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# ON THE HIGH SEA OF SPIRITUALITY. ANTECEDENTS AND DETERMINANTS OF DISCERNMENT AMONG SCHOOL LEADERS IN INDIA

## ABSTRACT

*Discerning the good is the spiritual compass of living a good life with, and for others. It is the core of "lived spirituality". A person grows in discernment, when his/her spiritual character traits, spiritual capital and spiritual experiences grow. The authors first map the field of lived spirituality related to discernment. Next, they present the results of a research into lived spirituality of school leaders in India. School leaders have a task to discern the good in school organisations, in order to deliver good education. School leaders in India differ in the level of agreement with discernment. They report higher levels of discernment, if they report a stronger spiritual character trait of self-directed-cooperativeness, more spiritual capital (both claiming the absolute truth of their own religion and/or truth emerging from religious pluralism), and a higher level of mystic experiences.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

How to discern the good in organisations such as schools? Which road leads towards the good? According to Waaijman (2002:483-514), discerning the good is the compass on the high sea of lived spirituality. The metaphor of the high

sea indicates a context where life is unpredictable, rough, and sometimes unprecedented things happen. To discern the good on the high sea of everyday life is the task of school leaders.

The school seeks to deliver good education as a service to society in the formation of new generations. Education is not “good for” some other goal, but its aim is to educate new generations for the future of a good life with, and for others, in just institutions and a sustainable world. The school does not serve the school boards, the parents, the state, and the economic growth; it serves good education. Discerning the good is a risk, because the good life with, and for others is not a possession but a project towards a future that is better, inclusive, ultimate happiness, human fullness, perfect. Do we know what a good society is? Do we know what a sustainable society is? We need new generations to take up responsibility for the good life with, and for others so that with them new beginnings emerge of a future that is better, more perfect, inclusive, ultimate good. Discerning the good is the core task of leadership in schools: not simply of school heads, but also of all professionals in schools. It makes schools the most important democratic institution of the state: the quality of our schools in terms of good education is crucial for the quality of the future of society. This mission gives educational leadership a normative and spiritual quality. Educational leadership is a calling to serve good education, namely the future of a good life with, and for others that seeks to emerge in new generations.

The core question of this article is: How do school leaders discern the good? Discernment is a spiritual and normative task. Discerning the good is the compass of living a good life with, and for others. It is at the heart of what we define as “lived spirituality”. Lived spirituality is the art of living a good life with, and for others where life emerges as human fullness, more admirable, ultimate. Discerning the good is influenced by spiritual traits, spiritual capital and spiritual experience (Hermans & Koerts 2013:207-210).<sup>1</sup> We map this field of lived spirituality in section 2. In section 3, we describe our research design: research questions, sample, data-collection, measuring instruments, and data-analysis. In section 4, we present the results of the research among school leaders of Catholic Don Bosco schools in India. We end this article with a summary and discussion in section 5.

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1 The argument as to why each aspect is considered to be a determinant of discernment will be elaborated on in sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4.

## 2. LIVED SPIRITUALITY

According to Waaijman (2010:5), spirituality is a separate theological discipline within the encyclopaedia of theology, in which experience in the sense of receptivity for what is considered to be ultimate is a core concept (Waaijman 2010:30), and which is increasingly interdisciplinary (Bible, ethics, practical theology, philosophy) and comparative (in the field of religion and non-religious experiences of ultimate) (Waaijman 2010:32-33). Lived spirituality is of specific interest for practical theology, which aims to build theological theory on human agency (experiences, practices, beliefs) regarding a way of life that is considered to be spiritual.

Lived spirituality is a way of growing in discernment of the good life with, and for others, in just institutions and a sustainable society. We understand “the good life” as referring to something or somewhere, where “life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worthwhile, more admirable, more what it should be” (Taylor 2007:5). Spirituality is an art of living that is learned through transformation, coming to awareness, and growing in wisdom. We provide some distinctions to clarify what lived spirituality is and is not:

- Lived spirituality is not to be regarded as something individual versus something communal; it encompasses both (*i.e.* the good life with, and for others) (Streib & Keller 2015:51).
- Lived spirituality does not refer to dogmas, beliefs, and myths whereby we interpret the good life with, and for others; it refers to a life where we struggle to live a good life with, and for others and where fullness of life emerges unexpectedly as a gift.
- Lived spirituality is not the same as religion defined as a relationship with a divine transcendent being (deity, angels, spirits, and so on); yet religious life can be an expression of lived spirituality. Spirituality presupposes self-transcendence as an experience, as
 

being pulled beyond the boundaries of one’s self, being captivated by something outside of myself, a relaxation of or liberation from one’s fixation on oneself (Joas 2008:8).<sup>2</sup>
- Lived spirituality is not about structures of institutions or organisations; it refers to the art of living a good life with, and for others.

We consider discernment as the compass for the art of living the good life with, and for others in the “high sea of daily life”. In life (everyday life and professional life), we need to discern what the “good life” as fullness

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2 According to Joas (2008:7), experiences of self-transcendence “are not yet experiences of the divine, but without which we cannot understand what faith, what religion is”.

of life is that seeks to emerge. Without a compass, we do not know which road to take and where it will lead us. This can be summarised in an apt quotation of Waaijman (2002:483-514, 801-803):

Beyond the shorelines of the institutional churches and established family life, and beyond the boundaries of organised and organisable life, they exposed themselves to the presence of God, struggling, as Jesus did, with demons. In the desert, the unending sea of sand, the monks discovered discernment, *discretio* as their compass.

