PREFACE

This volume contains papers which were read at an international conference on the theme of discernment that took place in Malta from 24 to 27 May 2012. The conference, the result of an international co-operation, was attended by scholars from the Netherlands, the United States, Malta, South Africa and India.

The conference theme focussed on discernment, a prized virtue in classical spirituality. As a point of departure and as a working definition, discernment was understood as referring to the critical reflection on the religious experience of individuals or communities within the context of the divine-human relationship in order to come to right choices and actions. This is typical of the faith experience in times of fundamental ambiguities. Point of departure for most of the papers was the chapter on Discernment – A Blueprint for the Method, in the magisterial work of Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality. Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Louvain: Peeters, 2008: 483- 515.

This theme was discussed in this interdisciplinary forum by scholars from the field of Biblical Studies, Biblical Spirituality and Spirituality. The aim of the conference was to reflect on discernment in Biblical texts in the light of their reception in classical Spirituality, but also to reconsider discernment as it has been understood in classical Spirituality. The purpose was to engage in a dialogue which would ultimately enrich all disciplines represented at the conference.

This was the first ever attempt, as far as is known, to undertake such an interdisciplinary investigation on discernment. This volume contains the papers that were prepared for and read at the conference. The contents of this volume is, therefore, preliminary in nature and represents working material that now needs to be investigated and developed further.

A brief overview of the contents of this volume, reveals the wide range of topics and approaches to the theme.

In his introductory presentations, **Kees Waaijman** briefly and very generally explores some of the developments in the field of biblical spirituality over the past six decades by analysing and discussing some seminal publications on the theme of discernment. This is a valuable and insightful report by someone who is pre-eminently informed about recent research. In a second article, Waaijman analyses and evaluates the nature of discernment in contemporary spirituality by way of two paradigms on discernment (in the house of study in the Jewish tradition and in the community of desert monks in the Christian tradition). He indicates some invaluabe implications for discernment in general, but also for Spirituality

which had become such a vast field of research. The article concludes that discernment permeates all spiritual practices and represents the exercise of all exercises without which one is without a compass on the high sea of spirituality. This article confirms the seminal place of discernment in Spirituality.

In several articles, valuable material on discernment in Hebrew Scriptures were discussed. These articles indicate how neglected the theme of discernment had been up to now and that much insight is to be gained by reflecting on these Scriptures in terms of discernment.

Barbara Green, using Bakthian insights, discusses the story of Judah (esp Gen. 44) within the larger story of Joseph's dreams, to discern the work of the Holy Spirit and what is recognized in spirituality as the work of discernment. Discernment is about Judah's journey of transformation – presumably guided by God's widening and inspiring Spirit as he needs to persuade his (unrecognized) brother Joseph to allow Judah to take punishment in place of their brother Benjamin for the sake of their father.

Anne-Marie Bos discusses discernment in 1 Kings 19:1-18. In a perceptive essay, she draws attention to discernment as a change of perspective and as a fundamental aspect of the divine-human relational process – not only between Elijah and God, but also when readers are drawn into this process. Her article illustrates discernment through two works of visual art. It is a useful exploration of the ongoing relevance of biblical material on discernment, but also of the special place art has in reflecting on reception of Spirituality themes.

Nicholas Cachia focusses for his discussion of discernment on the request made by King Solomon to God for "a listening heart" (1 Kgs 3:9) at the beginning of his reign and writes in more depth on this metaphorical expression. A listening heart comprises a conscious openness of the whole person to God as well as an attentiveness to the demands of people. He discusses the need to develop the human capacity to know God through formation and self-commitment. Both the divine and human dimensions of discernment come to the fore in this interesting article.

Several articles focus on discernment in the New Testament.

Huub Welzen discusses discernment in Matthew's gospel through an analysis of δικαιοσύνη – an expression which is intensely debated in New Testament studies. In a close reading of the text, he shows how righteousness becomes the criterion for discerning. This article is helpful in spelling out more detail about the process of discerning.

Hermie C. van Zyl also takes the Gospel of Matthew as his text for investigating discernment. He describes discernment in terms of the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Here again, the human and the divine dimensions are spelled out and their close relationship indicated. Discernment takes place at the juncture of "not knowing" (being empowered by God) and "knowing" (purposefully seeking the will of God).

Pieter G.R. de Villiers investigates the often-neglected communal dimension of discernment by focusing on Acts 15. Several dimensions that are characteristic of discernment within the communal setting are spelled out: In times of ambiguity and crisis a faith community seeks the divine will through inclusive, intense debate, in consultation with the wise people in the present and past, for the well-being of all in the community, but always with an awareness that discernment is about a contemplative gaze.

