

Martin M. Lintner (ed.)

# **GOD IN QUESTION**

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE AND SECULAR LANGUAGES

with a Foreword by  
Peter Hünemann



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On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the  
EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY  
(1989–2014)  
to its former Presidents

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## FOREWORD\*

*Peter Hünemann*

The EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY celebrates 25 years of its existence this year. The Society was founded in Mainz on 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> December 1989, a few days after the fall of the Berlin Wall and before the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic.

It is for this reason that the president of the EUROPEAN SOCIETY, Martin M. Lintner has asked me to write the foreword to this volume, which contains the weighty presentations from the Congress “God in Question – Religious Language and Secular Languages,” held in Brixen from 29<sup>th</sup> August through 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013. The Society presents itself and its work through this publication, which is dedicated to “*Theo-logein*,” and through the corresponding edition of the journal ET-STUDIES 5 (2014), issue 2, which has defined the changing landscape of Catholic theology in Europe over the past 25 years.

*Theo-logein*, or God-speech, does not exist in only one form. It bears its own character in preaching, catechetical instruction, in the liturgical celebration, in the magisterial proclamation, which differs from the *Theo-logein* of theologians, or rather, from the science of theology. The *Theo-logein* in preaching, catechism, liturgy, magisterial proclamation is a confessing, witnessing speech. It is a God-speech, which in its credibility and identification directly involves the speaker with his/her faith, just as it engages the “we” of the faithful in Christ and speaks to listeners and addressees in their individuality. It is a speech of faith, hope and love and as such it is not a speech about God and his salvation but a *Theo-logein*, in which God and his salvation are referenced as the One who empowers, creates memories, and sends out people: ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν (ek pisteos eis pistin) (Rom 1:17).

This directly witnessing speech, however, has needed since the Middle Ages – and now needs again with a completely different urgency in our time – the *Theo-logein* of theologians.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages evangelisation was not understood anymore in the way it had developed in Patristics, in the sapientia christiana. Many unsettling questions remained unanswered; particularly in an epochal development over and above the standards of knowledge in the liberal arts, Aristotelian philosophy and Platonic-Neoplatonic ideas were embraced in the monasteries, cathedral schools and in the emerging universities of Europe.

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\* Translated from German by Angela Ilić.



The great theologians of the Middle Ages successfully incorporated the new basic concepts and forms of thought gathered within philosophy into an interpretation of the legacy of faith that was comprehensible. In this way, they facilitated God-speech, the first form of *Theo-logein* and a corresponding “speech about God” – which is also about humans and the world – in the public space of the universities and in the educational world at the time.

I experienced profound joy in Brixen upon seeing how younger and older theologians from East and West, from diverse cultures and environments worked and reflected together. Their goal was to mediate an up-to-date, witnessing God-speech through the numerous established and institutionally anchored languages that belong to our modern secular world and in their diversity contain approaches to the highly complex correlations that make up our global world.

Through this, the theologians do not simply render service to a small sector of social life in a widely secular education-oriented society. They do not help only those who witness to their faith in God directly through confessing and who – in the absence of theology – can do this only through words, which, based on their traditional definition and conventional overtones do not allow the personal credibility of the speaker and the credibility of their message to come to expression anymore and with that, are unable to meet the audience where they are. Through its focus, the theology of our time rather keeps the possibility altogether open for people to come to faith in God. Through that, it offers at the same time room for thoughtful people and for the sciences to critically reflect upon their respective methodological limitations and profiles and to responsibly make fitting and sensible decisions that rise above meta-languages and special languages, without being subject to narrowing constraints.

I think that the present volume and the contributions within clearly demonstrate how theologians at the forum of the EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY are striving in ingenious ways to fulfil their essential task, which is to serve theology.

Deo gratias!

## INTRODUCTION

*Martin M. Lintner*

The ESCT – EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY has established itself as a significant association in the European theological landscape.<sup>1</sup> Over 850 theologians, men and women, are involved in it in twenty-one national sections: from Great Britain in the north to Malta in the south, from Lithuania in the north-east and Ukraine in the east to Portugal in the west. ESCT is the only theological organisation within Europe that through its members covers the full breadth of theological disciplines and areas of investigation and yet emphasizes theology in all its variety as a unity. For many theologians spread across various countries and generations, the many and varied activities of ESCT provide an indispensable forum for academic theological exchange and personal encounter.

