

# **Mozambique, Indiana, and My Mother's Funeral**

July 31, 2012

Dear friends,

This month was bittersweet; it ended with the loss of our dear mother, Johanna Beeke, at the ripe age of 92, after a lengthy illness and many tearful goodbyes. As a family, we experienced in the loss of our dear mother that “man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets” (Eccl. 12:5). A huge empty place has been left behind in our family.

Our mother died in faith, with dignity, in Christ. We lost a praying mother, but we have not lost her prayers. Matthew Henry said of parents that they could far better leave behind for their children a treasury of prayers than a treasury of gold and silver. We have been blessed in this way as children more than almost anyone else we know on this earth. What a treasury is laid up in store for us in the prayers of our dear mother and father! And what responsibility is now ours! The legacy, the heritage, the mantle is now passed on to us.

We'll miss our dear mother's sweet smile, her kindness, her godliness. We'll miss caring for her. Dad used to often say to us, “You will never be able to repay all that your mother has done for you.” By God's grace, we count it an honor as a family that we could repay a little, so that through 24/7 care in recent years she could stay in her own home until the end, which was always her desire. But now, how shall we begrudge her her place at our dear father's side singing praise to the Triune God without any infirmity? She is now in the church triumphant forever! Soli Deo Gloria!

May God prepare us all to meet Him clothed in the white-robe righteousness of Immanuel. Dear friend, if Christ were to send His angel of death to harvest you today, would it be eternally well with your soul? Are you resting for this life and a better in Christ's righteousness alone?

Here are some notes of the busy itinerary of the last three weeks. This letter finally brings me up to date.

## **Camp Michawana, Michigan (July 10, 2012)**

I had the privilege of giving the opening address at our annual Youth Camp at Camp Michawana. The camp theme was “Wisdom: The Fountain of Life.” I was asked to speak on “Wisdom's Source.” About 150 young people were present. It was a great atmosphere, as always. God has blessed these camps in marvelous ways in past years.

Unfortunately, I couldn't stay at the camp, as I had to leave for Mozambique. I heard later that the other addresses by Rev. Michael Fintelman, Rev. Cees Molenaar, Dr. David Murray, and Rev. Johnny Serafini went well. Also, that the camp directors, work shop leaders, and chaperones were helped in their many labors. May God graciously bless every one of those young people who are the recipients of so much love and spiritual care from so many volunteers.

## **Mozambique (July 11–20)**

*July 11–13*

My trek by plane to Mozambique took 27 hours—from Grand Rapids to Chicago to Washington D.C. to Senegal to South Africa to Mozambique. On the Chicago to Washington flight, I evangelized a young man. After chatting about his family (married to a devout Roman Catholic,

with whom he has two girls, ages 6 and 2, and is expecting a third in two weeks) and work (a contractor) for a while, I asked him if he was a Christian.

“Sort of,” he said. He went on to tell me that his dad was a leader among the Gideons and flies all over the world to promote Bible distribution. His mother is a strong Pentecostal who is constantly telling him that he is on his way to hell because he doesn’t take his Christianity seriously.

“I struggle with lots of things,” he said. “I struggle with having Christianity crammed down my throat. I struggle with the idea that the Bible is inspired, though I do recognize that it is an amazing book. I struggle with the irrelevant messages I hear from the priest on the odd occasion when I do go to the Catholic Church with my wife. I struggle with the idea that if you don’t know Jesus, you’re on your way to hell. I know a lot of good people who aren’t Christians who don’t deserve to go there.”

For the next hour, we dialogued about each of his concerns. He was receptive, but not easily persuaded. He is an outstanding conversationalist, a very likable guy, but he has no awareness of the gravity of sin. I tried hard to explain the basics of the gospel: why we all need Jesus Christ, why Christians in themselves are no better than non-Christians, how God looks on our hearts, our desperate need to be born again, and why no other religion can give us a Savior accepted by God.

Then I gave him a breather, but he kept asking questions. He wanted to know more about the Reformation. “What is the difference between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism? How did Protestantism split up between the Lutherans and the Calvinists? Were there other groups involved as well? Just who are the Puritans? Are you a Puritan?”

So we had a basic church history lesson. He told me that he found it fascinating. I gave him my card and asked him if he would read a few books if I sent them to him.

“Sorry,” he said, “I’m not a reader.”

On the flight from Washington to Senegal, I sat next to another man, who is trying to promote “green energy” in an African nation. He was on his way to meet with the president of that nation for the fourth time, hoping to seal a business deal this time around.

