

## PREFACE

### THE SPIRIT THAT MOVES. A NEW SOCIETY AND ITS FIRST PUBLICATION

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As will become evident in this journal (cf. contributions of Kees Waaijman and Celia Kourie), the academic study of spirituality at institutions of advanced learning, is a major new development in the field of theology and religion, although writings about and the practice of spirituality are part of the oldest traditions in the history of Christianity. In addition, it is something that is found across boundaries of faith and denominations. In fact, it is studied and practised in secular, non-religious contexts.

The often fascinating growth and the widespread interest in the field of spirituality during the last few decades, reflect important trends in our global village. That spirituality is generating so much interest all over the world at more or less the same time and in many ways regarding similar matters, provides interesting perspectives on the limitations of contemporary theology as a discipline and on the needs of those who are involved in the church and theology. In some ways there are significant correctives on traditional theology and religion to be noted in this development, but in other ways it is clear that there are needs and issues that can only be addressed by a different approach than that of contemporary theology.

In South Africa, the practice of spirituality has a long history, being a firm part of the training of students at seminaries of some of the major Christian churches (e.g. the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches) and, obviously, of the church life of these institutions. It was, however, only in recent years that the academic study of the discipline was developed. One, if not the pioneering institution in this regard, was the Faculty of Divinity at Rhodes University, where a specialised Master's course in Spirituality was taught over a long period of time. Prof. Felicity Edwards was appointed at this institution as professor in Spirituality in the early nineties of the previous century, and supervised the

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presentation and development of the study of spirituality. It remained a popular postgraduate course in which a number of students completed their research until the closure of the Faculty of Divinity at Rhodes University in 2000. In the meantime, Prof. Celia Kourie had begun to teach Spirituality as an academic subject on a formal level at the University of South Africa, initially while she was still in the Department of New Testament and later on as a sub-department on its own. The Christian Spirituality degrees at Unisa were instituted in 2000 (M's and D's) and 2001 (Hons). She was also co-operating with St Augustine Catholic University, in Johannesburg, where courses in Spirituality are also offered. Recently an academic chair, a Professor Extraordinarius in Biblical Spirituality, was established under the leadership of the Dean, Prof. Hermie van Zyl and the Vice Dean, Prof. Francois Tolmie, at the University of the Free State with Pieter de Villiers as its incumbent. The aim of the chair is specifically to promote the study of Biblical Spirituality through postgraduate research and presentations. Although other universities accommodate the study of Spirituality, these are the universities where it is formally offered as a discipline in its own right.

It is a sign of the times that this publication appears under the auspices of SPIRASA, (the Spirituality Association of South Africa). The society was formally established at a conference held on 23-24 January 2003. This happened after Pieter de Villiers invited Celia Kourie in January 2002 to meet in Stellenbosch in order to reflect on how Spirituality as a discipline can be promoted in this country. On 24 February 2002 he wrote to her a follow up letter and suggested that the following invitation should be sent out to people who may be interested in establishing a society, to attend a meeting on spirituality:

We hope that this meeting will become a regular annual feature and perhaps lead to a Society for Christian Spirituality in South Africa where all who are interested in spirituality can meet, share their interests, celebrate Christianity and participate in activities relating to Christian spirituality, especially in our African context...

Although an important part of this meeting will focus on informed presentations and discussions on spirituality by leaders and specialists in the field, we hope that there will be many opportunities to experience spirituality practices and that there will be open participation by anyone interested and actively involved in spirituality.

After this proposal, keenly supported by Kourie, the process of organising the meeting began. Kourie at that stage began to establish a sub-department of Spirituality at the University of South Africa, after her previous involvement in it within the Department of New Testament, and De Villiers had been involved in teaching Spirituality at Rhodes University. After months of correspondence and planning, the conference date was set for January 2004. Kourie at

that time already had excellent contact with the internationally renowned scholar and expert in Spirituality, Prof. Kees Waaijman, Director of the Titus Brandsma Institute of Spirituality in Nijmegen. He was to conduct training in Spirituality as St. Augustine the following year. It was decided to invite him and his colleague, Dr. Jos Huls, a colleague at the same institute in Nijmegen, to attend the inaugural meeting of the Association, to read papers that would orientate local scholars and to advise on the nature and function of such a society.

The intention was to establish a society that would promote the academic study of the discipline, but that would also create the space for practical application of spirituality. Although the initial focus was to be on Christian spirituality, it was not intended to be exclusive of other traditions and approaches — especially in order to get as many experts in our country to meet and interact. Since the majority of scholars who are active on this field are involved in Christian spirituality, it was thought that this would allow for the best use of the available skills and insights. At the same time it was also decided to open membership in order to allow anyone with an interest in the field to participate in the study of spirituality. A conscious focus was to be on spirituality in an African context. This approach was eventually consolidated and taken up in the constitution of the Association.

