

**Arab-West Report, October 22, 2012**

**Title: Bjoern Bue's Human Rights Memorial Lecture for 2012; Love amidst fear and conflict: Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt 2012**

**Author: Cornelis Hulsman**

**Summary:**

Cornelis Hulsman was asked to speak about Matthew 25:35-36 from the Bible in which Jesus said, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in," in the light of his work for *Arab-West Report* in Egypt. Hulsman explained that this verse applies to all of our neighbors, Christian, Muslim and people regardless of whatever faith they may have. Around 150 people attended.

**Full text:**

**Invitation**

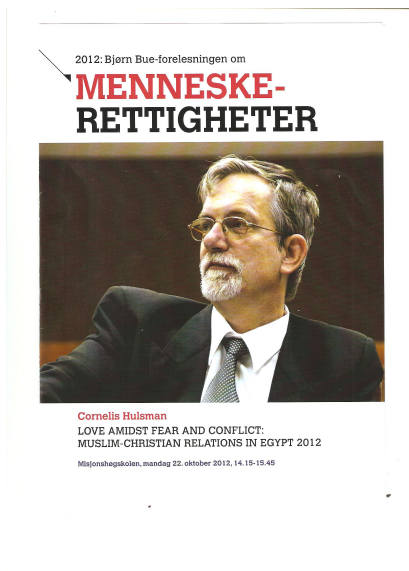
It is a great pleasure of the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, Norway, to hereby invite you to come to Norway to give the annual Bjoern Bue's Human Rights Memorial Lecture for 2012, on October 22, coinciding with the United Nations Day.

Rt Rev. Bjoern Bue was trained in theology from our school in the 50s, and worked first as a missionary in Cameroon and later as a minister and bishop of the Church of Norway in our Diocese. As a missionary in Africa, a Norwegian church leader, and within the frame of the WCC, he often voiced the issues and situations of the weakest of us. Through this lecture we aim to pay tribute to the memory of his vision of the God-given, equal and inherent dignity, worth, and rights of all human beings.

Human rights issues have always been emphasized in the studies and research at our school, preparing our students to integrate this perspective in their ministries domestically and overseas.

Based on the knowledge we have received from people at our school about your knowledge of Egypt and your important work, your name was suggested as this year's candidate to give this lecture.

The lecture is inspired by Matthew 25:35-36, and was established in 2002. Since then the list of previous lecturers include persons from human rights and peace and conflict work in El Salvador, Kenya, DRC, Northern Uganda, Columbia, Pakistan, and the former Norwegian Prime Minister, Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik.



Invitation to the lecture

The lecture itself will be a public lecture here in Stavanger, located on the West Coast of Norway. We would also love to plan for a seminar related to your work in Egypt, inviting scholars, our students, and others to participate and learn from you. Your field of competence and experience should be a very good match for our students' interests in their programmes (intercultural communication; global studies; religion and development; interreligious dialogue, etc).

We would be greatly honoured to receive you in the best possible way here in Stavanger in October!

May God bless your work abundantly,

**Bård Mæland,  
Director**

**Lecture:**

Thank you Dr. Bård Mæland, Dr. Kristin Fjelde Tjelle, and Dr. Jan Opsal for your kind invitation to give the prestigious Bjoern Bue's Human Rights Memorial Lecture for 2012 on the God-given, equal and inherent dignity, worth and rights of all human beings and since I am speaking about Egypt in particular, Muslims and Christians. Thank you all for attending.

I was impressed by the torch marches last week in different locations in Norway that showed solidarity with Christians in the Middle East. Impressive too was that the new Norwegian Foreign Minister, Espen Barth Eide attended one of these marches. It shows that this subject is important to Norwegians. There is good cause for concern as Christians are hastily leaving the Middle East and if this continues at the current rate, there won't be many Christians left in the next generation.

It is important to give attention to this, but we also need to be extremely cautious about how this is expressed because very often we also hear presentations that are simply untrue. People sometimes speak of Christian persecution, but I prefer to speak of hardship for all Egyptians, including Christians.

I was raised as Christian and I am Christian. I was raised in an environment with negative views of Muslims and Islam. In 1974, 1975, 1976 and 1977 I went to Israel where I have met with Leif Larsen, a lifelong Norwegian friend whose family I visited before coming here and whose daughter Linn Elise is attending my lecture now. In Israel my views on Muslims and Islam gradually changed. I first met with Palestinian Muslims and Christians. I then went to other Arab countries to hear their views. I have met with many, many people and I have changed.

