn and Petrus J. Maritz; BETL 223; Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 13–32, 18–19.

³¹ “The position adopted by Neiryneck and Sabbe is a familiar one. Both scholars argued that they can demonstrate that the Fourth Evangelist did not make use of traditions lying behind the Synoptic Gospels, but used rather the Synoptic Gospels themselves.” van Belle, “Theory of Repetitions,” 16. Cf. Frans Neiryneck, *Jean et les Synoptiques: Examen critique de l'exégèse de M.-E. Boismard* (BETL 49; Leuven: University Press, 1979), 390. ; Frans Neiryneck, “John and the Synoptics,” in *Evangelica: Gospel Studies: Collected Essays by Frans Neiryneck* (ed. Frans Van Segbroeck; BETL 60; Leuven: University Press – Peeters, 1982), 365–400, 398; Frans Neiryneck, “John and the Synoptics: The Empty Tomb Stories,” in *Evangelica II: 1982–1991 Collected Essays by Frans Neiryneck* (ed. Frans Van Segbroeck; BETL 99; Leuven: University Press-Peeters, 1991), 571–599; Maurits Sabbe, *Studia Neotestamentica: Collected Essays* (BETL 98; Leuven: University Press – Peeters, 1991), 329–513; Michael Labahn and Manfred Lang, “Johannes und die Synoptiker: Positionen und Impulse seit 1990,” in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das Vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditions-geschichtlicher Perspektive* (ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle; WUNT 175;

The specific orientation of the hermeneutical approach is gradually developed and further explained in the third, fourth and fifth chapters. Because of the particular problem outlined above, this approach is two-sided. On the one hand, through the reconstruction of the reception history of John 14:6, the different interpretations are mapped, and the possibly dangerous interpretations are identified. Next, I examine whether or not and to what extent these dangerous interpretations are caused by the particular wording of John 14:6. On the other hand, a distinct hermeneutical approach will be developed, which enables us to look through the negative aspects of the Bible verse in order to notice the positive revelatory potential of the verse as well. This approach is based on the normativity of the future approach, as conceptualised by Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd.³²

3. Structure of this Publication

The formulation of the problem, the research questions and the methodology result in a structure of five chapters. The first three chapters present the results of the exegetical research, while the fourth and fifth chapters are devoted to the hermeneutical understanding of John 14:6.

The *first chapter* examines John 14:6 in the literary context of John 13:31–14:31. Indeed, the isolation of the Bible verse from its context is the main cause of the naive use of John 14:6 in the polemical interpretations. The exegetical positioning of John 14:6 in John 13:31–14:31 starts from the assumption that this text unit is the first part of the Farewell Discourse. It also pays special attention to the pivotal function of John 14:6 in this unit. The relationship of John 14:6 with the main motives of the text unit is then further examined. These are the complementarity of the future-oriented and realised eschatology and the theme of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, in which the disciples participate in the Spirit and in love. The purpose of this chapter is to show that John 14:6 acts as the hinge between present and future and to explain how this verse is to be understood against the background of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son and of the first two sayings of the Paraclete.

The *second chapter* researches the Johannine theology underlying the concepts of the way, the truth and the life. These three concepts seem at first sight

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 443–515, 450–451; Gilbert Van Belle, “Tradition, Exegetical Formation, and the Leuven Hypothesis,” in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies* (ed. Tom Thatcher; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 325–337.

³² Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, *The Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective* (ANL 61; Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

to be universal and easy to understand. However, their typically Johannine meaning is often not considered in a first interpretation. Moreover, the concept of truth is all too often interpreted in a contemporary, epistemological sense. An examination of the interwovenness of these terms with the implicit theology of the Fourth Gospel is, therefore, necessary in order to deepen this first, naive understanding of these three concepts.

The term ‘the way’, first of all, does not belong to the typical vocabulary of the fourth evangelist. The origin of this term will, therefore, be examined in the first part. In the first instance, the relevant background material will be considered. The different traditions offered by the *Forschungsgeschichte* will be evaluated, and the possible dependence on the synoptics will be examined. In the end, I choose to explain the term ‘the way’ in connection with the dynamics of the descent and the ascent that the evangelist develops creatively in his Gospel.

The term ‘the truth’, secondly, is one of the central terms in the Fourth Gospel. After an evaluation of the different approaches to the Johannine truth concept in the *Forschungsgeschichte*, the second part of the second chapter develops an own approach to this Johannine truth concept based on the way John uses the term with different semantic nuances in the Gospel text. The purpose of this section is to show that the truth in John does not stand for divine reality, but for the truthfulness of the loving unity between the Father and the Son.

The term ‘the life’, thirdly, is the soteriological concept par excellence in John. An evaluation of the *Forschungsgeschichte* of this term is followed by an exegesis of the various passages that specifically relate life to Jesus. The purpose of this third section is to promote a christo-theological perspective on this Johannine life concept.

The *third chapter* focuses on the Johannine ‘I am’ saying with the predicate in John 14:6. After explaining the individual terms in the second chapter, it is necessary both to make a correct assessment of the meaning of the ‘I am’ saying and to give an adequate explanation of the interrelationship of the three terms. After a brief account of the *status quaestionis* about the Johannine ‘I am’ saying and about the coherence of the terms of the way, the truth and the life, I present my own thesis. The purpose of this third chapter is to interpret the ‘I am’ saying with predicate as a metaphorical expression, in which the way is the central term. This attention to the ‘I am’ saying as a metaphorical expression makes the transition from the exegetical part (chapters 1, 2 and 3) to the hermeneutical part (chapters 4 and 5) of this book.

Through a study of the reception of John 14:6, the *fourth chapter* brings to light the different interpretations and aspects of the verse itself, which are problematic for the Jewish-Christian dialogue. Christology is not only a bone of contention in the discussion of the Johannine Jesus with ‘the Jews’ but has often been used by Christians throughout history in a controversial way in relation to Judaism. After examining as a case study the reception of John 14:6

in *Nostra aetate* (1965) and *Dominus Iesus* (2000), I identify the stumbling blocks to the interpretation of John 14:6 in view of Jewish-Christian relations. Finally, I evaluate some of the proposed remedies from the *Forschungsgeschichte*, based on which I set the beacons for an own hermeneutical approach of the fifth chapter.

Finally, the *fifth chapter* offers an interpretation of John 14:6 from the perspective of a future-oriented hermeneutics. I believe that the above-mentioned hermeneutical approaches neutralise John 14:6 by invalidating its Christian claim in order to render the verse harmless and prevent further ideological abuse. These approaches often forget that the verse is also part of a rich tradition of revelation that still can inspire readers today. Therefore, I believe there is a need for an approach that takes the difficulties of the verse seriously and at the same time brings out the positive revelatory value of this verse. We, therefore, choose to interpret John 14:6 using the future-oriented hermeneutics of Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd. The purpose of this last chapter is to go beyond the critical stage, toward a *seconde naïveté* that can still appreciate the biblical text, with all its human flaws, as a revelatory text conveying an inclusive vision of the future.

These five chapters thus explore the direction in which the interpretation of John 14:6 takes us. Does John 14:6 lead away from the truth? Does the pitfall of exclusivism lead us away from the true path? Or does John in this verse provide the inspiration to embark on our own journey within and towards the fullness of truth? In any case, John 14:6 teaches that the truth is a road, which can only be travelled gradually. Like the Johannine Jesus, truth in itself is an experience of a relationship that can only be known by walking and sharing it. Truth, according to John 14:6, is, therefore, above all the truth that is shared on the way to life.

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