Late in 2003 the following invitation was widely circulated:

We would like to inform you of an exciting new development in the field of Spirituality. A few interested people have been discussing the possibility of setting up a society where the different dimensions of spirituality can be discussed and researched.

Two scholars in this field, from the Titus Brandsma Institute of Spirituality, University of Nijmegen, Holland, have been invited to be the main speakers at a conference where this Society will be instituted. Details of this event are given below.

Please pass this information on to other interested persons.

Please contact either Pieter de Villiers or Celia Kourie for further information. A full programme will be sent out shortly.

**SPIRITUALITY TODAY: REFLECTING AND RESEARCHING  
A NEW PHENOMENON**

(Conference for the Inauguration of the South African Society for Christian Spirituality)

Date: 23-24 Jan. 2004

Main Speakers:

Professor Kees Waaijman

(Director of the Titus Brandsma Institute, University of Nijmegen, Holland; Author of *Spirituality: forms, foundations, methods*. Leuven; Paris; Dudley MA: Peeters, 2002)

Dr. Jos Huls: Coordinator of SPIRIN, Spirituality International, a world-wide network for those involved in spirituality. Also coordinator of SPINE, a world-wide programme for teaching Spirituality via the Internet.

The inaugural conference then took place at the University of Stellenbosch for no particular reason other than that it was a convenient meeting point. On two hot summer days, an audience of more or less 70 members gathered to listen to presentations, mainly by Waaijman and Huls — all of which are being published in this volume. Finally, on Saturday 24 January 2004, at a Business Meeting, the Association was established. Celia Kourie, Pieter de Villiers and Christo Lombaard were elected to the executive. Kees Waaijman was then unanimously elected as Honorary President. It was also decided to publish the papers presented at the conference in a first publication that would eventually become the journal of the society. With the support of Prof. Francois Tolmie, Head of the Department of New Testament at the University of the Free State, this dream became a reality with their publication as a supplement of *Acta Theologica*. He is most heartily thanked for the way in which he supported our activities, also in accommodating Waaijman, Huls and Welzen as researchers in his institution. His contribution in this regard represents a vital stimulus to a new project and a new trend in theology in our country and continent.

The second annual meeting of SPIRASA, on the theme “Contemporary Spirituality,” took place on 21 January 2005 at the Santa Sophia Centre in Waterkloof, Pretoria. Papers were read on such topics as the work of Ken Wilber and Kees Waaijman, on spirituality in Afrikaans church hymns and rock music, on secular spirituality, on small groups as a means of promoting spirituality, and on the *momento mori* in Medieval and Renaissance art. At the Business Meeting the Constitution of the Association was adopted. In January 2006 the Society co-organised a meeting on African Spirituality with St. Augustine in Johannesburg, as well as a meeting with the South African Missiological Society in Stellenbosch.

The study of spirituality in South Africa is a fledgling discipline and should be promoted as effectively as possible. In order to promote its growth, the Association spelled out the following objectives:

1. To coordinate and promote professional research in the field of Spirituality
- 1.2. To coordinate and promote the practice of spirituality
- 1.3. To promote mutual understanding of various traditions in spirituality
- 1.4. To research and promote spirituality that is contextualised and rooted in Africa

- 1.5. To provide a non-sectarian forum for the discussion of and dialogue on spirituality
- 1.6. To seek contact and cooperation with international bodies and institutions of spirituality

This will be done by means of the following methods:

1. The Society will further its aims by research, conferences, workshops, retreats, groups and dialogue among members and persons interested and concerned in a national, regional and international context.
2. The Society will further the publication of its activities and of the research of its members.
3. The Society will organise at least one Annual General Meeting comprising
  - 3.1. papers on the topic of spirituality in assembly
  - 3.2. parallel sessions for short papers and group activities
  - 3.3. performances, readings, expositions, tours, retreats and activities that promote the practice of spirituality

This is the first publication of the Association. Its contents are in some cases introductory in nature and are intended to orientate the reader within the field. Because of this introductory nature, it was decided to include the contribution of Huub Welzen as well, though it was not presented as a paper at the inaugural meeting. This paper, originally an address to the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, was reworked for publication here and provides a fascinating introduction to aspects of Biblical spirituality. At the same time this publication contains specific specialised topics that will inform the reader about some of the issues that are currently under discussion in the field, and as such provides examples of how spirituality is being researched. It is the hope of the executive of the Association that this journal will promote an important new discipline that is in many ways vital within a global society as it continues its search for meaning. As we begin a new phase of our activities with this publication, we are convinced that the Spirit is the One who moves us on our journey to advance one of the most significant trends in contemporary religious thought.