He describes himself as “a solid Lutheran.” He meets often for prayer with his closest friend. In fact, before the plane even taxied out, he called his friend and said, “You won’t believe this, but I’ve got a preacher guy sitting next to me who runs a seminary. I’m going to bend his ear for the next eight hours. The poor guy won’t be able to do any of his work.”

And bend my ear he did. He is a non-stop talker; his conversation is a stream of consciousness, covering anywhere from one to five topics per minute. We covered a lot of ground, but I’m not sure how profitable it was. He seemed to be an antinomian in some areas of his life and a devout Christian in other areas. He certainly loved to talk about Christianity. After three hours I had to finally tell him that I needed some rest.

In Senegal, I stayed on board as our flight continued on to Johannesburg, South Africa, which is another eight hour flight, so I was on this plane for 17 hours in all. On this segment, I sat next to a 6’8” slender African from Senegal (a former basketball player) who was working in South Africa, also in the field of energy.

When I asked about his religious beliefs, he said, “My father is Muslim and my mother is a strong Christian.”

“So where does that leave you?” I asked.

“Well,” he said, “I’m a Muslim because in Senegal it is a custom that the son takes over the religion of his father.”

As I pondered how to respond, a lady next to us, who was listening to our conversation, jumped in. “Religion is something you can’t take automatically from any parent,” she said incredulously. “You have to know what is right and true for yourself!”

The young man answered very shyly, so shyly that I couldn’t understand him. Clearly he didn’t want this conversation to proceed further.

Karl Peterson was on hand in the Maputo, Mozambique, airport when I finally arrived—without my luggage. No surprise there. Karl is a Westminster Seminary graduate who pastored a Presbyterian church in Philadelphia for four years and then accepted a call to head up a Bible institute in Mozambique, a position he held for fifteen years. During those years he also helped organize an annual ministers’ conference in Nampula (where I am to speak next week) and planted two churches. Recently, he moved to Cape Town, South Africa, to teach and exercise leadership in a Bible institute there. You can feel immediately that he is an organized and competent brother who is gifted with leadership skills.

The following morning I had breakfast with three Brazilians, including Rick Denham, who has an important visionary and leadership roll in the Brazilian FIEL organization, which he serves as president. FIEL, which stands for “faithful,” is opening a conference in Maputo for the first time. Two hundred attendees have pre-registered, which is about all they have room for in this hotel. They come from a great variety of backgrounds. Most are not Reformed. Rick asked me to speak very simply, because the ministers who are attending lack much in theological background and training.

Please pray for this ground-breaking conference in Maputo, the first of its kind for this major urban center in Mozambique. Nine addresses were given in the next thirty hours. Each of the three speakers—Jaime Marcelino, Ronald Kalifungwa, and myself—gave three addresses. In God’s providence, I know both of these other brothers quite well. Jaime Marcelino is from the Amazon in Brazil, where he is a very effective pastor whose labors God is blessing (I hope to do a conference for him next year, D.V.). Ronald Kalifungwa is a powerful Zambian preacher, who speaks often at conferences throughout Africa and beyond. He is a dear brother whom I have known for years. We once shared each other’s conversion stories on an airplane in South Africa flying from one conference site to the next. He is also a long-distance student at PRTS.

#### *July 13–14*

The Maputo conference went well—230 attended, of whom most were pastors. Ronald Kalifungwa’s messages on texts from Paul’s Epistles to Timothy were excellent and challenging. He spoke on being a man of God (2 Tim. 3:17), on exercising ourselves unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:17), and on doing the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). I also was privileged to have considerable fellowship with him, especially at mealtimes. He is truly a joy to be with. I’m hoping to bring him over to North America sometime in the future to speak at our Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary conference. I sat in only on parts of Jaime Marcelino’s addresses because he spoke in Portuguese, so I could only grasp about ten per cent of what he was saying. I spoke on God’s solemn charge to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:1–2), on teaching families how to do family worship (Joshua 24:15), and on preaching for holiness (1 Pet. 1:15–16). My translator, Anselmo Vilaneulo, had studied in the States for some time and knew his English well, so that was great. In a setting like this, one’s translator is all-important.

At one point, I spoke about my being assaulted in Latvia. Later, a woman approached me, saying that as a mission worker in Mozambique, she had a very similar experience in which she was bound by two men who assaulted her. She too experienced a special time when the Spirit

caused numerous divine promises to flood into her soul—especially 1 Peter 5:8–11—to carry her onward and forward. Our experiences were remarkably similar indeed, only with this difference—I felt deserted by God shortly after my experience was over, whereas she felt extremely close to God for more than a month, constantly humming and singing praises to God in the joy of her soul.