In this section, spiritual discernment will be defined. We identify three antecedents of discerning the good, namely spiritual character traits of self-directedness, cooperativeness and self-transcendence; the accumulation of spiritual capital, and spiritual experiences in which we experience an ultimate concern. Each section will elaborate on the argument as to why each aspect is considered a determinant of discernment.

## 2.1 Spiritual discernment

In Christian spirituality, the term “discernment” is used in different ways. According to Hense (2016:10), there is no such thing as the original model of discernment, which is the source of all later developments. On the contrary, on the basis of an historical overview of the first centuries of Christian spirituality, Hense concludes that discernment is always contextual and open to renewal, serving specific needs for persons in specific situations.

The theme of “discernment” in Christian spirituality has also two different strands in the tradition, as can be noted in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (1957) (Waaijman 2013a:2-3). The first strand deals with the discernment of the spirits (in Latin known as *discretio spirituum*), and the second with the virtue of discretion (in Latin known as *discretio* and in Greek as *diakrises*). In history, both strands are taken up sometimes by the same authors who connect them in different manners; but there are also authors with a specific line of thought. The term *discernment of the spirits* is used in the New Testament by Paul of Tarsus as one of the eight charismata or gifts for building up the community (1 Cor. 12:8-10). But the term is vague and open to many interpretations.

The concept “discernment” will be developed from the Christian tradition of spirituality (“context of discovery”) and is proposed as a universal spiritual communal process of deciding the common good (“context of legitimation”) (see also Hermans & Koerts 2013:205). Of course, this claim needs to be tested, but we can provide the ground on which this claim rests. In the tradition of discernment, we differentiate

between the penultimate versus the ultimate goal(s) of discernment. According to Aquino (2017:157), the penultimate goal of discernment is purity of the heart, which implies the cultivation of a stable, tranquil, and properly disposed mind. The ultimate goal is the contemplative state of the beatific vision of God, or the kingdom of heaven. This vision need not be located in the afterlife, but also in moments of a “glimpse”, however brief, limited, and tentative, of a “heaven on earth” (Aquino 2017:158).<sup>3</sup>

Based on the work of Waaijman (2002:483-514, 801-803; 2013b) and Nissen (2015), we constructed a model of discernment with four stages. Both authors develop their ideas in line with John Cassian (c.360-c.435), who approaches discernment as a general spiritual faculty of human beings (Dingjan 1967:14-77). For Cassian, discernment is a reasoning skill characterised by deliberation, in which different perspectives are discerned (Hermans & Koerts 2013:205). Insofar as exploring multiple perspectives necessitates views of others, discernment has a social dimension for Cassian. Discernment should lead to a judgement based on reasons considered to express the truth under given conditions: a firm judgement made after considering all possibilities and expressing the right measure, balanced and thoughtful. In other words, to lead to a good decision, it needs to incorporate self-examination and self-criticism. An inner sensitivity has to be cultivated through humility (*i.e.* insight into our own limitations and imperfections) and love of ourselves and others (Hermans & Koerts 2013:205). A last component in this Cassian tradition is an obligation to act. Discernment is connected with growing in virtuousness, such as courage and justice.

Based on Waaijman (2002; 2013a) and Nissen (2015), we derived a model of discernment with four phases:

1. *Looking outwards (circumspection)*: Multiple perspectives on a question requires making room for ideas from different sources and persons. It also implies a discretion between the viable and the non-viable.

The first insight I gained is the result of investigating the way in which Anthony arranged the meeting (*collatio*). Every hermit participated in this meeting with his own experience and knowledge. ... It implies becoming sensitive for different positions, experiences, and perspectives in the field of spirituality (Waaijman 2013a:21).

2. *Looking inwards (introspection)*: This comprises reflection and self-inquiry, at both the individual and the community level. The focus is on

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3 This is also why we will not incorporate ideas on the belief of God or religious practices in relation to God (such as prayer) as elements of the concept of discernment.

evaluating the alternative perspectives and their possible outcomes, going beyond (the ideological aspect of) what is known and opening up to (the utopian aspect of) how things could be. Becoming attuned to the ultimate purpose and being open to new possibilities necessitate both peace of mind and the ability to change perspectives.

A second insight is that, in listening to different voices, new insights can be born, new differences can be created, new, previously unrecognised layers of transformation can be revealed. If we do not allow other insights, other positions and other perspectives to enter our consciousness, we will become narrow-minded (Waaijman 2013a:21).

3. *Intervision*: This stage is marked by an exchange of arguments in the process of deliberation. This implies that participants be wise and willing to share learning experiences. According to Nissen (2012:22-23), leaders should create a “critical middle” to come to a shared insight in what is the good that needs to be done.

This I learned from the monks: nothing is a priori excluded from critical reflection. Everything in the field of spirituality needs critical argumentation. Though it is at times painful, it remains unavoidable. Discussion and evaluation (known as *collatio*) are indispensable for valid discernment (Waaijman 2013a:22).

