

POKROF

OOSTERSE CHRISTENEN, KERKEN EN CULTUREN

Utrecht, July 27, 2020

His Eminence, the Most Reverend Archbishop Nicolas Thevenin,
Apostolic Nuncio to Egypt
Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See
Cairo, Egypt

Your Eminence,

Laudetur Iesus Christus!

May this letter find you in good health and spirit in these difficult days of the worldwide coronavirus crisis that is so deeply affecting Church work in general and Egypt in particular.

I write to you today about the work of Drs. Cornelis Hulsman, about whose work I know through his contributions for *Pokrof*, a publication of the Catholic Society for Ecumenism Athanasius and Willibrord. I would deeply appreciate if you might receive him and so he might tell you in person about his life's work, a most inspiring work conducted under very challenging circumstances. Further, I would most deeply appreciate your writing a letter of recommendation to Missio on behalf of this work and this man for the final three years needed support for succession planning. His work is unique and I truly believe his work merits Your Eminence's attention and support.

I truly came to know Drs. Hulsman after he had become the chairman of the Committee Repurposing St. Theresia Church in Den Haag in 2009, and in 2011, organized a visit for four priests, including myself, and several parishioners to Egypt.

Please allow me to me share my experiences with you. The Diocese of Rotterdam had closed the St. Theresia Church building in Den Haag to worship. Many parishioners, however, wanted to see the building to remain active in their community, and together with the then-chairman of the parish council, Jean Marie Bosch van Drakesteijn, Drs. Hulsman looked for alternative uses for this beloved religious center. In 2010, he investigated a new use of the church by Coptic Catholics who wanted to be able to celebrate their own liturgy. In 2010, Drs. Hulsman organized a well-attended Egyptian exhibition with icons, Coptic art and a presentation of the Holy Family tradition. At that time, he also discussed these plans with the Apostolic Nuncio in the Netherlands. The plans for transitioning the building to the Coptic Catholics were sadly not realized for lack of funds. But the exhibition resulted in organizing a visit along the path of the Holy Family in Egypt for priest and parishioners. Too modest to say so himself, Hulsman is an outstanding expert in this field, knows all locations and the responsible local Egyptian clergy, both Catholic and Orthodox.

Our travel group consisted of four priests, three Dutch and one Belgian and several parishioners. We left on January 21, 2011, and stayed the first days in the residence of Coptic Orthodox Bishop Marcos of Shubra al-Khayma, Cairo. We were also kindly received for dinner by H.E. Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald. We here learned that Cornelis Hulsman had played a major role in diffusing baseless Egyptian criticism of H.H. Pope Benedict XVI following his lecture in Regensburg in 2007 by writing responses in a major Egyptian magazine with information provided by H.E. Archbishop Fitzgerald.

After our visit to Cairo, we went to Alexandria where, at our request, Cornelis Hulsman took us to the Two Saints Church which had been bombed that January 1. We prayed on the site of the victims' death. This visit was deeply moving. Although the Egyptian revolution had broken out on January 25, Hulsman was nevertheless able to bring us safely to Minia where we met with local priests according to our planned itinerary. Hulsman obtained a car from the Catholic bishop of Minia to bring two elderly members of our group to the airport. The roads and airport were chaotic but Hulsman, knowing the country well, was able to safely arrange their transport without creating a yet more dangerous situation. He then returned to Minia from whence he took us to the Monastery of St. Anthony. We had been scheduled to go to St. Catherine's Monastery, but the Egyptian military told us that the road to the Sinai had been closed. Hulsman then arranged with Bishop Justus, head of the Monastery of St. Anthony, that our entire group could stay for a number of days in the Monastery. This stay was definitely the best part of our visit. Cairo was chaotic and dangerous, but the monastery was a place of serenity and prayer.

We nevertheless had to return to Cairo to catch our flights on February 4, but were unable stay with Bishop Marcos since his area was full of unrest. Hotels and the airport were overcrowded and chaotic: non-Egyptians all had to depart the country immediately. Hulsman was able to arrange for us to stay in the residence of H.E. Catholic Patriarch Antonios Naguib, conveniently near the airport. We celebrated communion and transferred safely to the airport to evacuate.

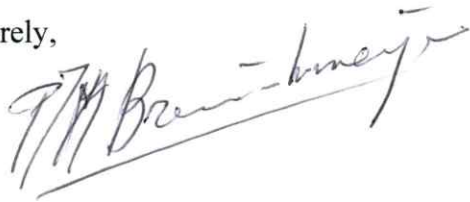
We could not have had a better guide for this trip. Hulsman was able to use his extensive network to find out which parts of greater Egypt and Cairo were safe. He was also able to quickly rearrange the program according to the circumstances. Each single participant was deeply impressed how Hulsman had handled this visit. I was moved to describe this trip in *Pokrof*.

Since this impressive visit I have been following Drs. Hulsman's work. Missio has provided core-funding which subvents a part of Hulsman's very modest salary and office overhead. This subvention was done granted with the understanding that Hulsman would seek project funding from other organizations, too. It is impressive and stirring to see how he has multiplied his talents for the Kingdom of God – even at the expense of his own pension savings which are far below the average of a citizen of the Netherlands who never lived in Egypt.

His current, pressing goal is the culmination of his life's work, identifying a Catholic academic institution to carry on his work after his retirement, less than 2 years from now. I would be deeply and humbly grateful if you would grant Cornelis Hulsman a personal audience to share the plans to continue this excellent work through 2021-2023.

Realizing the plans for 2021-2023 is only possible with financial support from Missio, unobtainable without a letter of support from Your Eminence, I am humbly and respectfully asking that you write to Missio.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul J. M. Brenninkmeijer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Father Paul J. M. Brenninkmeijer,

Priest of the Archdiocese of Utrecht,
Priest for the Byzantine Rite in the Catholic Church in The Netherlands,
Between 2008 and 2018 a member of the editorial board of *Pokrof*, a publication of the
Catholic Society for Ecumenism Athanasius and Willibrord
Painter of Holy Icons