

Letter 103
Amsterdam, 27 July 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your last letter. From home I heard that you have visited Mauve already; it must have been a pleasant day – sometime I hope to hear the particulars from you.

Enclosed is a contribution to your collection, three lithographs after Bosboom and two by J. Weissenbruch; I found them this morning at a bookstall. Do you think the one after Bosboom can be the church in Scheveningen? The other one is the Great Church at Breda, and the third is after his picture at the Great exhibition in Paris. Those two by Weissenbruch struck me; perhaps you have them already, but maybe not. Keep right on collecting such prints, and books too. I am making a collection of Latin and Greek themes, also that of texts that report on history, etc. I am at the moment copying one on the Reformation, which is quite long.

The other day I met a young man who had just passed his entrance examination for Leyden University. It is not easy – he told me what they had asked him. But I must keep courage; with God's help I will pass, and the other examinations too. Mendes has given me hope that at the end of three months we shall have accomplished what he had planned we should if everything goes well. But Greek lessons in the heart of Amsterdam, in the heart of the Jewish quarter, on a hot and stifling summer afternoon, with the feeling that many difficult examinations await you, arranged by very learned and shrewd professors – I can tell you they can be more oppressive than the Brabant cornfields; which are lovely on a day like today! But as Uncle Jan says, we must always “push on.”

A few days ago two children fell into the water near the Kattenburg Bridge. Uncle saw it and ordered out a boat from the Makassar which was tied at the dock. They dragged the little boy out. Two ship's doctors whom Uncle sent for and I accompanied the men who carried the little boy to the drugstore; every effort was made to revive the child, but in vain. Meanwhile, the father, who is stoker at the yard, recognized the little body, and they carried it home in a blanket. They continued searching for an hour and a half, thinking the little girl had also been drowned, but fortunately that seems not to have been the case.

That evening when I went to see those people once more, it was already dark in the house; the little body was lying so still on a bed in the little parlour – he was such a pretty little boy. The sorrow was great; he had been the light of the house, as it were, and the light had now been extinguished. Though rough people express their sorrow crudely and without dignity, like this mother, one still feels deeply in a house of mourning, and the spell remained with me the whole evening, while I took a long walk.

Last Sunday morning I took a fine walk. First I went to morning service – the Reverend Mr. Posthumus Meyes in the North Church – then to Bicker's Island, where I walked along the dyke by the Ij until it was church time again, and then to the Island Church, where Uncle Stricker preached.

So time passes – and quickly, too – we are almost at the end of the week. How are you, boy? Every day I think of you so very often. May God help us in our struggle to keep straight; you are right in associating with good artists – I, too, cling fast to the memory of many of them.

It is written, “Conquer the evil with the good.” We may strive after that, and God can help us. He can make the days bearable for us with many good things, and He can spare us too much self-reproach.

The afternoon of the accident when Uncle Jan ordered the boat and the doctors to the rescue, I saw him in his element.

Before I go to work, I want to fill this sheet of paper. Generally I get up at a very early hour; before the sun rises over the naval yard and the labourers arrive, my window offers me a magnificent spectacle, I wish you were here. Will it be given me one day to work on a morning such as this to write a sermon on these themes: “He makes the sun shine on the wicked and the good,” or, “Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light,” or “It is right to praise the Lord in the early morning and it is good for the eyes to see the sun” [sic. 1 Chron. 23:30; Eccles. 11:7]. I think the sun never shines more beautifully than in a parsonage or in a church. It is delightful to study the Bible so early in the morning. If you have time and a stamp and paper, write me soon. Uncle Jan sends you his compliments.

The evening in the dunes which you describe must have been fine. In the gallery at Uncle Cor's the other day I saw “The Evangelists” by Bida [Painter of Eastern subjects, pupil of Delacroix's]; how beautiful it is – it is impossible to describe. Much of it reminds one of Rembrandt.

With best wishes and a handshake in thought, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent