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In Memoriam Vincent Brümmer (Stellenbosch 30 December 1932 – Bilthoven, 30 March 2021)

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In memoriam Vincent Brümmer (Stellenbosch 30 December 1932 – Bilthoven, 30 March 2021)

In the Holy Week of 2021, the first academic director of NOSTER, prof. Vincent Brümmer, died at the age of 88. When spending Christmas 2017 in Gambia, where his eldest daughter and her family live, Vincent became unwell. On his return he was diagnosed with cancer and treated with chemotherapy, in the hope that he might live another five years in reasonable health. In the course of 2018, however, his health swiftly deteriorated and by the end of 2018 he left hospital to celebrate Christmas and his sixtieth wedding anniversary at home, and to die there. Unexpectedly, from then on he gradually regained some strength, and he could say with undisguised satisfaction: 'I did not live up to the expectation of my doctors!' While he could no longer travel or work, Jean and he received many visitors in their home in Bilthoven, and were even able to pay an occasional visit to a museum. In the end, his death came quite unexpected, and he passed out just after going upstairs to brush his teeth.

Vincent was a son of Stellenbosch professor Nicolaas Brümmer, who was 66 when Vincent was born and died when Vincent was only 14. He studied philosophy and theology in Stellenbosch, Harvard (with Paul Tillich), Utrecht (with A.E. Loen) and Oxford (with Ian Ramsey). He obtained his PhD with distinction in Utrecht in 1961 (on the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd) and returned to South Africa, where he took up teaching positions at various universities. In 1966, he was appointed professor of the philosophy of religion at Utrecht University, and during 31 years (January 1967–December 1997) he remained in this position. In the first years of his professorship, he concentrated on developing a new philosophy curriculum for the Utrecht students of theology. The textbook that he wrote (*Wijsgerige begripsanalyse; ET: Theology and Philosophical Inquiry*) became a Dutch classic, and was printed four times between 1975 and 1995. After his Leiden colleague Henk Berkhof had suggested to Vincent that in order to enable his students to apply the theological method presented in his textbook, Vincent should provide examples of this application, Vincent set out to do this and became a prolific researcher. His most influential monographs are *What are We Doing When We Pray* (1984) and *The Model of Love* (1993). In these books, Vincent articulated a philosophical theology on the basis of the practice of Christian spirituality; he argued that the attributes of God should be interpreted in the way presupposed by the love relationship between God and man.

Vincent became one of the first professors in Dutch theology who organized their research in a research programme; his 'divine attributes' programme, in which the later professors Gerrit Immink, Luco van den Brom and Gijsbert van de Brink were trained, became exemplary for a new way of organizing theological research. As a result, Vincent was invited to organize the research of the Utrecht Faculty of Theology and the Catholic Theological University of Utrecht in a research institute of which he in 1988 became the founding director (INTEGON). Subsequently, he was invited to do the same for Dutch theological research on a national level and he also became the founding director of the Dutch National Network for Advanced Studies in Theology (1991–1994) and its successor, the Netherlands Research School for Theology and Religious Studies NOSTER (1994–1997). At the time, he was known as *Pater NOSTER*. Vincent was president of the British Society for the Study of Theology (1994–1996), received honorary doctorates in Uppsala (Sweden) (1994) and Durham, UK (1998), and was appointed a knight in the order of the Lion of the Netherlands (1997). After his retirement, he continued his research and writing and several times went to South Africa as a visiting professor until his poor health in 2018 made it impossible for him to continue.

<https://noster.org/news/in-memorial-vincent-brummer-stellenbosch-30-december-1932-bilthoven-30-march-2021/>

Vincent leaves his spouse of more than 60 years, Jean Brümmer-Heatlie, three children and six grandchildren behind. He was not only an excellent teacher and supervisor, a creative researcher and prolific author and an efficient organizer, but also a beloved husband, father and grandfather. He had friends all over the world, and it is telling for Vincent that most of these friendships had been going on for decades.

Let me end with a recollection. Vincent was also active in interreligious dialogue with Muslims, and visited Iran several times. In 2006 he told about his experiences there:

When I was in Iran I was taken to a Quran scholar. This scholar explained to me the meaning of Jesus in Islam in the following terms: 'A prophet is a manifestation of some characteristic of Allah. Joseph and David, for instance, are perfect manifestations of Allah's beauty. Mohammed is a perfect manifestation of Allah's activity and Jesus is a perfect manifestation of Allah's love.' I replied: 'If that is what you believe, I can see in you my brother in Christ.' What Muslims believe about Christ comes closer to orthodox Christian faith than what many contemporary theologians say about Jesus.

His memory will live on among those who had the privilege to know him.

Tilburg, 14 April 2021

Marcel Sarot