FIEL sold a goodly number of books, including the new Portuguese translations of my dear wife’s book on kindness, and my book on *Family Worship*. Some of my other books in Portuguese that have been in print for a while didn’t sell as well. The FIEL staff was quite pleased with the conference over all, especially as a first time effort. Next year they hope to build on this momentum and rent a larger place that can hold 400 or more.

### *July 15*

On Sunday I preached in an all-black Dutch Reformed church on the outskirts of Maputo, with a handful of white missionaries present. The thirty-minute journey from the motel to the church, often over bumpy roads, enabled me to see the poor sections of Maputo. The church itself is a large structure built by some Dutch Reformed South Africans at their mission’s expense. We would say that it is in “rough shape” with its concrete floors, etc., but it is spacious, clean, and serves the church’s purposes well. The church went through some turmoil of late, but the pastor at the center of that turmoil has now left, and a new pastor named Gabriel was installed a few weeks ago. Gabriel and his wife come from a rural ministry. They are sweet, humble, warm, and welcoming people; everything I saw and heard indicates that they will do very well in this church, God helping them.

The church service was two and a quarter hours long. The first hour and a quarter was largely singing: first, congregational singing, then about 100 children singing, followed by the older women singing, and then the younger women singing. The congregational singing consisted largely of the Psalms; the songs sung by the three groups were not, but the words were edifying, though a bit repetitious by our standards. Typical of the Africans, the congregation sings with all their heart and with their bodies as well, which includes lots of clapping, constant moving of the feet, and swaying of the body. Some of the women also sing at certain points with a very high-pitched voice in a descant that is quite beautiful. You can hear their voices above all the rest.

I preached about how Christ plants and grows faith in the hearts of His own through the story of the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21–28). My translator, who was a young elder in the congregation with a humble disposition, had lived in Australia for a year or two, so knew English fairly well, but it was still quite a struggle. I realized early on that I had to really cut back on my sermon and make every sentence as simple as possible if my sermon was to go forward. But the translator did the best he could, and thanked me for the honor and opportunity of translating my sermon.

About 250 people were present: 110 women, 100 children, and 40 men. The lack of men is typical of African churches in southern Mozambique. Men are often nowhere to be seen. Few are believers. Often they are working far from their families and aren’t around, or else they are separated from their wives. Even when they are living with their wives in the vicinity of a church, few choose to attend. This makes finding male leadership a real problem; consequently, many churches have moved to women serving in all three offices. Happily, this church still has enough able men to serve, and hasn’t been tempted to move in the direction of female office-

bearers. They seemed like a rather competent group of men, too—including three elders in their 30's, one of whom did a very good job leading the liturgy for the service.

After the service some of the women left the building and returned, carrying various bags of groceries and supplies, singing all the while, and presented them while singing to the new pastor and his wife, who stood in the front of the church. Then the congregation wanted to sing their gratitude to me, so they all passed by me, everyone singing heartily as they shook my hand, one by one. The elder explained to me that this is their way of saying “thank you so much for bringing us the Word so that we can praise and worship God.”

Then the consistory members gathered for prayer. First, I had to sign my name and text in a book that registers all the sermons, collection amounts, etc., a custom taken over from the old Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The pastor then addressed me for about five minutes, expressing heartfelt gratitude for the sermon. He said, “So many people in our culture and even in the church are prone to turn to witch doctors when praying to God doesn't seem to help, so the example of the Canaanite woman pressing on in waiting on Christ, has great spiritual benefit for our congregation.” Once again, I was struck by how God often uses His Word in cross-cultural situations in ways that the preacher never even thought about before he preached, or even in the act of preaching. How versatile the preached Word is under the guiding hand of the sermon's internal minister, the Holy Spirit!

The pastor then went on to explain that they wanted to give me a gift but really couldn't afford it, so they would give me a copy of the New Testament in Portuguese, and write best wishes on the front page. Well, that took about ten minutes, as he filled up the page, and then the translator translated every sentence for me. The warmth and love with which he then presented the New Testament to me was enough to bring tears to anyone's eyes. What a dear brother Gabriel is! What a pastoral heart he displays.

Then, as I was about to leave, Pastor Gabriel pulled out of his bag, my book, *Living for the Glory of God: An Introduction to Calvinism* (in Portuguese) and asked me to sign it for him. He had just purchased the book at the conference the previous week (at the reduced rate of \$10, which is like spending \$300 on a book for us) and had already read quite a bit of it.

### *July 16-19*

On Monday morning, we flew early to Nampula. The conference, which began Monday evening and concluded on Thursday, had as its theme: “Growing in Grace: The Doctrine and Practice of Genuine Sanctification.” The meetings took place under a large tent, where potentially malaria-carrying mosquitoes are quite common, especially at the morning and evening sessions, so we speakers were advised to take malaria-fighting medication for twenty days, from two days before we came to Mozambique until a week or so after we return home. This is no idle threat as five million cases of malaria are contracted each year in Mozambique, and more people die from this disease than from AIDS, because they don't get the needed treatment in a timely manner. Visitors are especially prone to be infected, as our bodies have not built up immunity against it. Such a danger makes one feel quite dependent on God, as it is hard not to wonder when a mosquito buzzes around your head: *Is this one of the infected ones?* You are also advised to give your body a good spray of insect repellent twice each day.

Well, I'm taking the medication and using the repellent, but this morning I woke up with two good-sized bites. I'll know in 14 days whether I have malaria, but at least I'll be home by that time if I have contracted it. Since I'm on medication, however, the chances of me having it at this point are probably 25 per cent or less, or so I'm told.

This conference was organized and run largely by Dr. Charles Woodrow (see below) and Karl Peterson (see above). Rev. Jaime Marcelino and I each gave five addresses to a group of 300 people, most of whom were pastors. Three of his addresses focused on the practice of Christian virtues among brothers (Phil. 1:2–11), one address was on the necessity of experiencing genuine holiness as a preparation for eternity (Phil. 1:9–11), and his final address was on sanctification in family relationships. Four of my addresses focused on various aspects of growing in grace, and I was also asked to give one historical address on lessons we can learn from John Calvin’s life. We both felt helped, and the men were a joy to preach to and quite responsive. A group of dedicated young people, who sat in the first rows just before the pulpit dressed in beautiful African garb, sang heartily for us periodically throughout the conference. All of these young people listened intently and were great note-takers.

Karl Peterson translated for my first address, and Anselmo, the brother who translated for me in Maputo, translated the remaining four, and the two Q&A sessions. Both men did an excellent job. Rev. Marcelino and I both did a few Q&A sessions as well, and met with a group of young men who have embraced the Reformed faith and are trying to spread it through beginning an indigenous mission outreach called Mission Ecclesia. They intend to use literature, lectures, sermons, radio broadcasts, and a small periodical to carry out this exciting vision.

I also met with several people who wanted to visit for a variety of reasons. One young minister was under deep conviction of sin. Another minister wanted to know more specifically how to begin family worship in his own home. Another young minister had been dating a Christian woman for two years, and was expecting to marry her soon, but she broke up with him last week, and he is heartbroken. “What should I do now?” he pleaded.

A highlight was meeting spontaneously with a group of 16 young people at their request—half from white missionary families and half from black native families. They are serious, God-fearing young people who wanted me to preach a mini-sermon to them and then ask me questions about it. The meeting was supposed to last twenty minutes, but extended to more than an hour as they asked me numerous questions about spiritual life, discerning God’s will, fighting temptation, etc. This meeting was very precious.

Unlike the conference in Maputo which was a first time effort, this is the 13<sup>th</sup> year for the Nampula conference. The evangelical church in Mozambique is still quite young in many parts, especially in the north of the country where this conference is held. In many places the church is only in its second generation, due in part to Mozambican Christians being severely persecuted for many years at the hands of a Marxist government.

Here is the sad story in a nutshell, as told primarily by Peter Hammond, whose evangelistic travels to Mozambique led him to establish the Frontline Fellowship. In 1975, Mozambique, in the possession of Portugal for 470 years, was granted independence by the Portuguese. Marxist revolutionaries organized as the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) then took control of the country, without providing a referendum or an opportunity for elections. Their leader, Samora Machel, imposed a harsh Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat upon Mozambique. Nearly everything was nationalized, including educational institutions, hospitals, businesses, industries, agriculture, and commerce. Property was confiscated. Tourism was basically shut down. Portuguese settlers were expelled from the country, including 80 per cent of the physicians who were given 24 hours to leave.

Samora Machel and his Marxist protégés declared war on the church. Thousands of churches in Mozambique were confiscated, closed, or burned down. Missionaries were expelled

or imprisoned. Evangelism was forbidden; Bibles were burned. Thousands of Christians, including many pastors, were shipped to concentrations camps, never to be seen again.

