

*Dear ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear ambassador and other prominent guests in this meeting,*

*On Sunday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2021, my good friend and colleague Karel Adriaan Steenbrink passed away. He attained the age of 79 years. Not long before I visited him. We said one another goodbye as if we would meet each other many times again. I had not expected that he would die so soon after our last meeting.*

*Karel Steenbrink had made a thorough study of Java, in particular of its most important religion, Islam. Nonetheless he also knew very much about Christianity on Java. He started his study, however, with the Muslims given his dissertation 'Pesantrèn' about the religious schools of the Muslims on this island. He had, moreover, a great pleasure in telling one of the many stories found in Javanese culture and religion. That he also was well informed about Christianity shows his last big study entitled 'Catholics in Indonesia'.*

*Karel Steenbrink grew up in a Catholic family. He even decided to enter the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Then you are very Catholic in the eyes of a relative outsider like me. But Karel Steenbrink had a goal. He wanted to go abroad and he knew that if you cannot dispose of much money, you can attain this by entering a mission congregation. But Karel Steenbrink became a very special missionary.*

*When it was decided that Karel Steenbrink would write a dissertation about the Indonesian pesantrèns, he chose to attend such a school for one whole year. During the research in which was ascertained whether he could really participate in this institute, he was asked about his faith. In his own view he was a good Christian, a good Catholic believing in one God. This led to a heated discussion. Being a Christian, he would have to believe in Jesus, God's Son, which is in contradiction to Surah 112, which stipulates that God is one and that He did not beget nor is begotten. Steenbrink replied that this verse is directed against the pre-Islamic polytheists and not against the Christians because in Christianity God neither does beget or is begotten in a physical way. So, he was Christian and Muslim in one. It must not be forgotten that it was 1970, only a few years after the Second Vatican Council had accepted the 'Nostra Aetate' declaration, a proclamation which is very open towards people of other religions.*

*I tell this because it is characteristic for Karel Steenbrink's attitude. He did not search for the differences but for what binds people. For him religions were traditions giving expression to the great secret, the great mystery which cannot be articulated in human words but nonetheless inspires millions of humans. Alas, it can also pit people against each other. During his entire life Steenbrink would do his utmost to counter this trend. Therefore he was active both in ecumenism and in the interreligious dialogue.*

*Now we come a next important step made by Karel Steenbrink. First, he was a pupil in a pesantrèn, in 1981 he was appointed teacher at the IAIN, the State Institute for Islam, a kind of Islamic State University in Jakarta. In 1984 he moved to the State Institute for Islam in Yogyakarta. He taught about Christianity because the Ministry of Religion of that time was convinced that the students at these institutes had to receive information concerning this religion from a Christian. During these years Karel Steenbrink enjoyed the dialogue in which he entered with his students and his colleagues. For him this meant the beginning of many life-long friendships.*

*In the meantime he was married to Paule Maas with whom he got two sons.*

*In 1987 Karel Steenbrink returned to the Netherlands. Some years later he was appointed at the so-called IIMO, an inter university institute for the study and promotion of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. In 2005 he was appointed professor at the Utrecht University. But his retirement was near. Therefore, his professorship lasted only one year. Nonetheless it was the crown on his academic career.*

*In these years he was managing editor of Exchange, an authoritative academic journal about developments in Christian theology in Asia, Africa and Latin America. He was eager to give writers from these continents the opportunity to publish their articles in this periodical to become known in the rest of the world. Many of*

*them published their first article in this journal. Steenbrink was proud of this.*

*In addition, Karel Steenbrink gave lectures, and stimulated the interreligious dialogue by initiating conferences or participating in them. He did so in the Netherlands and Indonesia, but also in other countries. Furthermore he tried to help the Dutch Muslims when they attempted to get official recognition for an own Islamic university. Unfortunately, this attempt was not successful.*

*Steenbrink did so in a very amiable way. Everywhere he had friends, which can be seen in the Festschrift for his farewell as professor in 2006. To the bewilderment of the publisher 26 authors were prepared to write a contribution. That is a high number.*

*He also loved to compose co-called tembangs. They are found in the prefaces he wrote in the Indonesian editions of the dissertations of his promovendi. About Bambang Subandrijo he wrote:*

*Doktor Bambang sudah doctor fi'din  
Dia telah pergi ke negeri yang dingin  
Berulangkali dari istri dia dapat izin  
Asal dia tetap minal mu'minin. Amin!*

*Doktor Bambang mangakui Trinitas  
Tetapi mohon juga kata lain atau alias  
Mohon rumusan modern yang berkualitas  
Segingga orang yang beriman tidak lagi waswas.*

*In 2019 he received the Anugrah Budaya prize of the Indonesian ministry of education and culture.*

*Karel Steenbrink was an academic researcher, teacher, but also a dedicated musician who once directed a performance of Jesus Christ Superstar. Thanks to his wife, Paule Maas, he was also able to make his house to an open home where everyone was welcomed and could enjoy the drinks and food they offered abundantly.*

*We will continue to remember Karel for his academic achievements, his many publications, but more than these for his amiability, helpfulness and hospitality.*

*Thank you for your attention.*