Personal meetings count. Direct contacts. Not seeing people of other faiths and cultures as abstract entities or even enemies, but as people of real flesh and blood, people with their strengths and weaknesses. I have met with great intellectuals, politicians, students, farmers, and laborers. All have contributed to my understanding of peoples of different cultures. All of them have also contributed to my understanding of God's word in Matthew 25:35-36, where Jesus said

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,<sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

These words refer to any hungry or thirsty person, any stranger, any ill person, and any prisoner. Any one! This includes Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and people from any other religion. We need to help our neighbor. And when we help our neighbor we in fact have done this to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

One of the oldest churches in the world is the Coptic Orthodox Church, founded in the first century A.D. by St. Marc. The Church was initially persecuted but persevered and witnessed many great saints. One of those saints was the fourth century St. Bishoi.

Copts relate to stories that Bishoi saw Jesus. First, an old man visited his monastery and, after a long desert walk, had sore and dirty feet. The custom of those days was that monks would wash the feet of their visitors, but no one wanted to wash the feet of this old man. Then Bishoi came and washed the feet of the old man. When he did so, he discovered this was not just an old man but Jesus. With this story Coptic Christians tell their believers that whatever you do to your neighbor you do to Jesus.



Prof. Otto Meinardus, a great scholar, pastor, and good friend of mine who passed away in 2005, related a second encounter between Bishoi and Jesus. Monks had heard of Bishoi meeting Jesus and were jealous. Bishoi had a dream in which he was told that Jesus would appear on a nearby mountain. He told his fellow monks and they all rushed as fast as they could to that mountain. On the way to that mountain they found an old man who begged them to help him climb the mountain because he, too, wanted to see Jesus. They had no time for him and feared they otherwise would miss Jesus. But when Bishoi passed the old man he decided to help the old man and carried him.



And when he did so he discovered he was not just carrying someone, but he was carrying Jesus. The message Meinardus

<sup>1</sup> Some people limit the explanation of this verse to only the poor Jews in Jesus’ time. Such limitation of Biblical verses happens more such as Bishops Dimitrius and Marqus limiting “my people” in Isaiah 19 to Christians in Egypt only. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2008/week-52/8-bishop-marqus-responding-christian-activists-contributions-christian-migration>. I believe such ways of limiting the verse is not doing justice to God’s love for all, which transcends the boundaries of one’s own faith group.

gave in his 1962 sermon in the Washington Cathedral in Washington D.C., U.S. was clear: we humans are so busy in our own work we forget to be human.<sup>2</sup>

Please note that the second story comes from a sermon of Prof. Meinardus who, in those years, was also a pastor of the Maadi Community Church in Cairo. But the message was well understood by Copts; they knew their saint and the story of the first encounter and thus readily accepted the second encounter as well. The message is clear to any Christian. What you do to your neighbor you do to Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

### Who is our Neighbor?

Is this a fellow churchgoer? Or a member of the same organization? Perhaps a fellow Norwegian or Dutchman?

When an expert in the law asked Jesus about who is our neighbor he responded with the parable of the “Good Samaritan”. Neither the priest nor the Levite that the Jews of Jesus’

would have expected, but the Samaritan is our neighbor because he provided help to the man



New Year 2012 – Muslims mourning the attack on a church in Alexandria one year earlier.



March 18, 2012 – Muslims providing water all day long to mourning Christians for the death of Pope Shenouda.



who was so severely beaten by robbers.

I used this parable when I was asked to speak in a church in Ishneen el-Nasara, 180 km. south of Cairo. I read the Bible text but replaced the Good Samaritan with “Good Muslim”. People in the village knew very well what I meant. The way Christians in Egypt think about Muslims is often not different from the way Jews in the days of Jesus thought about Samaritans. Of course that feeling is mutual, but Jesus made an effort to break mutual stereotypes and showed that we should approach one another with humility because no person is beyond the reach of God’s love. And when we do this, persons from groups we may dislike may turn out to be conduits of his grace in time of need.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, “Visions or Dreams,” *Religious News Service from the Arab World*, Week 44, Art. 24, November 9, 2002, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2002/week-44/24-visions-or-dreams>.

<sup>3</sup> For a personal reflection on this story see: Jayson Casper, “Miracle Stories,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 10, Art. 2, 2010, <http://arabwestreport.info/year-2010/week-10/2-miracle-stories>.