Mozambique became a land of terror; 300,000 people were incarcerated in re-education camps; 75,000 were publicly executed as reactionaries, black marketers, and counter revolutionaries. Entire villages were massacred. Hammond writes that during one of his missions there, “I documented 42 villages which had been burned to the ground, 74 churches which had been destroyed, and over 60 incidences of Bibles being burned, and 28 incidences of FRELIMO, or Zimbabwean troops, having massacred whole villages. I regularly saw burned out villages, burned out fields, and unburied corpses. I was shown the scars of bayonet and bullet wounds of several church leaders. I listened to many testimonies of Christians who had suffered trauma and torture at the hands of the communists. I ministered to people who had lost all their possessions, and many who had had their loved ones taken away to Rua Rua, one of 16 concentration camps in Mozambique.”

By the 1980s, *Operation World* reported that the war-torn Marxist state of Mozambique was the least evangelized country in the Southern Hemisphere and that there was less than one Bible for every thousand people. By the 1990s, after three decades of civil war, first against the Portuguese (13 years), and then among its own people (17 years), Mozambique was a shattered nation. It was judged by *Operation World* to be the world’s poorest country at that time. At the height of the war, in 1992, more than 40 per cent of the population were refugees. Deaths from the civil war and resulting family were estimated at over one million people.

Then the unthinkable happened. Hammond writes, “In 1994, by God’s grace, and in answer to prayer and international pressure, the FRELIMO government renounced Marxism, opened up its economy, and accepted a multi-party democracy. Church buildings and lands were returned to the congregations that they had been confiscated from. Firearms that had been confiscated were returned to those still alive. The borders were opened. Missionaries were welcomed back into the country and religious freedom was announced.”

Today, Hammond concludes, “Mozambique is wide open to the gospel and spiritually responsive. After being devastated by decades of communist oppression and civil war, Mozambique remains one of the world’s poorest countries. Cyclones, floods, and other natural disasters have dramatically disrupted development and destroyed infrastructure. Mozambique remains heavily reliant on outside aid and a huge public debt burdens the country. Many people struggle from day to day to survive. Life expectancy has risen to 48 years. Over 16% of the population have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Corruption is endemic.” (See Peter Hammond, *In the Killing Fields of Mozambique*, Christian Liberty Books.)

Progress is being made, however. Thousands of new churches have opened. Thirty-five years ago, 3 per cent of the population were evangelicals; today, that number is about 20 per cent, though many of these are only nominal Christians. There is rapid church expansion with lots of activity, but with that expansion comes problems, such as limited Bible knowledge and doctrinal understanding, power struggles among the leaders, and a lack of trained ministers. About 75 per cent of the ministers have little or no formal training. Some have difficulty reading.

The Reformed movement in Mozambique is still small, but potential for growth is promising. If one considers that these two conferences alone drew close to 500 ministers, there is certainly hope! Then, too, the Dutch Reformed have been active for some time in parts of the country. Signs of hope are springing up. Some good and well-educated pastors serve this denomination which is fairly conservative theologically, and several of them attend the Nampula conference regularly.

As I write, I am staying at the home of Dr. Charles and Julie Woodrow, who have five children and a large home with an incredible maze of all kinds of little bedrooms. Close to two dozen people are staying in this home, which is quite ordinary I'm told. Wherever one turns, there is another bedroom or two, and another occupant or two—or three! Each bedroom has the name(s) of those who are sleeping in it that night posted on the door. In fact, while typing this last sentence, two young men just walked through my bedroom on the way to two other bedrooms beyond mine, one of which I didn't know existed until now. And now, as I was typing the previous sentence, a young man just walked in and said, "Hi, I'm Chris; by the way, you're sleeping in my bed tonight, and I have my money stashed beneath the mattress. Do you mind if I fetch it?"

When one arrives at the Woodrow home, there are eight German shepherd dogs—all friendly ones—waiting to greet you (and a cat who is expecting four kittens any day) the moment you step out of the Land Rover, which somehow remains intact on the incredibly bumpy roads. The conference site is only a few miles away but it takes half an hour to drive there due to road conditions.

