

Letter 096
Amsterdam, 21 May 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and for the church certificate. It is a pity you were not in Etten at Whitsuntide: I certainly hope you will be able to go some other Sunday. Was it easy to get that certificate? Thanks for the trouble.

Yesterday morning, I went to church; in the sermon was the text: "I quarrel eternally with mankind," I heard an explanation that after a period of disappointment and pain, one gets to a time of life where our fervent desires and wishes are fulfilled at a stroke. At ten o'clock in the morning I heard Uncle Stricker speak on Acts 2:1-4 – a very fine, sincere, warm sermon. This morning I am going to hear Uncle again; I must go now, and when I come back I will write you what the text was.

It is rainy today, and it was a long walk along the Buitenkant to the North Church. Near the Schreyers tower, where there is a view of the Ij, the city looked like a picture by J. Maris. The text was I Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body."

There are some beautiful churches here. This week I walked to the Zuider Zee; along the dike to Zeeburg, one passes the Jewish churchyard, and I visited it. It is very simple, full of elderberry trees and old headstones with Hebrew inscriptions; occasionally the latter are covered with high dark-green grass. Yesterday (Sunday) afternoon I went to Baarn¹ with Uncle Jan. How beautiful it is there! We walked through the avenues of pine trees and beeches in the wood, and saw the sun set behind a coppice. You can imagine how beautiful the wharf and the docks and the banks of the Ij are in the evening; for instance, yesterday when we came home, there was such a delightful smell of tar, it reminded me of the pine woods. Do you know that old English engraving, "The Vicar's Daughter," which hangs at Uncle Cor's? I was struck by it yesterday; look at it when you go to Baarn someday. Its mood reminds one of "Die Abendglocke" [The Curfew].

This morning, I glimpsed at church a little old woman, probably the chair-renter, who made me think of the etching by Rembrandt where there is a sleeping woman, her head resting in her hand, after a reading of the Bible. Ch. Blanc has said really well, and with a lot of truth, like Michelet, if my memory serves me correctly: There is no such thing as an old woman. There is also a poem by Genestet : "She ends her life alone."

Do you think we too shall be at the evening of our life before we know it, so to speak? If we feel the days are flying past us faster and faster, it sometimes does me good to believe so and to remember that l'homme s'agite et Dieu le mène. [Man proposes and God disposes.]

Did you have to go to the office in the mornings during Whitsuntide? I hope you still had a good time.

22 May

Last night I was at Uncle Stricker's, where it was very pleasant. I came home after eleven and sat down to write until twelve; how I wish we could visit here and there together – I wish you had been with us last night. Write soon if you have a moment.

Again I have lots of work this morning; I tell you that it is not easy and that it will get more and more difficult; nevertheless, I hope to succeed, and I am also convinced that the habit of study will come to me through practice, and that my work will improve and become more thorough. I am engrossed in the study of the Bible, but only in the evenings, when my day's labours are done, or in the early morning – after all, it is the Bible that is essential – although it is my duty of devote myself to my other studies, which I do not neglect.

Yesterday at Stricker's they asked me to tell them about London and Paris. When I do, I see it all again before me: all that past time can be of help in my present work. I love so many things over there, and oh! it was so wherever I lived; how I feel it when I walk through the streets of The Hague or in Zundert, for instance – I shall never forget that last visit there.

Before I went to Stricker's I just stepped in the Trippenhuis to look at some of the pictures. You know which. Well, Theo, give my regards to the friends you may meet, write soon, be as happy as possible, a firm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

1. Twenty miles from Amsterdam, where Uncle Cor had his country seat.