

Appendix E

Letter To

Western Theological Seminary's 40th Anniversary Class

DATE: April 07th, 1998

TO: The Graduating Class of 1958, Western Theological Seminary

FROM: Rev. Jim Moerman (for his father, Rev. John Moerman)

RE: WARM GREETINGS TO THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY CLASS
OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Dear Friends:

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of you may already know, but I want to inform you that on March 28, 1998, a founding father of the Reformed Church of Canada has been promoted to Glory - my own dear father, mentor, and friend, Rev. John Moerman. He was so much looking forward to being with each of you at the 40th anniversary celebration. The trip was planned and he mentioned it often.

I want you to know that Dad died a content, fulfilled man, full of vigor and joy to the last moment. He died on a beautiful spring afternoon of a massive heart attack as he worked on his farm, with boots on and hammer in hand, fitting symbols of this shepherd and spiritual warrior.

In God's economy, my Dad was a great man. His three-quarter century life was loaded with ripened, golden delicious fruit. I was watching him closely at the 50th anniversary celebration on March 22nd and I saw a man so full of peace, gentleness and contentment. There was a River of Thanksgiving running through him that seemed to get deeper and deeper – thankful for each new morning, thankful for each family member from oldest son to newest baby, thankful for the mercy and grace of God the Father, the Redeemer, the Holy Spirit. Besides the Spirit's fruit of a fully matured character, he finished well with the fruit of a Golden Marriage, the fruit of almost fifty respectful, God-fearing offspring and the fruit of an effective ministry in three provinces.

My Dad was given a modest number of talents by the Lord, but he traded well with what he had, and last Saturday afternoon he settled his accounts and presented the Master with a remarkable profit and increase. "Well done, good and faithful servant."

I am grieving because I have lost my father, my example and my friend. I also grieve because I have lost one of my main intercessors, one of my best encouragers and my favorite teacher. Almost every important thing I have learned about ministry and spiritual things, I learned from my Dad.

Dad died with no regrets. His memoirs were finished. (If anyone of you would like a copy, I can provide it. An excerpt or two of his days in Hope College and WTS are provided for you below.) All funeral arrangements and memorial service details were prepared one year ago. All of Dad's relationships were in tact. His life was loaded with good fruit. His 50th anniversary with my mother and all their children plus most of their 28 grandchildren and 2 great-grand-children was celebrated on March 22nd with great joy in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. My wife Babette and I were thankful to be present.

Dad was a faithful minister of the whole counsel of God to the very end. At Classis Canadian Prairies on March 19th, I saw him give up his breaks in order to counsel a man with a troubled marriage. Ministering, ministering, giving, giving. That was my Dad. I have lost my father. But the Church has lost a Spirit-filled bulwark of truth and righteousness, a tireless worker who cared little for the praises of men but who cared everything for the praises of the King.

My mother, Mrs. Corrie Moerman is doing remarkably well, Praise the Lord her Tower of Strength! She will be visiting each of her children until well into the summer, at which time she will move in with her oldest son, Murray, who resides in B.C. Her address there will be:

Mrs. Corrie Moerman
11658 – 246th Street
Maple Ridge, B.C. V4R 1K8

Mom recently said to me, *"I am so proud that I can say 'I am the widow of Rev. John Moerman' for the rest of my life!"* And I will always proudly say that I am his son.

Shalom in Christ and Love to you all,

Rev. Jim Moerman
For my dear Parents

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EXCERPTS
from the memoirs of
REV. JOHN MOERMAN

(to be published posthumously in July, 1998)

During these days, I often thought of what Amos answered Amaziah the priest of Bethel when he objected to him prophesying in Israel (the ten tribes). Amos said "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd (herdsman), and I also took care of sycamore fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel!'"

I was an uneducated farmer's son too. I knew about working the land, caring for animals, and pruning trees. And now, here I was - God's called one, like Amos! I very much wanted to preach, teach, prophesy, and minister, but these feelings of inferiority and inadequacy were still very much around me! In fact, both Corrie and I were plagued with it. We felt it everywhere - in college with the professors and students, in First Reformed Church among the people who did their level best to make us feel at ease. We tried not to compare, but when invited to their homes, we just could not help doing so. In Chatham we knew everyone in the congregation, but here with these 700-800 worshippers, we felt lost. And though we now laugh about it, their minister wasn't just a "dominee", he was a doctor!

Many times I have had a dream about a crowded hallway and chairs with students going to their next class. And indeed, this was quite an experience for a person with my background. The English and Philosophy courses were the most difficult at the start. I knew next to nothing - if that much - about verbs and adverbs, nouns and pronouns, adjectives, clauses and compound clauses, morphology and syntax, the system of word structures and arrangements, rules for speaking and writing, and so on. For me, this

was something from another world. I have sweated at Leonard Giffen's farm when haying there, but I did it in my English class too. The same in Dr. Dykstra's Greek Philosophy class. Following this, the student went home and sought to be daddy and husband.