<sup>4</sup> For my experience in Ishneen el-Nasara see: Cornelis Hulsman, “Freedom of Religion in Egypt,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 34, Art. 3, 2003, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2003/week-34/3-freedom-religion-egypt>. I later developed a sermon that I have used in different German churches, Cornelis Hulsman, “Love Your Neighbor As



Relations between Jews and Samaritans may have been marred in Jesus' days but this is much more the case between Muslims and Christians today. There is a widespread mutual mistrust that has been reinforced by centuries of conflict and tensions; Muslims conquering traditional Christian lands, Crusaders trying to regain some of those lands, Western colonialism in the 19th and 20th century, Western self-interest in relating to the Arab world, biased standards in dealing with Israel and the Palestinians, a long history of anti-Islamic statements by Western leaders and authors. Being in Egypt, one is repeatedly reminded of this history and Western biases. This has resulted in a widespread conviction that the West has targeted Islam, that some Western Christian groups are making an effort to destroy Islam and that, in fact, we are witnessing a new Western crusade against Islam.

Christians, both Egyptian and non-Egyptian, have their own images of Muslims, highlighting difficulties, violence and Muslim insensitiveness for Christians' positions and outright anti-Christian statements. Of course, violence, frustrations, and misunderstandings that do exist need to be addressed.

We have a major problem with media reporting. Both Arab and Western writers, and also often Egyptian Coptic activists and Muslims, tend to focus on the negative aspects of the other and to treat these as so-called essential qualities, which are believed to never change.<sup>5</sup> Many journalists are guilty of focusing attention on what has happened, but not on the underlying causes of events. In this way, media reporting can act as a boomerang and reinforce Arab-West or Muslim-Christian polarization. This is the context Muslims and Christians in Egypt live in; widespread Muslim feelings about Western injustice; Christians feeling pressed in following conservative Muslim norms; Western media highlighting, and at times, exaggerating local Christian sentiments, which in turn results in Muslims feeling that they were unfairly portrayed in the Western media and often this indeed was unfair. Activism and media thus tend to contribute to driving Muslims and Christians apart instead of doing justice to both.

In this negative spiral we tend to forget the moments of cooperation that should not be neglected. In my May 9 lecture in the European Parliament I highlighted the cooperation between Coptic Orthodox Priest, Father Yo'annis and Salafi Shaykh Hamdī in the village of Qufādah in the governorate of Minia, Upper Egypt. Father Yo'annis even campaigned in the previous parliamentary elections for Shaykh Hamdī, a local orfi



Father Yo'annis and Salafi Shaykh Hamdī from Qufādah

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Yourself," *Arab-West Report*, Week 50, Art. 25, 2004, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2004/week-50/25-love-your-neighbor-yourself>.

<sup>5</sup> For an example of widely different Coptic and Muslim interpretations see Jayson Casper, "Stubborn Ideologies and Uncertain Details," *Arab-West Report*, Week 2, Art. 17, 2010, <http://arabwestreport.info/year-2010/week-2/17-stubborn-ideologies-and-uncertain-details>.

(customary) judge with a strong sense of justice who was also fair in rulings that involved local Christians.<sup>6</sup>

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of other examples of local Muslims and Christians cooperating, but these are generally not reported in our media.<sup>7</sup>

When I see Christians doing good things for Muslims and Muslims treating Christians well in Egypt then these are the “Good Samaritans” that Jesus refers to in his parable.

Here I would like to show you some images of “Good Samaritans” in Egypt.

The parable of the “Good Samaritan” is first of all a message to us Christians. We know of this parable and we therefore should know that the attitude of many non-Muslims towards Muslims is wrong and not Biblical. But we should go a step further. Muslims are not only our neighbors, but are also our brothers in humanity before God. Describing Muslims as “brothers before God” comes from Father Christiaan van Nispen, a Dutch Jesuit Priest with whom I have worked in building *Arab-West Report*, our Egyptian electronic magazine.

Father van Nispen was continuously emphasizing the value of personal relations with Muslims. Around 1995, he introduced me to Dr. Abdel Mo’ti Bayūmī, a fantastic Azhar scholar who had been a lifelong friend until his death last summer. He was a strong Muslim believer, pious, always open to meet with non-Muslims and respond to questions. His friendship with non-Muslims also made him take strong positions in opposition to Muslims with not-so-tolerant views about non-Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

In meetings with pious Muslims such as Dr. Abdel Mo’ti Bayūmī I came to understand that both Muslims and Christians worship one God and acknowledge God as our Creator. For many decades Father van Nispen had asked Muslims and Christians about their prayer life and found much sincerity from Muslims and Christians in their desire to serve and be obedient to God. I am well aware there are also major differences, but it is also important to see the similarities.

I have discovered in personal relations with Muslims and Christians that we are all humans. Of course we also find Muslims lying and serving their own interests, and so do Christians. None of us is righteous, not even one, as St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans,<sup>9</sup> neither Muslims nor Christians.