Julie Woodrow is remarkable; cheerful, easygoing, somehow she rolls with all the punches and enjoys ministering to her five home-schooled children and her large extended "family." Dr. Woodrow, an able well known physician in the area, is of a perfectionist bent and holds the bar of expectation high. Dr. Woodrow has spearheaded Grace Missions Ministries in Mozambique (GraceMissionsMinistries.org). It consists of four ministries:

1. **Medical Outreach** (since 1990)—providing surgical care to Mozambicans with the goal of proclaiming Christ to every patient. From 1990 to 1998 Dr. Woodrow himself performed 3,500 operations from a small government hospital. In recent years he has been spearheading the building of a hospital for the needy local people. Building of the hospital was hampered when funds ran out, but a couple from Brazil recently donated \$250,000 to complete it. So now, a South African couple, Mark and Hilda, who have great credentials for this kind of work, have volunteered to see the project to completion by 2013, the Lord willing. This hospital still needs to be staffed, but hopefully will be a huge help to the local people in the years ahead.

2. **Church Planting** (since 1993)—establishing congregations of evangelical Christians adhering to the historic Reformed confessions. This task is not easy. The Woodrows' local church in Nampula is just such a church plant. Presently attendance is from 25–30 each Sunday. Dr. Woodrow supervises the church and exhorts on Sundays quite frequently.

3. **Literature Distribution** (since 1997)—aiding the Mozambican church through Christian literature distribution via mail and bookstores in cooperation with FIEL Publishers.

4. **National Pastors' Conferences** (since 2000)—strengthening pastors and church workers through hosting annual pastors' conferences attended by leaders from all of Mozambique's ten provinces. This, of course, refers to the conference we are currently speaking at.

Ministering in a place like Nampula can be overwhelming. The needs are so great, the perils so many, the challenges so daunting, and the opportunities so abundant, that one scarcely knows where to begin. Here are just a few of the issues in the Mozambican church:

1. **Animism**. It's everywhere: in the mosque, in the church. Back country farmers and principle leaders in the government resort to the witch doctors for manipulation of the spirits believed to control everything. If a child gets sick, if the garden doesn't produce, if one is fired from his job, he seeks out the witch doctor to find out who has cursed him or what spirit is displeased

with him. Animism runs rampant in the church, despite all the preaching against it. Members of the church are pressured by family members to participate in ceremonies honoring the dead. If a believer or one of his family members falls ill, the extended family “guilts” him into going to the witch doctor, accusing him of not caring for the well-being of his family. Worst of all is the pastor who preaches against witchcraft but whose words hold no more weight than the amulet he wears, given him by the witchdoctor to protect him from illness.

2. **Crisis in the family.** The African family is in shambles. Men are not responsible for their own offspring but for their sisters’ children. City life has eroded traditional African morality. Immorality in the city is rampant. The church needs strong male leaders who exercise *loving* leadership. African wives frequently complain that their husbands abuse their authority over them. I am told that there are few, if any, sermons on Christ-like love and care for the wife as the Savior cherishes the church.
3. **The need for Christian wives.** A Christian wife is hard to find here in northern Mozambique. Women are the guardians of tradition in the matriarchal Makua society. The older generation is very conservative of their African ways while the younger generation of “liberated” women don’t have time for Christ as they pursue the things of this world. The church needs *biblical-grounded* women who can read and understand the Word for themselves and can thus better support their husbands in their ministries.
4. **The content of public worship.** The beauty of African worship is its joy and celebration. But how much of it is directed to the Lord and how much is merely celebration for the sake of forgetting the hardships of life? The church service is comprised of session after session of congregational song and choral performances. Reading of Scripture, preaching of the Word, and instruction in the faith are neglected. Moreover, the preaching of the gospel was suppressed for centuries under the Roman Catholic Portuguese colonial government then actively persecuted by decades of communist rule. The result is a weakened evangelical church that preaches a works-oriented salvation in keeping with Roman Catholic and Muslim influences that dominated the country for so long.
5. **The supremacy of the Word as the rule of faith and life.** Ignorance of Bible doctrine, and in particular, the requirements of God’s law, leave many in darkness. Many profess to have turned to God but have not as yet turned away from idols. The church needs to promote faithful adherence to the standards of faith and holiness set forth in the scriptures without compromise. But, as with the rest of Christendom, African Christianity is often beset with compromise. Example: It is wrong to lie, but some lies are actually socially *expected* because it is not polite to contradict another person.