My first semester grades were dismal. But my English professor, Dr. De Graaf, was a God sent man for me in this class. He was Christian Reformed, as sound in the faith and doctrine as anyone can dream about. But he also was a man of the highest principles. To describe him as a thoroughly pietistic would be very fitting for him. I loved the man and he loved me. He understood where I came from and where I sought to go. As my first semester drew to a close, he told me that though I should be given an 'F', he would give me an 'E' because I worked so hard. He also told me that he was sure that I would do better in the second semester. There was one student in the class who was as bad as I was. Yet, he had just graduated from high school. I never knew how this was possible.

Ten years afterwards when I was appointed as Classis Cascades representative on the Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary, in all the five years I served on this Board I never missed to pay a visit to my English professor Dr. Clarence De Graaf. And he appreciated the visit as much as I appreciated him for helping me struggle through his English Literature Class trying to tackle Milton's "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained".

I wore out my new English - Dutch dictionary in one year. When I registered for my courses I was told by my faculty advisor, Dr. Lambert Ponstein, that the courses he felt I should take would not necessarily be the easiest, but they definitely would be the best for me. As to the first part of that advice, I readily agreed. But as to the latter I sometimes wondered why. This was especially so with Dr. Dykstra's Introduction to Greek Philosophy course. I had a hard time understanding what "the processes governing thought and conduct, and investigation of the principles that regulate the universe and underlie all reality", had to do with my preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ! I thought this was why God gave us His Holy Scriptures and why He had revealed to us everything we needed to know about the world and right and wrong. I just could not see what Socrates, Plato, Archimedes and others who knew about what God had revealed. I know this is putting it crudely and simplistically, but that is how I felt. Corrie can tell you too how one evening I was so frustrated and even disgusted with my Introduction to Greek Philosophy, that I threw the book into the corner, saying, "waarom moet ik deze rommel leren om dominee te worden"? (Why must I learn this junk to become a minister?) Of course, after a little while I sought to overcome my defeatist attitude, left the chair and picked up the book. We looked at each other, smiled, Corrie gave me a hug, and I went back to my book again.

The course I liked best was "Introduction to the Bible". Had I been allowed to take a few more Bible courses I would have had no problem. In this class, in spite of my English drawback, I was ahead of a number of other students. Dr. Henry Voogd was the professor.

Next best classes were those courses on History, Political Science, and Speech. My teachers in

these classes were, respectively, Dr. Vanden Berg, Dr. Fried (a new German immigrant with whom I was able to hold good conversations about war experiences), and Dr. Schrier. The latter course was hard, too. I could not say a word without being corrected. It was hard to be corrected, but it did not feel too pleasant with all the other younger students around. The very first day Dr. Schrier gave me a 3 x 5 card and on it was written: "Theopholis Thistle sifted three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb." I was told to read this over five times each hour of the day. The year before the RSV had become available, and how happy we were to have this version replace the King James with all its "thus saith, doeth, thinketh, thou and thee"! Reading the KJV was so hard with all these "th" pronunciations!

One day Dr. Schrier announced that our next test would be a demonstration speech. After finding out what this meant, I tried and tried to come up with something to demonstrate. The grade for this test had to be good, otherwise I would have another E or even F. All at once an idea bit me - I was the only one in the class who was married with children, and a baby at that! I would take our baby Ann along and show these smart young students how to change a diaper! At first I was little fearful to ask my professor whether this would be acceptable. But when I asked him, his face just brightened up as I had never seen before and he said, "Why, sure, John. That'll be a great idea. I will announce it to the class for the girls to take their camera along." This was more than I had bargained for. However, it was too late to back out now.

What a demonstration speech this became! It was a good thing baby Ann had nothing to say about it. Not one of the girls in the class stayed in their place. Everyone wanted to hold her, crowding around not so much to listen what I

had to say, but to watch the baby! I don't know how many pictures were taken. A picture even appeared in the next Hope College paper. And my next grade was better than I had dared to hope or dream. I received a new standing in my speech class! I had received a much-needed boost. Very often the girls in the class would ask how the baby was doing. Even in the following years some of the girls would ask how little Ann was doing!

When Sunday came around we would all walk to church. We took our Dutch baby buggy along for baby Ann. Not all the people talked to us, but everyone looked at us with wondering eyes. We were immediately invited to join the young couples' Sunday School class. There we met three couples who helped us with many things. They were the Albert Kleis family, the John Van Tatenbover family, and the Ken Raak family, all somewhat older than we were. Our adult Bible teacher was Rev. Howard Van Egmond. For some reason or another, he had been in the ministry only five years before he left it. The Sunday School Guide was our teaching lesson, and as long as we were able to attend, we enjoyed it to the full. These hours became a great blessing to us. Dr. Raymond Van Heukelom was a fine preacher, teacher, and pastor. We appreciated him very much and up until very recently he has been in contact with the family.

Living in the barracks provided the children with several friends. They loved to play with them. Across the road two lonely, elderly single men lived. They loved to have Corrie and the children come over for a little talk.

The walls of the barracks consisted of soft compressed paper. Any noise on the other side could easily be heard. We only had neighbors on one side while on the other side was a driveway.