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<sup>6</sup> Jayson Casper, “Shaykh Hamdī of Maghāghah, A Salafi Candidate with Coptic Support,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 3, Art. 48, 2012, <http://arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-3/48-shaykh-Hamdī-maghaghah-salafi-candidate-coptic-support>.

<sup>7</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, “The Harms of Misreporting on Egypt’s Christians,” *Arab-West Report*, May 9, 2012, <http://arabwestreport.info/harms-misreporting-egypts-christians>.

<sup>8</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, “In memoriam of Dr. ‘Abd al-Mu’tī Bayūmī (1940-2012), prominent Muslim scholar, strong supporter of *Arab-West Report* and personal friend,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 33, Art. 35, 2012, <http://arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-33/35-memoriam-dr-abd-al-muti-bayumi-1940-2012-prominent-muslim-scholar-strong>.

<sup>9</sup> New International Bible, Romans 3:11.

Of course many Muslims and Christians who are serving their own interests may try to hide that with religious language, often misleading fellow believers and trying to present a better image than who they really are. “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus knew this and therefore told his disciples, “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Pious Muslims; Obedience to God and Justice**

I have many Muslim friends. I have had tens of Muslim students in our office and I have been involved in numerous discussions with Muslims. Two phrases stand out:

- 1) Obedience to God. Pious Muslims want to be obedient to God and I would wish to see a similar drive among Christians of wanting to serve God. This drive to be obedient to God was best expressed by Grand Shaykh Muhammad Sayyid Tantāwī in a meeting I organized in the 1990s for a group of Christian believers from the Maadi Community Church led by Pastor Dave Petrescue. Muslims and Christians asked each other in that meeting about personal faith and Shaykh Tantāwī at a certain moment simply stated it was for him a matter of being obedient to God. You find this with many believing Muslims. Of course questions remain as to how this should materialize, but the basic principle is often the desire to be obedient to God. Do not think you will find this only among pious Muslims. You also find this among pious Egyptian Christians.
- 2) Justice. In meetings with Muslims from within all layers of society the concept of justice comes back. The previous governments under President Hosni Mubārak did not allow any political dissent and, as a consequence, tens of thousands of Muslim Brothers and also many dissenting Salafīs, liberals, and leftists had been imprisoned. Religious sentiments were used to maintain own positions, often at the expense of Christians. Corruption, supporting people in one’s own social circles, nepotism, growing differences between rich and poor, and unfair reporting are all clear signs of injustice. Thus the call for justice became a major theme of the January 25 Revolution.

Of course one can add dignity and freedom to the list, but for me, in all meetings in the past thirty-five years these two stand out: obedience to God and justice.

Previously, I referred to Jesus’ words, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat”. You can also read this as, “Injustice was done to me and you gave me justice”. That is why honest and fair reporting is so extremely important.

### **Growing Islamist influence in Egypt since the January 25 Revolution and media reporting**

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<sup>10</sup> New International Bible, Romans 3:13, Many Christians fear deceit of the Muslim Brotherhood reports, see: Jayson Casper, “The Muslim Brotherhood: Trust Us,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 34, Art. 73, August 23, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-34/73-muslim-brotherhood-trust-us>. Is fear justified? It is obviously too early to tell.

<sup>11</sup> New International Bible, Matthew 6:5.

Since the January 25 Revolution the influence of Islamists has been steadily growing in Egypt. In the first free parliamentary elections of December 2011-January 2012 the Muslim Brotherhood-supported Freedom and Justice Party obtained 48% of the seats and the Salafist el-Nour Party received 28% of the seats. Non-Islamist parties were divided and received around 23% of the seats. Islamists received fewer votes in both rounds of the presidential elections. In the second round President Mursī won with 51% of the votes, including that of many protest voters who did not want a military candidate to become president. Whatever the percentages, it is certain that the two main Islamist parties have widespread support in the Egyptian population. I know many Egyptians who voted for Islamist parties. These are not radical people. These were people who were fed up with the previous regime and wanted change!

I believe that we in the West have to accept that it is a fact that Islamists have widespread support in Egypt. Yet, it is a fact that many people find difficult to accept.

