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Preface



On the occasion of his 80th birthday, this volume celebrates Kees Waaijman for his distinguished career and scholarship in Spirituality over a period of 60 years. Researchers in the field of mysticism and spirituality from all over the globe offer contributions in honour of one of the best-known scholars in the field, in recognition of his singular contribution to research on spirituality.

During his career, Waaijman played a formative role in the study of spirituality as the scientific and general director of the Titus Brandsma Institute and as professor in Spirituality at Radboud University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Not only did he promote and generate research in these official capacities, but he also produced his own publications that have been influential both in his home country and in many other parts of the world.

An outstanding aspect of his work is its theoretical and methodological nature. Building on phenomenological and dialectical insights, he offered a unique and groundbreaking contribution to the field, combining theory and practice in an intricate unity. With scientific

acumen and clarity, he offered a unique understanding of spirituality as the unfolding and transformative divine-human relationship. This formal definition was paired with a material analysis that determined typical spiritual themes of spiritual texts. On the most abstract level, for example, he concluded, from his paradigmatic reading of all spiritual traditions, that they all share the themes of awe of God, holiness, mercy, and perfection. This provided a helpful tool to interpret the spirituality of a document and to help describe it as a spiritual text. The outcome of this methodological and theoretical approach was developed in great depth in his magisterial book: *Spirituality: Forms, foundations, methods* (2002). The impact of this work is illustrated by the five editions of the Dutch version (2002) that have been printed thus far, and translations into German, Italian, Spanish, and Russian. This book can be regarded as the crown of both his academic career and his research on spirituality.

Another seminal aspect of his work is his writings on Biblical spirituality, especially on the Psalter. He entered a religious order that had the praying of the whole of the Psalter in Latin as a major spiritual exercise. In a recent interview, Waaijman described, in language with a mystical quality, the existential impact of this reading on his religious experience and his appreciation of the Psalter as an aesthetic text. He noted how he was “overwhelmed” by the transformative “beauty of praying the Psalter”, adding,

I felt as if I was being plunged into the Psalms, an experience that shocked and overwhelmed me. It is difficult to explain exactly what happened to me, but in praying the Psalter I experienced strength, presence and beauty in an intimate way (Tolmie 2020:1).

This remark contains some basic elements of the spiritual journey, namely the spiritual values of perseverance, the transformative divine touch, and mystical elements such as presence and intimacy. This spiritual, if not mystical experience would set in motion Waaijman’s lifelong adventure of reading the Psalter spiritually.

His experience of reading the Psalter can be extrapolated to the reading of all spiritual texts. Spirituality is about a lifelong journey in which one stands in awe before the divine to become aware of the spiritual meaning of one’s existence. Spirituality is not merely about doctrine or theology, however valuable they might be. It is about their integration in life so that one has to constantly reflect on how one’s thoughts function within the context of the spiritual quest for flourishing.

Waaijman’s exegetical work reveals the difference between traditional forms of Biblical Studies as academic discipline and what is now known as Biblical Spirituality. They share many commonalities and are mutually

dependent. Biblical Spirituality is, however, about an encounter with the text, in which one senses the divine presence and responds to its claims and challenges. “Praying” the Psalter with others is then not simply about saying a prayer or “understanding” the texts. It is about an encounter of the first order that touches one’s life. It is about an existential, heartfelt affair of special intimacy and about a mental state that emanates from being immersed into the atmosphere of the Psalter. In Waaijman’s words: “It felt as if I was born for the Psalter, and as if the Psalms were written for me! They opened my heart and widened my horizon” (Tolmie 2020:2).

These remarks should not be misunderstood as if spirituality is about a naïve or superficial piety. It is characteristic of Waaijman’s life career that, from an early start, he interacted with advanced scholarship. Already in his initial academic training as a student, he was influenced by leading scholarship in philosophy and religion, especially the phenomenological insights of authors such as Husserl and Heidegger. At the same time, he was impressed by the dialogical thought of scholars such as Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas. These insights shaped his thought for the remainder of his career. And yet, his academic approach to the Psalter involved him on a deeper level and made him aware of the unfolding divine-human relationship as a new dimension of a “poetic phenomenology”. This remained a golden thread in his work on spirituality.

Other formative influences include his study of language, linguistics, and translations. He learnt the Septuagint and the Vulgate versions of the Psalter, and researched semantics that empowered him to investigate key terms in the Psalter.¹ This would explain his close reading of spiritual texts and his extensive use of linguistic insights in his publications on Spirituality Studies.

Waaijman’s oeuvre furthermore contains extensive research on mystical texts. He offers special insight into the nature of mysticism – a much discussed point of debate in contemporary scholarship. Of special interest in his list of publications is his dissertation entitled, “The mysticism of I and Thou” – an early indication of his interest in mysticism and dialogical thinking. He prepared for this work by studying modern Hebrew in Jerusalem and Jewish mysticism at the Hebrew University. His later work reflects his extensive exposure to many years of research on mysticism at the Titus Brandsma Institute. There is, for example, his relatively unknown but valuable essay on the mystical way and experience that uniquely outlines some key characteristics of mysticism and that could even provide a useful heuristic tool to reflect on mystical texts (Waaijman 2003).

1 For more information, see Tolmie (2020:1-5).

His interaction with academic scholarship is also evident in his ten-volume commentary on all 150 psalms. For this, he immersed himself in a large number of secondary works on the Psalter by authors such as Gunkel, Mowinckel, Kraus, Beyerlin, and Seyhold. And yet, this research made him aware that exegetical reconstructions can be restrictive, and that more attention was needed for the role of the reader.

In recent times, Waaijman expanded his work on the Psalter with more attention to liturgy (especially the liturgy of hours) and spirituality. This development also had an existential impact on him. The work on liturgy, he noted in a recent interview (Tolmie 2021), made him aware of prayer as the deepest layer of the Psalter. Spirituality may learn from the Psalter that prayer is not simply about saying prayers, but about becoming aware of God's presence and of participating in the process of divine-human transformation. The opposite is also true: spirituality and liturgy reveal that, by praying the Psalter regularly, an inner space in the soul has grown resistant to destruction. Once again, his academic work, which reflects a distanced reading of the text, culminates in a spiritual reading that is about an interiorising response to the text.

It is with great pleasure that we present the contributions in this *Festschrift* to Kees Waaijman on his 80th birthday on 20 June 2022, in celebration of his lifelong career and work in Spirituality Studies. We congratulate him on this special occasion and wish him good health.

These studies appear in a special *Supplementum* of *Acta Theologica*, published by the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State. Our Faculty is proud of the fact that Waaijman has a long relationship with us as a research fellow and as a visiting professor in our spirituality courses. We have benefitted greatly from his academic contributions, his visits to our Faculty, and the lectures that he gave.

We want to thank every author for his/her willingness to participate in this *Festschrift*. Their contributions cover themes from Biblical Spirituality to historical research to contemporary reflections on spirituality. The *Festschrift* speaks of Waaijman's global reputation, in that the contributors come from various countries and include some of the best-known specialists in the field of Spirituality Studies.

We also extend our gratitude to Dr Lyzette Hoffman, Executive Editor of *Acta Theologica*, for her work on this volume, as well as colleagues in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State, for their interest and help in the publication of this volume.

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