4. *Decision*: This final stage of discernment implies judging which of the alternatives could be viewed as wise, sound and adequately representing the ultimate purpose. Linking decision-making to being radically attuned to the ultimate purpose and thus creating new possibilities is crucial for discernment (Nissen 2015:23). The aim is to note the difference between the given and the possible flourishing in the future and to choose the path that leads from the given to the possible. Noting this road towards the good will intrinsically lead to acts of virtuousness to allow the good to emerge, such as the courage to face resistance.

## 2.2 Spiritual character traits

The need to create coherent meaning (in terms of wholeness, fullness, and ultimacy) is inherent in our very existence as human beings. A human being is the only living organism that can experience conflict with him-/herself (McNamara 2009:32-42). This experience can come in a cognitive mode (not knowing our true self, experiencing discordance in past and present images of ourselves); an affective mode (feeling bad, without hope, or unhappy), or a volitional mode (not having the right will, doing what one understands to be wrong). These conflicts cannot be resolved

on the emotional level (Cloninger 2004; 2007; 2008). We need to develop character traits that regulate these conflicts. Regulation demands self-awareness (“Why am I so upset in this situation?”) and control (“How can this conflict be resolved?”). This is important for discernment as described in section 1: if we are aware of what influences us, we are able to control those influences through self-examination. If we control those influences, we can grow into a more coherent meaning towards wholeness, human fullness, and happiness. We can, therefore, state that these character traits are a necessary condition for discernment of the right path towards the good life with, and for others.

According to Cloninger (2007:742), being coherent means that our character traits are focused on wholeness, fullness, and ultimacy and keep us aloof of conflicts in ourselves, with others and towards what is considered to be transcendent. In Cloninger’s (2007:742) view,

a spiritual perspective allows us to see that we live our lives in division, split between contradictory desires that create conflict and dissatisfaction.

When these character traits are more developed, we are better capable of discerning the good, because we can manage emotional conflicts and keep focused on what is considered to be ultimate. This is essential for discernment not to choose and act on ego motives or emotional reactions, but to take the path towards the good.

Following Cloninger, we can identify three character traits:

- The trait of self-directedness is characterised by responsibility and purposefulness (versus blaming and aimlessness).
- Cooperativeness is characterised by tolerance and kindness (versus prejudice and revengefulness).
- Self-transcendence by intuitiveness, openness to a unifying reality and being self-forgetful (versus being conventional and sceptical).

According to Cloninger (2007:741), these character traits represent the mental expression of the virtues of hope (*i.e.* self-directedness), love (*i.e.* cooperativeness), and faith (*i.e.* self-transcendence). Developing spiritual character traits is the spiritual equivalent of becoming virtuous (in an ethical sense). The development of character traits is a lifelong process with different stages, each one representing a different level of self-awareness concerning human fulfilment as a kind of effortlessly calm, impartial, wise and loving, unified being (Cloninger 2004; 2007; 2008).

## 2.3 Spiritual capital

Spiritual capital is “the knowledge, competencies, and preferences as positional goods in a competitive symbolic universe” (Verter 2003:150). Spiritual sources of wisdom such as religions are operating within a dynamic field of competing conceptions of a good life (Hermans & Koerts 2013:208). We live in a world of diversity of ideas about what is to be considered the good life with, and for others. There are good arguments not to reduce spiritual capital to institutionalised forms. First, spiritual capital in our late modern society is found not only inside, but also outside institutions, such as New Age spirituality, nature spirituality (Verter 2003:160). Secondly, there is more scope for laypersons in the valuation of different forms of cultural capital than is recognised in institutional forms of religion. Religion is not simply a field constructed by the professionals (theologians), but also by non-professionals. Thirdly, there is no such universally recognised field of religion compared to other fields such as the economic or political (Verter 2003:170). The religious field is a contested field.

Based on this concept of spiritual capital, we understand both world religions and non-institutionalised forms of wisdom and insight as spiritual repositories of wisdom and insight that nurture growth in discernment. In discerning between good and evil, we need to have wisdom and insight about what is good as the ultimate meaning of life. In order to grow in wisdom and insight, we need to increase our spiritual capital (resources) and deepen our understanding of the wisdom offered in the resources of spiritual capital.

According to Knitter (1995, 2002), there are competing positions in the religious field. On the one hand, monist positions see only truth in one religion; on the other hand, pluralist positions see truth in different religions and different spiritual ways of life. Knitter distinguishes two monist positions, and two pluralist positions.

- Replacement monism entails exclusive affirmation of our own religion as the only true religion.
- Fulfilment monism accepts that there might be some truth in other religions, but there is complete truth only in our own religion.
- Commonality pluralism presupposes universal truth lurking behind the particularity or uniqueness of religions.
- Differential pluralism underscores that differences between religions are real and that their particularities are opportunities for reciprocal enrichment and growth.