Since the 1970s, the growth of Islamism in Egyptian society clashes have been reported between Muslims and Christians which were used by Egyptian governments as warning signals to a Christian and Western audience, continuously giving signals “it is either us (Sādāt/Mubāarak) or them (Islamists)”. In other words, do not pressure us for democratization because that will bring violence. This was also most explicitly stated in one of the last speeches of President Mubāarak. But clashes also created a negative image for both Egypt and Islamists in particular. This increased after Mubāarak was toppled. Media reported in March 2011 of clashes between army and monks because of an illegal wall they wanted to build.<sup>12</sup> This was followed by a church burning in ‘Ātfih, a town south of Cairo, following a relation of a Christian man with a Muslim woman, which is prohibited in Islam.<sup>13</sup> The ‘Ātfih church burning triggered clashes between Muslims and Christians in the Muqattam garbage collectors area.<sup>14</sup> Later, a church was burned in the poor neighborhood of Imbābah.<sup>15</sup> Well known is the church burning in Mārīnāb, which I

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<sup>12</sup> Cornelis Hulsman and Jayson Casper, “Military Activity at Egyptian Monasteries: Aggression or Required Action?” *Arab-West Report*, Week 10, Art. 25, March 8, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-10/25-military-activity-egyptian-monasteries-aggression-or-required-action>.

<sup>13</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, “The History of tensions in Sūl, ‘Ātfih,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 44, Art. 27, November 1, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-44/27-history-tensions-sul-’Ātfih>. Interestingly enough the army rapidly rebuilt this church, Nader Habib, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, April 21, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-16/66-return-service>.

<sup>14</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, “Unwise Christian responses and selective reporting,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 10, Art. 52, March 8, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-10/54-unwise-christian-responses-and-selective-reporting>; Rebecca Atallah, “Egypt needs your prayer!!! Violence at the Garbage Village (1),” *Arab-West Report*, Week 10, Art. 88, March 10, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-10/88-egypt-needs-your-prayer-violence-garbage-village-1> and Cornelis Hulsman, “Egypt needs your prayer!!! Violence at the Garbage Village (2),” *Arab-West Report*, Week 10, Art. 89, March 12, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-10/89-egypt-needs-your-prayer-violence-garbage-village-2>.

<sup>15</sup> Jayson Casper, “Church attack in Cairo suburb leaves at least ten killed and hundreds wounded,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 19, Art. 11, May 8, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-19/7-church-attack-cairo-suburb-leaves-least-ten-killed-and-hundreds-wounded>.

Jayson Casper, “From the Burned Church in Imbābah: Fr. Mityas on the Event, Explanation, and Spiritual Response,” *A Sense of Belonging*, May 10, 2011, <http://asenseofbelonging.wordpress.com/2011/05/10/from-the-burned-church-in-lmbābah-fr-mityas-on-the-event-explanation-and-spiritual-response/>.



have investigated with AWR intern Lamīs Yahyá.<sup>16</sup> The images of a burning church on the Internet resulted in large-scale demonstrations and later the terrible massacre at Maspero, Cairo, which left 27 people, mostly Christians, dead.<sup>17</sup>

These clashes did in fact occur, but when we investigated them we always found reasons to be far more complicated than reported.<sup>18</sup> Christians at times did violate laws. At other times Muslim violence was disproportionate to the Christian transgressions. Frustration among both Muslims and Christians with the conditions and social pressures under which they were living was apparent. Police were often absent and that resulted in people taking law into their own hands. Circumstances were not ideal and the government needs to step in to address tensions, but I would be extremely cautioned to call people involved extremists. Calling people names does not reduce tensions. Exercising caution when throwing this label around too liberally does not mean that extremism does not exist and should not be addressed.

The combination of images was presented wrong: linking growing Islamist influence to violence. MEMRI and other outlets would highlight radical statements of Islamists, but often I found statements highlighted of people who were not prominent party leaders of the Freedom and Justice and el-Nour Parties, the two leading Islamist parties in Egypt.<sup>19</sup> I also found very moderate statements of other leaders and in meetings I have had with leading members of both parties I found people who were reasonable, seeking dialogue.<sup>20</sup> And thus I was faced with frequently recurring negative images in media and reasonable people in meetings. It did not match.

Many negative statements and interpretations of events taking place in Egypt can be attributed to people who almost habitually relate all unrest and violence to the religion of Islam. Mostly these are people who have not lived for an extended period of time in Muslim countries. Thereby claims are made about Islam that are most definitely not true. The problem is that some of these

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<sup>16</sup> Lamīs Yahyá, "What Happened in Mārīnāb Village?" *Arab-West Report*, October 12, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/what-happened-Mārīnāb-village>.

<sup>17</sup> Jayson Casper, "Analyzing Video Evidence from Maspero: Bloody Confrontations following the Coptic Protest of October 9, 2011," *Arab-West Report*, October 26, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/analyzing-video-evidence-maspero-bloody-confrontations-following-coptic-protest-october-9-2011>.

<sup>18</sup> Some reporting is truly poor, such as PVV MP Raymond de Roon, which, in his case, is due to political motives. See: Cornelis Hulsman, "Political misuse of Christian suffering in Egypt; blaming Muslims in general for the acts of thugs and extremists is unjust!" *Arab-West Report*, Week 44, Art. 40, November 4, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-44/40-political-misuse-christian-suffering-egypt-blaming-muslims-general-acts-thugs>.