We need to begin by praying the Lord of the harvest to send more reapers, workers, and volunteers into the African harvest—especially into very needy places like Mozambique. On a positive note, I did have some encouraging times talking about PRTS with one of the Woodrow sons who is seriously contemplating whether God is calling him to the pastoral ministry. Pray that God will call him, send him to PRTS, and that it may please God to return him to this needy part of the world. Finally, let us not forget to bow humbly before God, thanking Him for all the

freedom, resources and spiritual opportunities we have. We truly *are* blessed beyond measure compared with many other countries in the world.

*July 19–20*

The long trek home began in the back end of a large, bouncy truck, included a quick stop at a souvenir shop, where we watched three men carve figurines from beautiful, dark wood. They will spend an entire day on one piece and then be grateful to sell it for \$5. The average full-time employee in Mozambique earns \$4 a day or about \$110 a month. Most of the shops are owned not by local people, but by the Chinese and other nationalities, whom the Mozambicans resent.

Nampula has 400,000 people but no malls and no large stores. They did have a Shoprite Store for a few years, which was great, as the local people could then get almost everything they needed at one stop. But the workers of the store began siphoning off the profits, then adjusting the books. The South African owners decided to visit the store as they smelled a rat. Before they arrived, however, the workers decided to destroy all evidence by burning down the entire building. All the local people know what they did but they have never been arrested simply because they claim innocence and there is no absolute proof.

On the flight from Nampula to Johannesburg I sat next to a white woman who grew up in Africa. She looked old and tired—about 75 to 80 I thought—but she was only 60. She and her husband, who are Christians, have tried to start several businesses throughout their lifetime, but all to no avail. Customers often don't pay for services rendered. Moreover, each time they acquired a few earthly possessions, thugs broke into their home and stole it all—even down to food from the cupboard and drinks from the fridge. They have been left “penniless many times,” she said. She looked at me plaintively, and said, “We don't know what to do; we don't know how to go on. No country will accept us because of my husband's health issues. We just pray each day that we will have food for the day.”

To go from the poverty of Nampula to the luxury of the Johannesburg airport is a bit of a culture shock. The 17-hour overnight flight from South Africa to Washington, D.C. (with one drop down in Senegal), went well despite my exhaustion. I enjoyed editing Dr. Andrew Woolsey's doctoral dissertation on the development of covenant theology. What a groundbreaking book this is! I am so glad that Reformation Heritage Books is going to publish it.

My flight landed three hours late in Washington D. C., so I missed my flight to Chicago. That was the beginning of a strange 10-hour saga in which I tried to get tickets to Chicago and on to GR—first, successfully; then, unsuccessfully, as my boarding passes didn't register after all. Meanwhile, Mary called me and told me that my dear Mother was dying, which made getting home all the more urgent. Finally, I got on standby to Chicago. Because the plane stayed at the gate for an extra hour to take on additional customers, I then missed my Grand Rapids connection. All the Chicago-Grand Rapids flights were full for the remainder of the day and evening, but in God's kindness, I managed again to get on by standby. The fact that my mother was dying did not help at all, but having “Silver Elite” status as a “frequent flyer” did, as I was put at the head of the standby list on both occasions. Had that not been the case, I would not have been able to make it home at all that day. As it was, I didn't arrive home until 8:00 p.m. It took me 39 hours to get from Mozambique to Grand Rapids—the longest airport trek of my life. One could fly around the world in that amount of time!

Our family went straight from the airport to Kalamazoo to see my dying mother. After praying, singing, and talking, we said a second tearful goodbye, telling her that we would meet her on the other side, God willing, to spend an eternity together praising Christ. We then drove

up to Grand Rapids to see Johanna Mast, who was in the same condition as my mother. After visiting with them, and working our way through pre-arrangements for a potential funeral, I finally arrived home just before midnight.

### **Marion, Indiana (July 21-26; RPCNA Conference)**

The following day, Saturday, was a huge scramble to get all my ducks in a row to leave for Marion, Indiana, where I was to speak five times—once each day, from July 22 to July 26, on living the Christian life at the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America’s RP International Conference, which approximately 2,300 people attended. The RPCNA holds this conference every four years. More than 1/3 of the denomination attends, along with RPs from other countries, including Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Japan, and Australia. I know of nothing else quite like this in any other North American denomination.

On Sunday, Rev. Rich Holdeman preached on keeping the heart as a matter of life and death (Prov. 4:23), Rev. Dave Reese preached on “The Sabbath: Creation, Covenant, and Christology” (Gen. 2:1-3), and I spoke on “Cultivating Holiness” (1 Peter 1:16). It was a good day.