Monism and pluralism are two contested truth claims in the field of religion and influence discernment in different ways. A strong conviction that there is truth in different religions can strengthen discernment, because discernment incorporates the claim to be open to different perspectives. If we have more spiritual capital from different religions, we are better equipped to discern from different perspectives. But there is also an argument that an exclusive affirmation of our own religion induces a higher level of discerning the good. A monist position is more demanding in terms of cost (*i.e.* we need to invest more time and energy in it) and persons holding a strong monist position have a clear idea of what is good and not good. They likely will have less doubt about the “right” path towards the good. We also know that adherents of different religions in India have a different preference for monism and pluralism (Anthony *et al.* 2005). This makes the Indian context a good setting to test the influence of spiritual capital on discernment.

## 2.4 Spiritual experiences

Spiritual experiences can be defined as experiences of ultimate meaning, which are always unexpected and sometimes (but not necessarily) objectively strange compared to normal experiences (Hermans 2015). Ultimate means that spiritual experiences are marked by a subjective significance of absoluteness, finality, human fullness, and wholeness (see also Waaijman 2010). They are unexpected in the sense that they are not necessary and are intense experiences in the sense that they arouse strong emotions and feelings. Those who have experienced the ultimate meaning as such will be stronger in discernment, because they have a deep, personal experience of what they consider to be of ultimate meaning.

We distinguish two types of spiritual experiences. First, mystical experiences are ultimate, anomalous (*i.e.* objectively strange experiences), and commonly connected with religion, but not necessarily in an institutional form (Wildman 2011:97-98). Secondly, extra-ordinary experiences are anomalous, sometimes ultimate (but not necessarily), and not commonly related to religion (Wildman 2011:83). We do not expect a difference in influence on discernment between the two types of spiritual experience. Both experiences connect us to an awareness of the purpose of life. But we expect that those who report stronger spiritual experiences than others will have a stronger idea of the purpose of life as the ultimate ground of the decision about what to do!

### 2.4.1 Mystical experiences

Stace (1961:31) distinguishes between *mystical consciousness* and *its interpretation* (see Anthony *et al.* 2010). While mystical consciousness – in Stace’s perspective – is basically similar worldwide in different periods and religious contexts, mystical experiences can vary insofar as the interpretations of this state of union may differ from one religious tradition to another (e.g. Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist mystical experience).

Stace identifies two core characteristics:

- *Extrovertive mysticism* is characterised by an awareness of unity with the universe or the perception of all things as one (unifying quality), and by apprehension of the One as inner subjectivity or life in all things (inner subjective quality).
- In *introvertive mysticism*, the experience of union refers to a “pure” state, in the sense that the mystical consciousness has no substantive content and is even characterised by a loss of self (ego quality). Such consciousness of nothingness is accompanied by distortion of time and space (spatio-temporal quality).

In addition to these two types of mysticism, Stace (1961:31-37, 131-132) distinguishes common characteristics that can be viewed as universal factors directing the interpretation of mystical consciousness: noetic quality (perception of special knowledge or insight), ineffability (difficult to articulate), positive affect (experience of peace or bliss), religious quality (perception of sacredness or wonder), and paradoxicality.

### 2.4.2 Extra-ordinary experiences

Extra-ordinary experiences violate the operations of the world, as these are understood in normal life. These experiences usually fall beyond the control of those who experience them (Wildman 2011:83). They are emotionally and cognitively potent. They often produce powerful convictions, in those who have them, about the nature of reality, the significance of events, what future actions to take, and what our life priorities should be. There are strong indications that these kinds of experiences are widespread in society and are reported by both religious and non-religious people (Castro *et al.* 2014).

Based on this family resemblance, different experiences are grouped under this heading of extra-ordinary experiences. Bainbridge (2004) mentions extra-ordinary powers (of astrologers, palm readers, tarot card readers, fortune tellers), paranormal powers (such as telepathy, communication between minds without using the traditional five senses,

communication with the dead), and para-religion (such as esoteric beliefs in UFOs and extraterrestrial beings). All these categories involve not only a strong belief of those who report such an experience, but also strong emotions, a feeling of being out of control and ultimacy.

Some extra-ordinary experiences are connected to religion or para-religion; others are not, and some are created in a client cult, in which individual practitioners serve a clientele such as astrologers casting horoscopes or mediums staging séances (Bainbridge 2004:381). Moreover, there are anomalous experiences that are either shocking, terrifying, or enjoyable, with no religious or spiritual significance; they are simply odd.

## 5. RESEARCH DESIGN

In this section, we formulate our research questions and expectations, and describe the sample, data collection, and the measuring instruments.

### 5.1 Research questions

We address the following three research questions:

- What understanding do school leaders have of discernment?
- To what degree do school leaders engage in discernment?
- To what extent do spiritual traits, capital and experience predict a higher level of engagement in discernment, while controlling for background variables?

The first research question focuses on the understanding of discernment among school leaders (dependent variable). The second question is a descriptive one: What is the level of agreement with discernment? The third question aims to test the predictions of our conceptual model (see Figure 1). We distinguish between variables which we expect to have a direct influence on discernment, based on the theoretical presumptions (so-called determinants) and variables that can influence discernment (so-called antecedents) but that are not part of our explanatory model of lived spirituality. According to our theory of lived spirituality, discernment is influenced by three components, namely spiritual traits, capital, and experiences. We opine that school leaders report a higher level of discernment, when their spiritual traits are stronger, have more spiritual capital, and report higher levels of spiritual experiences. We will control for the influence of background variables (antecedents) that can directly or indirectly influence discernment.