<sup>19</sup> See for example: Cornelis Hulsman, "MEMRI misleading audience by highlighting Muslim preacher Wagdy Ghoneim's words about the death of Pope Shenouda," *Arab-West Report*, Week 12, Art. 23, March 20, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-12/23-memri-misleading-audience-highlighting-muslim-preacher-wagdy-ghoneims-words>. It would be worthwhile to research MEMRI's style of reporting more systematically.

<sup>20</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, "Visit Egyptian Multiparty Delegation," *Arab-West Report*, Week 42, Art. 29, October 16, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-42/29-visit-egyptian-multiparty-delegation>. In this text with the program of the Egyptian multiparty delegation one finds links to other articles about this visit. The delegation included representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood founded Freedom and Justice Party and the conservative Salafist el-Nour Party, all who participated in discussions on freedom of religion and other issues in which they showed to be very reasonable and wanting dialogue.

claims are made by Western scholars of Islam. In *Arab-West Report* we have criticized several claims made by Prof. Hans Jansen who knows his Islamic sources. But when you find radical interpretations by some Muslim scholars, you cannot possibly claim that to be “true Islam,” whatever that may be since Sufis, Salafis, Muslim Brothers, and others all have their own understanding of what “true Islam” is and this is certainly not similar.<sup>21</sup> The fact is that in any great religion one finds different interpretations, some we may find highly sympathetic and others may be repulsive. It is important that we recognize those differences and do not generalize.

On April 12, 2012, the *Telegraaf*, the largest Dutch daily newspaper, called for a boycott of tourism to Egypt on the mistaken belief that this would help Christians in Egypt.<sup>22</sup> This is a non-Christian newspaper with generally little concern for Christian beliefs. The problem is it incited the feelings of a large Christian tour operator, Jan van den Bosch, who was happy that this newspaper finally showed interest in a Christian issue, initially not realizing that this call was sensationalized and if carried out would harm hundreds of thousands of Christians working in the Egyptian tourism industry.<sup>23</sup>

It is misreporting and misplaced calls for boycotts that add to the hardship Egyptians are already facing.

Since the Revolution tourism largely has collapsed, Egyptian workers in Libya have been forced to return to Egypt – losing work and income. Foreign investments are down. The Egyptian state is almost bankrupt. The country is facing severe over population with a large percentage of Egyptians who are poorly educated.

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<sup>21</sup> Several articles in *Arab-West Report* critique retired professor of Islam Dr. Hans Jansen: Cornelis Hulsman, “Is ‘no compulsion in religion’ abrogated?” *Arab-West Report*, Week 49, Art. 5, December 31, 2008, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2008/week-49/5-no-compulsion-religion-abrogated>; Fadel Soliman, “‘Is ‘No Compulsion in Religion’ Abrogated?’ Responding to Dr. Hans Jansen,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 49, Art. 6, December 31, 2008, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2008/week-49/6-no-compulsion-religion-abrogated-responding-dr-hans-jansen>; Hassan Wagieh, “‘Is ‘No Compulsion in Religion’ Abrogated?’ Dr. Hassan Wagieh responds to Dr. Hans Jansen,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 49, Art. 7, December 31, 2008, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2008/week-49/7-no-compulsion-religion-abrogated-dr-hassan-wagieh-responds-dr-hans-jansen>; Cornelis Hulsman, “Dr. Hans Jansen responds to Imam Fadel Soliman and Dr. Hassan Wagieh,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 49, Art. 8, October 1, 2009, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2008/week-49/8-dr-hans-jansen-responds-imam-fadel-soliman-and-dr-hassan-wagieh>; Cornelis Hulsman, “Does the Shari’a prohibit building churches?” *Arab-West Report*, Week 44, Art. 39, November 4, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-44/39-does-sharia-prohibit-building-churches>; Cornelis Hulsman, “Review: Hans Jansen’s ‘Religious Roots of Muslim Violence’ with questions for Muslim scholars,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 3, Art. 5, January 15, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-3/5-review-hans-jansens-religious-roots-muslim-violence-questions-muslim-scholars>; Jayson Casper, “Giving Nuance to Jansen’s ‘Religious Roots of Muslim Violence’,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 8, Art. 32, February 20, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-8/38-giving-nuance-jansens-religious-roots-muslim-violence>.

<sup>22</sup> Cornelis Hulsman, “Why Boycotting Tourism to Egypt Doesn’t Help Christians,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 16, Art. 27, April 17, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-16/27-why-boycotting-tourism-egypt-doesnt-help-christians>.