Early Monday morning, my sister called to tell us that my dear mother finally went to be with her Lord. Our loss is her gain, and ultimately, ours as well. (I will be writing a letter about my mother in the near future, D.V.) A few hours later, I received a call from the Mast family just five minutes before I was scheduled to speak that Johanna Mast also had passed away. My heart was full when I began to speak, but the Lord upheld me. I told the audience that it was providential that I was about to speak on “Prayerful Prayer” because I had just lost a mother who was the best prayer warrior I had ever known. I then gave a few examples of what we children experienced of her prayer life. I can truly say that the Lord helped me through this part of my unprepared address in a humbling and comforting way, and from the response afterward, it became apparent that God’s leadings in this address and these deaths left a deep impression upon many. How good God is! His strength is perfected in our weakness. How many times I have experienced in my life that the best thing for me to do when I feel weak, burdened, and overwhelmed, is not to run from the pulpit but to run to it. There is no better place on earth to be.

When I finished speaking, a minister came quickly to the pulpit, and spontaneously asked all the ministers and elders in the audience to come up and surround me, as he wanted to pray for me and my family. About 75 men then joined me behind the pulpit, and this brother prayed movingly for me. It was truly a touching moment.

As the ministers began to move back to their seats, a brother with a booming Whitefieldian voice spoke up from the rear of the massive audience, saying that he would like to lift up all the ministers and elders in prayer as well, as they so often prayed for the people, but the people had so few opportunities to pray for them in such a tangible way. His prayer, uttered from his seat without a mike, was easily heard by the entire audience. That too was touching.

Since my brothers from Canada weren’t coming to Michigan until Thursday, visiting hours wouldn’t start until Thursday evening, and the funeral for my mother wouldn’t be until Saturday, we decided prayerfully to continue to fulfill our obligations in Indiana, which were scheduled to be completed on Thursday at 10:00 a.m. We knew my mother would want it that way, and I also felt the Lord’s favor on this decision when He gave an unusual degree of freedom to speak for the remaining days. That was particularly true of the address on coping with affliction in a Christ-centered way. The people were absolutely wonderful; they lifted me up on the wings of prayer and we felt bonded to each other. I also thoroughly enjoyed a Q&A time

with about 300 young people. During those days the conference attendees also showed their desire and hunger by buying \$16,600 worth of books—the most we have ever sold at a conference in the history of Reformation Heritage Books.

After my last address on Thursday morning, the 2000 attendees rose to their feet spontaneously and gave a standing ovation out of love for the Word of God that the Holy Spirit used to feed them. Meanwhile, we exited by a side entrance to rush to the airport where a private jet from one of the Mast sons was waiting for us to whisk us to Grand Rapids. The four hour drive took only 40 minutes by air. A car was waiting for us in Grand Rapids right beside where the plane parked, and fifteen minutes later we arrived home, changed our clothes, and were off to the Zaagman Memorial Chapel to conduct the funeral for Johanna Mast at 1:30 p.m. After the funeral, fellowship with the Mast family, and the committal, we rushed to Kalamazoo, and arrived at the Westside Chapel funeral home fifteen minutes before visiting hours were to begin for my mother at 6:00 p.m.

### **Kalamazoo, Michigan (July 27–28)**

The testimonies of many who came to the visiting hours that evening and the following day about my mother were humbling, encouraging, and sometimes tear-producing all at once. On Saturday, I conducted the funeral for my dear mother, preaching on John 14:1–3, the first text that the Lord made very special to her after he had begun to work savingly in her soul. It was difficult at the beginning to contain my emotions, but as the text unfolded before me, the Lord gave an increasing measure of liberty. How bittersweet that hour was! Before the funeral, my brother Jim spoke to the family. My mother, who had been an only child, had five children, thirty-five grandchildren, ninety-two great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild—133 in all! Though a number of the great-grandchildren were not able to be present, the family gathering was still sizable. I spoke at the graveside from Revelation 21:5, followed by my oldest brother John, who also thanked various people, and closed with prayer, after which we sang Psalter 203 (Psalm 73), and then fellowshiped at the NRC Christian School in Kalamazoo.

The following morning I preached at Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, and in the evening at our own church, on Psalm 17:15, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

Throughout the month of July—perhaps the busiest month of my life—I have felt the sustaining hand of God in an unusual way. He enabled me to preach thirty times on three continents, with about 25,000 in attendance in all. To Him be all the praise and the glory! May eternity reveal the fruits. I now look forward to a much more calm and restful August in Grand Rapids, the Lord willing.

Warmly in the Master’s bonds,

Rev. Joel Beeke