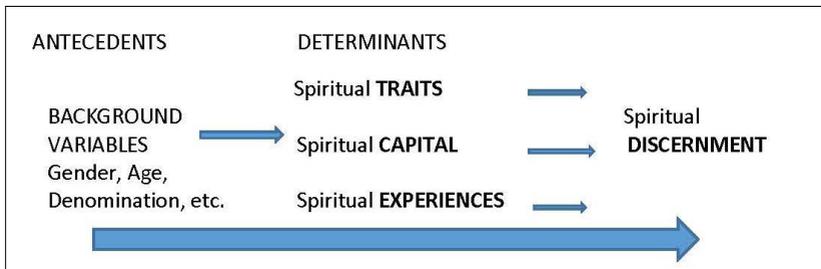


Figure 1: Conceptual model of discernment

## 5.2 Sample and data collection

To answer our research questions, we selected school leaders of Catholic schools of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India. The school leaders are a mix of Salesian priests, others associated with the Salesian family, and lay people. The Salesians of Don Bosco have 108 high schools in India, and 113 higher secondary schools (in 2017). In order to have a select sample of the school, we stratified the schools according to the 11 Salesian administrative provinces, levels of education (high and higher secondary), and their location (urban, semi-urban, and rural). Every second school was selected from the list of schools. Three respondents from each of the selected schools were included in the sample: principal/headmaster, vice principal/assistant headmaster, and a key coordinating teacher (chosen by the school head). The online questionnaire with link was made available to the 318 respondents forming the sample for a period of three-and-a-half months (from 17 October 2016 to 31 January 2017). Of the 207 responses received, nine were found to be incomplete. Thus, 198 formed our final sample of respondents, bringing the response rate to 62%, which is rather high in the case of an on-line survey.

## 5.3 Measuring instruments

For spiritual traits, spiritual capital and spiritual experiences, we used existing instruments. For spiritual discernment, we constructed a new scale. We will describe the psychometric qualities of the measuring instruments of the existing instruments. We will present the factor analysis of the spiritual discernment scale in the results.

For spiritual traits, we used the character scales<sup>4</sup> of the shortened Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI-140) developed by Cloninger *et al.* (1993). This instrument comprises three scales:

- The self-directedness scale (15 items) consists of five facets or subscales, namely responsibility (five items), purposefulness (two items), resourcefulness (two items), self-acceptance (two items), and congruent second nature (four items).
- Cooperativeness (15 items) also consists of five facets or subscales, namely compassion (eight items), social acceptance (three items), helpfulness (three items), and empathy (one item).
- The scale of self-transcendence (33 items) consists of three facets or subscales, namely self-forgetfulness (*i.e.* the experience of a loss of time and place; 14 items), transpersonal identification (*i.e.* the experience of unity with all people, with everything in the world, and with a spiritual power; seven items), and spiritual acceptance (*i.e.* the belief in wonder and extra-ordinary experiences; 12 items).

Confirmatory factor analysis (principal component; mineigen > .1; communality > .30) resulted in two factors. A combined scale of self-directedness and cooperativeness (Alpha .77) and one scale of self-transcendence (Alpha .83). We removed 26 items, due to low communality (< .30). In self-directed-cooperativeness (15 items), all facets are included except purposefulness, helpfulness, and empathy. In self-transcendence (22 items), all facets are present. There is a strong collinearity between the two scales (Rho .84; significance .001); in other words, the scales measure, for a large part, the same trait.

Religious capital is measured with a scale that we developed in a previous research in India (Anthony *et al.* 2015:17-142). The scale consist of four approaches to religions: replacement monism, fulfilment monism, commonality pluralism, and differential pluralism (see section 2.3). Confirmative factor analysis (principal component; mineigen > .1) showed two factors: religious monism (combining replacement and fulfilment monism) and religious pluralism (combining commonality and differential pluralism). Four items needed to be removed (communality < .40) from the combined scale of religious pluralism without changing the conceptual structure. Reliability for the religious monism scale is high (Alpha .88), and moderate for the religious pluralism scale (Alpha .70).

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4 The TCI also measures four dimensions of temperament (harm avoidance, novelty seeking, reward dependence and persistence), in addition to the three character dimensions.

Mystical experiences are measured with the so-called Hood scale (Hood 1975; Hood *et al.* 2001). There are three dimensions in this scale: extravertive mysticism (experience of union with the external world), introvertive mysticism (experience of nothingness), and religious interpretation (common characteristics of wonder, profound joy, sacredness, and revelation). In previous research in India, we reduced the number of items to twelve; four items for each dimension (see Anthony *et al.* 2015:102-116). Factor analysis (principal component; criteria=1) confirmed that all twelve items construct one scale of mystical experiences. Reliability is high (Alpha .87).