D. Francois Tolmie, in his clear and concise contribution, shows how fruitful it is to read a Biblical text from the perspective of discernment. His close reading of the Letter to Galatians shows that discernment has three core elements. He investigates how reflection, choice and one's relationship to God, as the three elements, explain discernment in Galatians 2:1-10; 2:11-21; 3:1-5 and 5:12-6:10.

Paul Sciberras analyses discernment in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 against the background of the Septuaginta, Paul's socio-religious background and other New Testament books. He also makes some important linguistic observations of general relevance for interpreting discernment in Biblical texts. In a concrete situation, discernment enables the human heart to realise its full potential by purifying it from all obstacles. This article is also useful in describing discernment as a process. For Paul discernment is ongoing, but it also has a future dimension.

Several articles deal with discernment in later receptions of the Bible and in other religions.

Paul Decock describes Origen's understanding of discernment as an operation of the higher part of the soul whereby the soul opens itself to its spirit and accepts divine guidance to assess the movements of the soul and to manage these correctly so that the soul may preserve what is good and continue to strive for better things. In this significant essay on the influential figure of Origen, the interconnectedness of the divine and human is also stressed, but especially in terms of its effects on humanity. The fulfilment of intelligence, created after the image of God, lies in a cooperative movement with the Logos towards ever greater likeness with God – which, in turn, makes someone more capable of understanding and discerning.

Diana L. Villegas's insightful contribution points out how Catherine of Siena's wisdom on discernment represents a significant development in the history of this essential Christian theme. Her teaching was a result of personal wisdom, since she had no formal training. Scripture which she assimilated through her life of prayer and her relationship with God, was central to Catherine's wisdom. Biblical themes of growth in charity and capacity for truth were at the heart of her teaching on discernment and illuminate her teaching on discernment.

Charlo Camilleri explores the dialectical method of Pavel Florenskij as the preferred way to discern spiritual truth. By comparing Florenskij's thoughts with 1 Timothy 3:14-16, he points out how, especially in challenging times, both texts call for discernment of the true identity of the church. This interesting article on a relatively unknown thinker for Western scholars, but nevertheless of an influential person in Orthodox traditions, paves the way for more reflection on the classical, wider understanding of discernment in Spirituality and on the contribution of Orthodox traditions to the dialogue about discernment.

Two papers were read on discernment in non-Christian texts. They revealed the importance of this theme in other religions and the need to reflect on their role in the dialogue about discernment in Christian Spirituality.

Celia Kourie engages in a comparative study of discernment in Christianity and Hinduism. She points out the multiple dimensions and expressions of the sacred in 21st century global spirituality. From within an interspiritual approach, an analysis of the mystical wisdom of the *Bhagavad Gita* and John of the Cross clearly points to the central theme of discerning the real from the unreal. This leads to detachment from/lack of desire for and, finally, surrender to the Divine. This essay prompts one to reflect in more depth on the nature of discernment as a process of growing into the divine will.

Kurian Perumpallikunnel, in his close and extensive textual reading, investigates how The Bhagavad-Gita reflects on a perennial human predicament which other religions and philosophies also tried to resolve in their own way. Human beings often stood perplexed and mystified as they confronted paradoxical situations in life that demanded action. Discerning right from wrong often became an existential predicament.

This meeting in Malta was organized by Huub Welzen of the Titus Brandsma Insitute at Radboud University, Charlo Camilleri of the Carmelite Institute Malta and Pieter G.R. de Villiers of the University of the Free State. This was done in consultation with Kees Waaijman, who played a seminal

role in conceptualizing the meeting. The Carmelite Institute hosted the meeting in a most hospitable and impressive manner, with Charlo Camilleri as a gracious and attentive host. Stefan Attard of the Institute was a most competent and effective organizer of the meeting.

The event in Malta was part of an ongoing series of meetings which have been taking place over a number of years and at which several themes have been investigated from the perspective of Biblical Spirituality. Two previous volumes from these meetings have already been published. Both of them appeared as supplements to *Acta Theologica*: *The Spirit that Moves Orientation and Issues in Spirituality* (2006), *The Spirit that Empowers. Perspectives on Spirituality* (2008) and *The Spirit that Inspires* (2011). We are grateful to the editor-in-chief, Prof. Hermie van Zyl for accommodating this volume in the supplement series and to Dr. Lyzette Hoffman, executive editor of the journal, for her dedication in preparing and publishing those journals, including the present volume. She handled the huge administrative work-load in an admirable manner.

From the beginning of these meetings, Kees Waaijman, for many years the Director of the well-known Titus Brandsma Institute of Spirituality at the Radboud University in Nijmegen and Paul Decock, a long time scholar in Biblical Studies graced them with their erudition and wisdom. Both of them contributed significantly to our understanding of Biblical Spirituality. Both of them turned 70 in the year of the conference. It is with great appreciation and in celebration of this milestone in their lives that this volume is dedicated to both of them.

Guest editor
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