<sup>23</sup> Email correspondence with Jan van den Bosch in April 2012.

I know families who are suffering. Families that have insufficient food, families who cannot afford expensive medical treatment, and who cannot afford the costs of proper education. Jesus said, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat”. This also means we should not add to the hardship of Egyptians. Egypt is standing before major challenges. People in the West should not add to their difficulties through misreporting and closing avenues of support.

### **Listen to One Another**

The least we can do is to communicate and listen. For this reason *Arab-West Report* proposed already in April 2012 a visit of representatives of different Egyptian political parties to The Netherlands. We are a small organization and did not have the funding to do this. In May 2012 the Dutch Christian Democratic Party (CDA) and Dutch Liberal Party (VVD) decided to support this proposal. In the summer of 2012 I contacted different Egyptian political parties resulting in a delegation of prominent representatives of five different political parties, the Freedom and Justice Party, the Salafī el-Nour Party, the nationalist liberal New Wafd Party, the liberal Free Egyptians Party and the socialist Tagammu’ Party. This visit, which took place from October 8 to 12, was amazing. All sensitive issues were discussed. Dutch Coptic Christians raised the issue of freedom of religion in the new constitution that is now being prepared. Dr. Amr Darrag, Secretary-General of the Constitutional Assembly explained that a new article will be created for Christians and Jews in which it will be stipulated that for personal status issues their own religious laws will apply.<sup>24</sup>

For anyone interested in the place of Islamic law in the constitution and freedom of religion I would like to refer to a book on the Egyptian Constitution I have been working on. The book is about to appear in print and the publisher is offering a great reduction for any order of the book before November 1.<sup>25</sup>

Back to the Egyptian delegation that visited The Netherlands. The representatives of all political backgrounds showed remarkable unity to address the economic needs of the country. They concluded that the most important achievement was the mutual bonding between leaders of different political parties that had taken place.<sup>26</sup>

Isn’t this great? Where Libya and Syria are strongly divided, Egyptians, despite the differences in political orientations, are united in understanding the urgency of addressing the economic needs of their country!

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<sup>24</sup> Hulsman, “Visit Egyptian Multiparty Delegation,” <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-42/29-visit-egyptian-multiparty-delegation>. In this text with the program of the Egyptian multiparty delegation one finds links to other articles about this visit.

<sup>25</sup> [http://arabwestreport.info/sites/default/files/pdfs/order\\_sheet.pdf](http://arabwestreport.info/sites/default/files/pdfs/order_sheet.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Amr Darrag, George Messiha, Tarek Shalaan, Mahmoud Samy, “Responses from delegation members,” *Arab-West Report*, Week 42, Art. 40, October 17, 2012, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2012/week-42/40-responses-delegation-members>.

During the meetings interesting comments were heard that both Egyptians and Europeans should consider. Let me give you two examples:

- Egypt is overpopulated and it is important to find new areas where new cities can be built. Egyptians are naturally looking at the north coast, west of Alexandria. But here one finds the largest minefield in the world, 650,000 acres of land, placed here during the battles of al-Alamein in the Second World War by Germans, Italians, British, and French troops. Yearly, tens or hundreds of Egyptians fall victim to these mines. Removing these mines is very costly. When the Egyptians raised this issue with Dutch and European members of parliament they were stunned to discover that these parliamentarians knew nothing of the enormity of these problems for Egypt. Dutch MP Pieter Omtzigt (CDA) correctly remarked that Egyptians must make an effort to make the world know because only in this way Western public support and thus also political support can be found to find the technical and financial support to remove these mines.
- Much negative media reporting concerns the conservative Salafī Muslims, but the two Salafī representatives in our Egyptian delegation were extremely pleasant, open, and knowledgeable. Discussions have made clear that in Salafism you have many variations. Delegation member Ahmed Kadry told me during dinner on the day before the group left The Netherlands that it is difficult for many Salafis to adhere to their strict rules and thus for many of them it is seen easier to withdraw in smaller circles and it is here where radicalism can develop. One also sees this among many Copts who, out of fear for Muslims, have withdrawn to their own circles or mental ghettos. Copts know they cannot use arms because this would be suicide in a society which is 94% Muslim, but this does not mean radical ideas and hate do not exist. A most notorious example of a Copt hating Muslims is Maurice Sadeq who has been promoting the inflammatory anti-Muslim film on the Prophet Muhammad. In other words, radicalism and extremism is found in closed circles. This only can be addressed through communication, listening, asking questions.

Communication is needed. Helping Christians is certainly not done by bashing Muslims. To Muslims I say: Helping Muslims is certainly not done by bashing Christians.