Extra-ordinary experiences are measured by means of an instrument developed by Bainbridge (2004). There are three dimensions, namely extra-ordinary powers (of astrologers, palm readers, tarot card readers, fortune tellers), paranormal powers (such as telepathy; communication with the dead), and para-religion (UFOs). We reduced the original scale of 20 items to ten items and added two items which we considered typical for the Indian culture: “Some faith healers have God-given healing powers” and “Good luck charms sometimes do bring good luck”. Confirmative factor analysis (principal component; mineigen > .1; communality > .40) showed one factor (five items removed with a low communality < .40). Reliability of the reduced scale was good (Alpha .82). In the final scale, items were present of the three dimensions identified by Bainbridge (see Appendix C).

Finally, we constructed a scale of discernment based on the four-stage model described in section 2.1. We formulated two items for each of the elements in discernment (see Figure 2). The psychometric qualities of the scale are part of the result section.

Phases	Elements
A. Looking outwards	(1) Listening: sensitive to different positions, experiences, and perspectives (2) Wonder: “sensing” the good that emerges in what others say and in what they do
B. Looking inwards	(3) Self-examination: being driven by the “coming of” the good, and not by “ego” motives
C. Intersivision	(4) Mutual involvement in understanding the good that seeks to emerge
D. Decision and action	(5) Purpose of life as the ultimate ground for decisions (6) Courage to face decisions; justice and fairness of decisions

Figure 2: Phases and elements of discernment

## 6. RESULTS

### 6.1 First research question

What understanding do school leaders have of discernment? In order to measure discernment, we presented 12 statements to our respondents: two statements per element that we distinguished in discernment. Table 1 shows the result of the factor analysis, after removing items with a commonality lower than .20. All elements are present in the scale, except one, namely wonder.<sup>5</sup> We will return to this finding in the discussion. We conclude that the scale measures our concept of discernment fairly well in terms of validity. The scale also has a moderate but acceptable reliability Alpha of .71.

**Table 1:** Principal component analysis (mineigen 1) of the discernment scale (n=197)

Items	F1
Decision2: Ideals of good life ultimately guide decisions	.70
Action1: I make sure to have the courage to put decisions into action	.69
Intervision2: Good decisions should be made with mutual involvement of all	.64
Listen1: I listen to people with different perspectives before deciding on the good	.62
Action2: I can only put decisions into action, if they pass the test of justice and fairness	.60
Decision1: My decisions find their ultimate ground in the purpose of life	.56
Selfexam1: Introspection of motives is indispensable in making good decisions	.50
Reliability: Cronbach <i>Alpha</i>	.71
Explained variance	38.1%

### 6.2 Second research question

What is the level of engagement of school leaders with discernment? We measured the agreement with discernment in a range from 1=disagree to

5 Items removed: "Leaders need a strong awareness of limited control in school organisations", and "A sense of wonder about what can emerge in persons and organisations is essential in making good decisions".

4=agree. The mean is 3.58, that is, on average, the heads of school agreed with discernment as something heads of school need to be capable of. The standard deviation is low (.39), which means that most of our heads of school tend to agree or agree with the concept of discernment, which we choose as starting point of our research.

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics discernment scale

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.
198	1.14	4.00	3.58	.39

*Legend: 1=disagree; 2=tend to disagree; 3=tend to agree; 4=agree*

### 6.3 Third research question

To what extent do spiritual traits, capital and experience predict a higher level of engagement in discernment, while controlling for background variables? We first analysed the influence of background variables on discernment (see Table 3; model 1). There is no significant influence of any variable on the level of discernment of the school leaders. In model 2, we added the determinants of spiritual discernment as predicted by our theory of lived spirituality. What are the results?

First, there is a moderate influence of age on discernment. Maturity predicts a higher level of discernment in combination with other aspects of lived spirituality. The level of significance is  $<.05$ . Secondly, we observe an influence of spiritual traits, capital and experiences on discernment, as foreseen in our model of lived spirituality. A higher level of discernment is induced by combined spiritual traits of self-directed-cooperativeness. The scale of self-transcendence is not a significant predictor. However, we know that this trait is measuring the same as self-directed-cooperativeness (see 3.3; high collinearity;  $Rho .84$ ). For a correct interpretation, we should incorporate this influence on discernment. We will return to this issue in the discussion.

Both types of spiritual capital (religious monism and religious pluralism) are predictors of discernment. Religious monism has a moderate influence (beta .17) and religious pluralism, a strong influence (beta .43). In fact, it is the only strong influence. We will take up this finding in the discussion. Spiritual experiences are also a predictor of the level of discernment. Of the two types included in our research, only mystical experiences predicts a higher level of discernment (a moderate influence of .22).

In total, model two predicts 33% of the level of discernment of school leaders; almost one third of the variation in discernment.

