

## **In Memoriam**

### **Hendrik (Henk) M. Vroom (1945-2014)**

On 16 January 2014 Henk Vroom passed away after battling cancer for more than a year. As one of the co-founders of ESITIS and a co-founding editor of *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, Henk was well known to many of the society's members.

To those who knew him, Henk was driven. I first met him just after his *Religions and the Truth* (1989) was published. A couple of years later, together with a couple of Dutch colleagues, Anton Wessels and Arnulf Camps, he co-founded *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* and asked me to take care of the English editing and production of the journal. Over the years he continued to put his time and energy into the journal, remaining active as editor until a couple of months before he died. He was a primary figure in the formation of the Center for Islamic Theology at the faculty of theology of VU University and served as its first coordinator for several years.

At the same time, he was also active as co-editor of the series *Currents of Encounter* he co-founded with Jerry D. Gort in the late 1980s, and continued to make important editorial contributions to the series in his final year. During the last year he helped co-edit a volume on Muslim and Western perspectives on medical ethics, *Looking Beneath the Surface*, and the volume, *Christology and Evil in Ghana*, was written by one of his PhD students.

That same drive was also present in his work in ESITIS. When we talked, the subject of ESITIS would often arise, and he would speak eagerly and passionately of things that were happening in the society. He very much wanted to attend the last two conferences the society held (in Istanbul and Bilbao) but was prevented by his illness. Despite the fact that he was unable to, he took an avid interest in what was happening at the conference and offered insightful comments and guidance on my own contribution to it.

That drive, however, was matched by a couple of other qualities that are rarely met in combination. First, Henk had an amazing ability to size up a potential area of study and set up a programme of study quickly. Henk could turn vague proposals for a dissertation into a programme of study, complete with title chapters and a proposed length of time for the study. That continued right to the end. When we visited him over a year ago just after his cancer returned, we discussed a possible dissertation project focusing on Abraham Kuyper (a Dutch theologian and prime minister of the Netherlands at the turn of the 20th century) and the significance (negative and positive) of his ideas for present-day Dutch politics. Again, he had a complete approach and structure already mapped out in his head. As long as he was able, he never stopped thinking, never stopped asking questions.

In its announcement of his passing, the newspaper of his university (VU University Amsterdam) stated that Henk never shied away from the difficult questions. That is true. This was more than intellectual curiosity, however. Henk never shied away because of his passion for getting at the truth. But this was not merely objective truth, but lived truth – to use his terms. And that is the other quality that characterized Henk: his passion and concern for others. On the one hand, this translated into a continual application of theology and philosophy to the needs and concerns of society. It was with respect to this that Henk was awarded the Senior Societal Impact Award in 2009 by VU University Amsterdam. On the other hand, it translated into a personal interest in people, getting to know them on a personal level. This was true for people of all ages. He took a genuine interest in people he met.

It was with a sense of appreciation for Henk that Jerry Gort and I went to see him just before Christmas to present him with a preliminary version of volume 50 of Currents of Encounter: a selection of the papers presented at the ESITIS conference in Bilbao that the editors had dedicated to him. Henk was deeply touched by this work.

Henk will be missed personally and professionally, He will be missed personally because of his genuine care and concern. Professionally, his influence and drive will be continue to be felt in ESITIS.

Henry Jansen