Efforts need to be made to understand the needs of Egypt and respond to them.

**I believe several major activities are needed including:**

- 1) Building a non-government information center for Egypt or the Arab World. We are doing work in this direction with our own center, but we are so terribly underfinanced and staffed. More research needs to be done into tensions that do take place in Egypt. The purpose of that research should be in finding solutions, not taking on partisan positions for either this or that party or interest.
- 2) Building an early warning and early response system to any tensions in society. Life in Egypt is not easy for many people and when social tensions are high clashes erupt more easily. We have had Nigerian Imam Muhammad and Pastor James Wuye lead workshops in June 2011 on building such a system in Egypt, making civilians aware of early signs of tensions and how to address them in an early stage. Of course reporting this to Egyptian police authorities is important so they can intervene when civilians are no longer able to

stop the escalation of a conflict. This is a very nice system, but it needs an administrative structure and training.<sup>27</sup> We do not have the funds for this.

- 3) Supporting the National Center for Human Rights in Egypt and linking this to an ombudsman, an independent office that advises people how to address possible grievances in a legal way instead of taking one's rights in one's own hands. This should help both in providing justice and reducing conflicts and tensions.

*Arab-West Report* is explicitly non-partisan and thus we claim no religious affiliation. With *Arab-West Report* you find Muslims inspired by the Holy Qur'ān and Christians inspired by the Holy Bible. I, for certain, have been inspired by Jesus' words: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me".

Jesus' words are often read as referring to the needy in our own surroundings or community, but it goes much further. It is seeking help for all Egyptians to live in peace, justice, and dignity. Egyptians, both Muslim and Christian, are our neighbors and brothers before God. Communicate with your Egyptian brothers. Help them overcome the tremendous challenges the country is now facing.

## Epilogue

After the lecture I presented the School of Mission and Theology (<http://www.mhs.no/en/>) with Samuel Marinus Zwemer's book *The Glory of the Empty Tomb* with an autograph of the author for Dr. Heleen van der Meulen and some words of mine reading, "I was inspired in my early life by Daniel and Heleen van der Meulen who in turn were inspired by Samuel Marinus Zwemer. I am glad you have given me the opportunity to speak about my inspiration in the Bjoern Bue's Human Rights Memorial Lecture for 2012."

The book ([http://www.muhammadanism.org/Zwemer/glory\\_tomb.pdf](http://www.muhammadanism.org/Zwemer/glory_tomb.pdf)) was not dated, but Dr. Heleen van der Meulen must have received this book in the second half of the 1940s. I received the book from her son Dr. Bernd van der Meulen, after she passed away. This was a very precious and personal gift but I believe it is more fitting for this book to be at the library of the School of Mission and Theology.<sup>28</sup>

Samuel Marinus Zwemer (April 12, 1867 – April 2, 1952), nicknamed The Apostle to Islam, was an American missionary, traveler, and scholar. Zwemer saw the supremacy of God in all things.

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<sup>27</sup> Jayson Casper, "The Imam and the Pastor: A Peace-Building Workshop Hosted by CAWU," *Arab-West Report*, Week 26, Art. 31, June 30, 2011, <http://arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-26/31-imam-and-pastor-peace-building-workshop-hosted-cawu>.

<sup>28</sup> For information on Heleen van der Meulen see: Cornelis Hulsman, "Remembering Dr. Heleen van der Meulen-Duhm: A life full of encouragement," *Arab-West Report*, Week 52, Art. 61, December 31, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-52/61-remembering-dr-heleen-van-der-meulen-duhm-life-full-encouragement>. I earlier wrote about Daniel van der Meulen with historian A.Th. Boone in Daniel van der Meulen (AO-boekje 2385). Lelystad: Stichting IVIO, 1991. See also: [http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel\\_van\\_der\\_Meulen](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_van_der_Meulen).



His views about Islam became more nuanced over time. He praised the all-encompassing idea of God in Islam, seeing it as the “Calvinism of the Orient”. For Zwemer, “The chief end of missions is not the salvation of men but the glory of God”. His confidence of the victory of the Gospel in the Middle East was equally unshakable. He believed the Gospel message is the greatest need of the Muslim as opposed to Western civilization or “philanthropic programs of education”.

Times have greatly changed since Zwemer worked as a missionary. If he were living today to see the world now he would be shocked to see the widespread secularization in Western countries. Also, his confidence of the victory of the Gospel in the Middle East would be deeply shaken. What Christians need to show Muslims today is not a belief that Christian faith is victorious over Islam, but the message of love of God for all human beings, regardless of the religious or other beliefs people may have.