ESCT has now held nine international congresses. These have been at Stuttgart (1992), Freising (1995), Nijmegen (1998), Graz and Maribor (2001), Fribourg and Geneva (2004), Leuven (2007), Limerick (2009), Vienna (2011) and Brixen/Bressanone (2013). The present publication contains the papers of the last Congress, which was attended by 220 theologians from 27 European countries.

The Congress focused on the dialogue in Europe between believers, searchers, and unbelievers. With the theme “God in Question: Religious Language and Secular Languages”, the participants faced the challenge of how we can as Theologians and as Church members speak about God so that the message of Jesus Christ can be made intelligible and attractive to people today, and so play a positive part in the social, cultural and political shape of Europe. The wider context of these discussions is today’s Europe, often portrayed as a secular continent. In many ways secularization and religious indifference characterise public life. Many people understand themselves to be “religiously unmusical” (Jürgen Habermas), and in some places we encounter new and striking forms of atheism, which are often shaped by the natural sciences. At the same time we also observe signs of a “return to religion”. Many people set out on a deliberate search for spiritual meaning and engage seriously with religious traditions. In European society we more and more hear every day of religions other than Christianity and questions are raised in the public sphere about the meaning of religion.

The opening paper for setting the context was given by Archbishop Bruno Forte. The other main papers were given by Stephen Bullivant, Franz Fischler, Christiane Florin, Tomáš Halik, Michael Kuhn, Ricardo M. Pérez Márquez OSM, Didier Pollefeyt, Letizia Ragaglia, Arnold Stiglmeier and Paul Valadier SJ. The paper of

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent insight into the history, activities of and present challenges for ESCT can be found in the journal *ET-STUDIES* 5 (2014), issue 2.

Christoph Amor served as the opener for the Junior Conference, which took place on 28 August and was attended by 24 doctoral and post-doctoral students from different European Catholic Theological Faculties and Universities. The Junior Conference offered these junior scholars the opportunity to present their research projects and to enter into discussion with colleagues from other countries.

All the other contributions in this book are papers given by their authors during the parallel sessions. Only papers on the theme of the Congress were selected for this publication. The quite large number of contributions is due to the aim to offer especially to emerging scholars the possibility to make themselves known to a wider public at an international level.

Altogether there are some very varied contributions. Most are in the form of short academic papers but some are presented in the style of an essay. The contributions give a lively insight into the “theological state of play” within Europe. Established as well as emerging and young scholars reflect together on the challenges for God-talk in our time. So, not only is it clear where their personal research interests lie, but also which issues are being discussed in different countries and regions in Europe and from which perspectives. The chosen approaches are also a mirror image of what is on each individual person’s mind and what also preoccupies them in the social and ecclesial context in which they work.

Most of the authors are theologians but there are also representatives from the fields of religious studies, philosophy, modern art, literature, architecture, journalism, and politics. One of the purposes of the Congress was to bring these different areas together in conversation. It was in the first place through this interdisciplinary exchange that one could listen to another discipline and learn from it. In the foreground, alongside the question of what representatives of one discipline have to say to other disciplines, was the concern to learn what different disciplines are saying about humanity and how they deal with human experiences. This begs the question how they are able to influence how speech about God must be shaped so that it can enter the joys and hopes but also the cares and needs of people today. Otherwise all talk about God runs the danger of being sterile and without relevance to real life. In the light of God’s revelation in the Bible, which has been slotted into human history – in an unsurpassable manner in the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ – such irrelevance of God-talk has been ruled out.

To avoid spreading the boundary of this introduction, we will dispense with an overview of the content of each individual contribution as there are so many. The reader will get a good overview for him(her)self by looking at the order of the contributions in each chapter, and the abstracts will help. The volume uses four languages; the original English, German, French and Italian have been retained for publication. To make orientation and reading easier, each contribution is preceded by an abstract in the other languages.

*Acknowledgments*

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Not least I would like to thank Professor Peter Hünemann, founding member, the first President and now Honorary President of ESCT, for the Foreword.

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