Our next door neighbors Bob and Mary Langenberg had one child. They must have been the only couple not attending church. Bob was a chemistry major. His wife was, according to our background and experience was a "modern woman". Several years later they told us that when I was praying in the morning and evening, they would be listening to our prayers. They also started reading their Bible because they heard us do so and they even entered the ministry later on because of what they had heard and seen of us!

We thank God for the academic improvement during the second semester. There was no more F's or E's. Now was getting D's and C's, and even one E-. God again had been "a stronghold in times of trouble" (Psalm 9:9). "He will deliver the needy who cry out" (Psalm 72:12). Yes, the reasons were different than when David said "I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears", but it was true here too that "this poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his (college!) troubles. So at the end of the first year, God enabled us to succeed and made us say, "Taste and see that then Lord is good; blessed is the man (and woman) who takes refuge in Him. Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing" (Psalm 32:4,6, 8-10).

I remember the most about the first year of our Michigan experience because of the intensity of all the work and the effort of the first year studies. We were so grateful that following our first summer ministry charge, the second year of study went much better and easier. The Leamington congregation presented us with a watch, which ran for 25 years without any trouble.

The second year it was recommended that I should be taking some Greek courses. Dr. Ouderluys from the Seminary would be teaching the pre-seminary students who stood in need of these courses. Well, I surely was one of them. It was no surprise to me that these Greek courses proved to be the most difficult during my second year of Hope College. Often I had to translate the Greek word first from English into the Dutch before I knew what the sentence said. This, of course, was very time consuming.

The old soldier barracks where we lived had been up since the United States involvement in World War II. Talks were already being held when we arrived in Holland, Michigan to replace them with more permanent student housing. When leaving for our first summer charge we were informed that there was a possibility our home would be gone by time we returned. And, indeed, in the second year we lived in a different one of the barracks. Happily, we were singled out to still be able to move in one of the last rows slated for demolition. And this was going to be our last year of free housing. Thereafter in Seminary, we had to take care of our own housing needs. And this was when our little bit of savings were to be used.

My second college year called for a heavier academic load. My Bible courses were replaced by psychology courses. And I should mention here that during the second semester of my first year at Hope College, I had been given a special test to determine what area I would be the strongest and best. To my surprise, it showed that I should enter the field of psychology and psychiatry! When I was informed about this, I first had to look up in my Dutch Dictionary what these areas were all about! When I found out what it was, I told them that I was preparing for the right thing because this talent was useful background for helping Dutch immigrants in

Canada. Besides psychology, my second year included philosophy (again), English, history, speech, political science and Greek. This year sociology was added to the list too. My psychology professor was a bright man and a very fine evangelical Christian. And of all places, his grandfather originated from Schipluiden! When we wrote this to our parents, they recalled that way back a large Vander Lugt family had emigrated to the USA.

During the second year we felt much more at home than in the first year. Also, the pressure was off as to whether or not I would be able to stay. This had weighed very heavy on me. It is not that we felt perfectly at home in the American culture and mentality - for we did not - but it definitely was getting much better. I did not even look as much as one "coming out of the sticks" as before - Corrie had bought me a new pair of pants! There was nothing in our budget for clothes for her or the children, but I had to look more like a student than before.

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Back at Seminary, our professors just kept on piling more work on us with each succeeding year. The seniors informed us that this would keep on going until the end. They "comforted" us that the third and final year would see even more work, all in preparation for the heavy load waiting us in the ministry, we were told. I kept on studying at the library. I had all good professors and liked them all. They were Menninga, Osterhaven, Ouderslyus, Eertingenburg, Piet, and Bast. In some ways, they were all different, yet in many ways, they were all the same: very dedicated and committed men.

As all the children know, I have a habit of underlining things when they really speak to me

while reading. I already had this habit in Hope College and Western Seminary. At one time, one of my professors, Dr. Eenigenburg, asked the class whether they had all read the assigned chapters of a certain book? Then, he made this remark: "I know John did; he just keeps on underlining whether the book belongs to him or to the Library." Ouch!

One day when it was pouring rain, I had taken our car to Seminary after our noon meal. I always left immediately after we had eaten. When it was 5:30 p.m., I walked home in the pouring rain. Upon my arrival at home, I threw off my wet clothes. Corrie asked me, "Why are you so wet?" I thought it was funny for her to ask me this since it had been pouring rain all afternoon. I even started to say something like this to her, until it all at once struck me that I had totally forgotten to take our car back home. It was a reminder to me how much I always buried myself in the studies.

The second year, us middlers were sent out on a regular basis to preach at churches who requested this service of the Seminary. Several times there were requests from churches to have the "Dutch Student" lead their service and speak either before or after the worship service to the congregation or Adult Bible class. One such Sunday, a request had come in for me to lead a service which was broadcast by radio. It was in Grand Rapids. Murray had come along with me. I had left plenty early, but got altogether lost in Grand Rapids. I was beginning to panic for it was very close to the time for the broadcast to begin. We had the radio on and the announcer already had mentioned who would be preaching. We arrived there 10 minutes late. What a sweating experience this was!