**Table 3:** Regression analyses for discernment with weights ( $\beta$ ) for each variable and total explained variance ( $R^2$ , Adjusted  $R^2$ ) (N=198)

	Model 1	Model 2
Gender (female = ref., male)	.035	.061
Age-group (22-35, 36-45, 46-65 years)	.146	.171*
Denomination (other Christian denomination = ref., Catholic)	-.092	.044
Leadership position (principal, vice principal, coordinator)	.016	-.079
Type of school (Hr. Sec. School = ref., High school)	-.037	.034
Nature of school (Private = ref., Govt. aided)	.002	-.049
Strength of school (up to 1,000 = ref., over 1,000)	.057	.029
Salesian identity (Lay = ref., Sal. family)	-.062	-.136
Self-directed-cooperativeness		.177**
Self-transcendence		.041
Religious monism		.172**
Religious pluralism		.428**
Mystical experience		.222**
Extraordinary experiences		.080
Explained variance		
$R^2$		.372
$R^2$ adjusted	.033	.332
$R^2$ change	-.008	.339

*Legend: \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$ ;  $\beta$  up to .14 small predictive value;  $\beta$  from .15 up to .24 as moderate, and large than .25 as strong*

## 7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this article, we presented a model of lived spirituality based on spiritual traits, capital, experiences, and discernment (TCED model). In line with Waaijman (2002; 2013a; 2013b), we considered discernment to be the compass on the high sea of lived spirituality, where human beings need to discern the emerging good life with, and for others, and to act and speak accordingly. The general conclusion of our research is that we did not falsify our model of lived spirituality (TCED model) with discernment as compass of lived spirituality and three determinants of discerning the good, namely spiritual traits, spiritual capital, and spiritual experiences. We will first present the results for each research question, before discussing some remarkable findings.

We developed a scale for discernment based on six elements (four stages). Our research findings (first research question) did not falsify the concept of discernment which we used in our research, except for one element. Wonder was not part of the concept of discernment, according to our respondents. We will reflect on this below.

Secondly, school leaders in our research tend to engage or engage in discernment as defined in our research. There are no school leaders who do not engage in discernment.

Thirdly, all three elements, which we identified as determinants of lived spirituality, influence higher levels of engagement with discernment. The first element is a spiritual character trait which we labelled self-directed-cooperativeness. This trait includes the following qualities:

- social acceptance (to be empathic and helpful);
- compassionate (not seeking revenge);
- congruence in speaking and acting (harmony, knowing who you are);
- show responsibility (not blaming others);
- self-acceptance (not wanting to be better than others), and
- to be resourceful (capabilities to give future to others).

The first two qualities refer to cooperativeness (*i.e.* to be “good-to-others”); the ensuing four qualities refer to self-directedness (*i.e.* to be “good-to-yourself”). It appears that to be oriented on the good for others and for oneself are viewed as reciprocal qualities.

Next, two types of spiritual capital predict a higher level of discernment: having found ultimate truth in one’s own religion (monism) and seeing ultimate truth in the diversity of religions (pluralism).

Finally, mystic experiences also induce a higher level of engagement in discernment but not extra-ordinary experiences. Mystic experiences consist of:

- an awareness of unity with the universe or the perception of all things as one (introvertive);
- consciousness of nothingness accompanied by distortion of time and space (extrovertive);
- common characteristics such as perception of special knowledge or insight, difficult to articulate, experience of peace or bliss, perception of sacredness or wonder, and paradoxicality.

All elements are moderately influencing discernment, except for pluralism which is twice as strong as the other predictors. A pluralist conception of the sources of the truly good (human fullness) is the strongest predictor of a higher level of discernment in our research.

Age (maturity) is also a predictor of discernment in combination with the components of spiritual traits, capital, and experiences. In other words, it is not simply about growing older, but about maturity in combination with stronger character traits, more capital and more experiences.

In general, our research did not falsify our model of lived spirituality (TCED model) with discernment as compass of lived spirituality. However, there were some remarkable results.

First, why is “wonder” not reported as a defining element of discernment? The problem can be conceptual or the construction of the items. To begin with the first: we still consider “wonder” (receptivity; transcendental openness) as a constitutive element of discernment. We suggest that future research should formulate new items for “wonder” and for other items that had to be removed because of a low commonality. No negatively formulated item entered the final scale. Therefore, we consider formulating new items as the better option.

Secondly, what could be the reason that self-directedness clustered with cooperativeness? Why is self-transcendence not a predictor of discernment? The clustering suggests that our respondents view self-directedness and cooperativeness as interrelated or reciprocal. In a sense, cooperativeness, *i.e.* tolerance and kindness, implies convergence of the self-directedness of others with their own responsibility and purposefulness. We hypothesise that this is definitely a conceptual possibility. However, maybe in another research population, self-directedness and cooperativeness could be disjunct. In his research on ultimate concern of teachers, Van de Brand (2017) was able to distinguish self-directed concerns, other directed concerns and reciprocal concerns (such as love of others and love of oneself). We hypothesise that the combination of self-directedness and cooperativeness is typical for this research group of Salesians and connected with the spirituality of Don Bosco (Deramaut 1998). Further research in other populations of school leaders should clarify if the traits of self-directedness and cooperativeness are combined or not.

The character trait of self-transcendence was not a significant predictor of discernment. According to Joas (2008:8), self-transcendence is an experience of

being pulled beyond the boundaries of one's self, being captivated by something outside of myself, a relaxation of or liberation from one's fixation on oneself.

The dimensions of the character trait of self-transcendence, as measured by the TCI instrument, seem to measure this accurately: transpersonal ("being pulled beyond the boundaries of one's self"), self-forgetful ("a relaxation from one's fixation on oneself"), and spiritual acceptance ("being captivated by something outside of myself"). Among our respondents, the scale of self-transcendence and the scale of self-directed-cooperativeness measures to a high degree a common character trait. Although not visible in our analysis, it should be incorporated in the influence of the trait of self-directed-cooperativeness. New research should provide insight into whether other groups of respondents show the same deep connectedness between self-directedness, cooperativeness, and self-transcendence.

Thirdly, the level of agreement with religious pluralism is the strongest predictor of discernment. We expected that pluralism would be a strong predictor, because mobilising different perspectives on the good is one of the elements in discernment. The more school leaders are open to spiritual capital of different religions, the more they are engaged in discernment. At the same time, school leaders, who affirm higher levels of agreement with the absolute truth of their own religion (monism), report higher levels of discernment. The two scales are unrelated (correlation  $-.074$ ; not significant). This implies that school leaders' combination of agreement with religious monism and agreement with religious pluralism is possible. This is so, because, in our case, religious monism is not total exclusivism; it also implies a certain inclusivism, seeing the positive elements in other religions that can find final fulfilment in our own religion. On the other hand, religious pluralism, in our case, also implies openness to the differential elements of other religions for reciprocal enrichment. This explains why, in the minds of the school leaders in India, religious monism and religious pluralism are not mutually exclusive. Conceptually this seems a paradox, but, in fact, this is what school leaders in India think and what they practise in lived spirituality. Let this finding stimulate further academic study into lived spirituality (besides the systematic spirituality), because it can bring new knowledge of the actual ways (in plural) in which persons lead their life *on the high sea of spirituality* (Waaijman 2013a).

## APPENDIX A

### SPIRITUAL CAPITAL SCALE (DERIVED FROM ANTHONY ET AL. 2015)

Please express your agreement or disagreement with statements that represent different ways of understanding your religion and the other religions. Your answer can be one of four: (1) Disagree; (2) Tend to Disagree; (3) Tend to Agree, (4) Agree.

#### Replacement monism

- 19. The truth about God, human beings and the universe is found only in my religion.
- 6. Other religions do not offer a true experience of God (*anubhava*).
- 1. Only through my religion can people attain true liberation (salvation, *mukti*, paradise).
- 4. Eventually, my religion will replace other religions.

#### Fulfilment monism

- 3. Compared with my religion, the other religions contain only partial truths.
- 10. Other religions do not offer as deep a God experience (*anubhava*) as my religion.
- 5. Compared with other religions, my religion offers the surest way to liberation (salvation, *mukti*, paradise).
- 8. Other religions will eventually find their fulfilment in mine.

#### Commonality pluralism

- 7. Different religions reveal different aspects of the same ultimate truth.
- 14. Different aspects of the same divine reality are experienced in different religions.
- 9. Every religion contributes in a unique way to the ultimate liberation of human beings (salvation, *mukti*, paradise).
- 12. The similarities among religions are a basis for building up a universal religion.

## Differential pluralism

11. Differences between religions are an opportunity for discovering the truths ignored by my own religion.
18. Differences in God experience (*anubhava*) made possible by various religions challenge the idea that God is one.
13. Differences between religions are part of God's plan to save the world.
16. Differences between religions are a basis for mutual enrichment and growth.

## APPENDIX B

### MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES SCALE (DERIVED FROM HOOD ET AL.; SEE ANTHONY ET AL. 2015)

In this part, you are invited to indicate whether you have had the following types of experiences. Your answer can be one of four: (1) Certainly no; (2) Probably no; (3) Probably yes, or (4) Certainly yes.

#### Extrovertive mysticism

- 3 (8) Did you ever have an experience in which everything seemed to be alive?
- 6 (24) Did you ever have an experience in which your own self seemed to merge into something greater?
- 9 (19) Did you ever have an experience in which you felt that everything in the world was part of the same whole?
- 12 (12) Did you ever have an experience in which you realised your oneness with all things?

#### Introvertive mysticism

- 2 (11) Did you ever have an experience in which you lost the sense of time and space?
- 5 (4) Did you ever have an experience in which everything seemed to disappear from your mind until you were conscious only of a void (emptiness)?

8 (32) Did you ever have an experience that cannot be expressed in words?

11 (3) Did you ever have an experience in which something greater than yourself seemed to absorb you?

### Religious interpretation

1 (25) Did you ever have an experience that left you with a feeling of wonder?

4 (20) Did you ever have an experience that you knew to be sacred?

7 (13) Did you ever have an experience in which a new view of reality was revealed to you?

10 (5) Did you ever experience a sense of profound joy?

*Legend: between brackets is the numbering of the items in the 32 items scale of Hood (1975)*

## APPENDIX C

### Scale extra-ordinary experience (derived from Bainbridge 2004)

What do you think about the following extraordinary experiences? Please indicate your opinion about each statement by choosing one of the four possible answers: 1 = Certainly false; 2 = Probably false; 3 = Probably true, 4 = Certainly true.

1. A person's horoscope (star sign at birth) can affect the course of his/her future.
2. Some people can hear from, or communicate mentally with someone already dead.
3. Some people can move or bend objects with their mental powers.
4. Some people really experience telepathy (communication between minds without using the five senses).
5. Some UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects) are spaceships from other worlds.
6. Dreams sometimes foretell the future or reveal hidden truths.
7. Intelligent life exists also on some other planets in the vast universe.

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