

## **“Amen” from the Heart**

July 2, 2012

Dear Friends,

Today I have a day off in London between preaching at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and the start of the conference here tomorrow. So I thought I'd spend today bringing you up-to-date with my preaching and conference itineraries. Some of these entries are quite short, as I took few notes of what transpired when I was there; others are longer because I wrote them out at the time but never finalized them. So the length of each entry below does not necessarily correlate with the value of each conference or speaking engagement.

### **Warrenton, Virginia (September 30–October 1, 2011)**

On September 30 and October 1, I was privileged to speak at the Keach Conference with my good friend Malcolm Watts from Salisbury, England. The Keach Conference—named after the post-Puritan Baptist preacher Benjamin Keach (1640–1704)—is an annual theology and ministry conference hosted by a network of church officers and congregations called the Reformed Baptist Fellowship of Virginia, which is committed to promoting reformation and revival in the churches. The conference has been held since 2002. (Prior to 2010, the fellowship was called the Evangelical Forum.) Past speakers include many friends, such as Dr. Mark Dever, Dr. Tom Nettles, Dr. Michael Haykin, Dr. Joey Pipa, Dr. Derek Thomas, Rev. Conrad Mbewe, Dr. Tom Ascol, and Dr. David Murray.

This year the conference met at the Covenant Reformed Baptist Church in Warrenton, Virginia, where Steve Clevenger is pastor. The theme was “Divine Providence,” based on article 5 of the 1689 London Baptist Confession. Pastor Watts spoke on “The Providential Preservation of the Ancient Scriptures” and “The Providential Translation of the English Bible.” I spoke on “How to Respond Christianly to Providential Afflictions” and “Job’s Submission to Providence.”

I enjoyed renewing acquaintance with Lloyd Sprinkle, publisher of Sprinkle Books and pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia. I also enjoyed establishing a friendship with Pastor Jeff Riddle, minister of Christ Reformed Baptist Church in Charlottesville, Virginia.

### **Hamilton, Ontario (Free Reformed Ministerial Retreat, October 19–20, 2011)**

About fifteen ministers—mostly Free Reformed—gathered for a three-day retreat at the Crieff Hills Community Conference Centre, just north of Hamilton, Ontario. My colleague from PRTS, Dr. Bill VanDoodewaard, delivered three addresses on “Early Princeton Seminary”: (1) its history, (2) its men, and (3) its theology. I was asked to provide three addresses on “Spiritual Growth”: (1) in knowledge, (2) in practice, and (3) in experience. Rev. John Koopman and Rev. David Kranendonk gave the opening and closing messages. The conference offered plenty of breaks and periods of relaxation so that the ministers could walk and talk together and grow in their friendships. More talking got done than walking, however, as it rained nearly the entire time we were there. Unfortunately, I was not able to take in the last day of the conference, as I had to fly on to Oklahoma, but it was good and invigorating to be with these brethren nonetheless.

### **Edmond, Oklahoma (October 21–24, 2011; Oklahoma Conference on Reformed Theology [OKCRT])**

I had been looking forward to going to Oklahoma and this conference for four years for two reasons—first, because it is one of the last states of our great country that I had not yet visited, and second, because I was curious about a Reformed conference being held for its tenth year in this state, which, to my knowledge, has few Reformed churches. To my surprise, I learned that this conference was sponsored by five churches, the George Whitefield Society, and the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Happily, a good crowd of three hundred people came from forty churches near and far—many from neighboring states—to attend the conference at Heritage Presbyterian Church in Edmond—the only event of its kind each year in the entire state of Oklahoma.

I gave four addresses on spiritual growth—the same three I gave at the Free Reformed retreat in the preceding days, only substantially changed to be geared to laypeople rather than ministers—plus an address on “Spiritual Growth in Prayer.” I stayed over the Sunday to preach twice to a vibrant congregation, continuing the theme of spiritual growth from Matthew 15 and Hebrews 12.

Heritage Presbyterian Church is being pastored by a senior interim minister, Wes O’Neill, who made some very edifying comments throughout the liturgy. One I remember is this: “Sin curses us, so that we turn in upon ourselves, shrink from our duties, and are reduced to the smallness of our own lives.”

The conference and church radiated with obvious hunger for the Word of God. People were fed spiritually, the singing was robust, and book buying was brisk. I enjoyed the people, including my hosts, Mr. and Mrs. James Dixon, who donate most of their time to the church and its ministries there. I had fascinating fellowship over dinner with five couples, most of whom are pastors and their wives: Randy and Kristin, Wes and Cathy, Mike and Amy, David and Di, and Carlton and Laura. We covered a good number of topics related to ministerial life. The following day, I enjoyed lunch with two more couples: Pastor Alan and Patti, and Luther (yes, he grew up Lutheran) and Linda—the latter couple being book dealers. I was also pleased to converse with some godly young people at this conference, one of whom I have had frequent e-mail correspondence with for the last ten months.

Two friends are scheduled to take this conference in the next two years: Rev. Carl Robbins (2012), pastor of Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina, and Dr. Phillip Ryken (2013), president of Wheaton College in Illinois. Pray that God will bless their labors in Oklahoma so that the Reformed faith may grow exponentially in this needy state.

### **Asheville, North Carolina (October 27–29, 2011)**

This year’s National Center for Family-Integrated Churches (NCFIC) was dedicated to “Gospel-Centered Marriages.” Over two thousand people attended—mostly conservative home-schooling families from various parts of the nation. Paul Washer, Doug Phillips, Scott Brown, Dan Horn, Kevin Swanson, and I were the plenary speakers. Numerous men joined us for breakout sessions—eighteen in all. I spoke three times: (1) “Learning about Marriage from Our Spiritual Fathers,” (2) “Friendship in Marriage,” and (3) “Sexual Intimacy in Marriage.” The last two addresses I later turned into a book, *Friends*

*and Lovers: Cultivating Companionship and Sexual Intimacy in Marriage* (Cruciform Press). As a plenary speaker, I also was called upon (1) to give a preconference brief message on what was “burning in my soul”—that is, what issue or issues did we feel burdened or moved about; (2) to be filmed for an interview on evangelism—in anticipation of the next year’s conference; and (3) to give a three-minute speaker vignette.

Our book table again did extremely well at this conference. My most memorable conversations were with Paul Washer, a well-known evangelistic preacher; Doug Phillips, president of Vision Forum; and Scott Brown, president of NCFIC. I also enjoyed meeting a family from near Lansing, Michigan, with fifteen well-behaved children—thirteen of them adopted from several cultures and ethnic backgrounds with various needs. The children were all so polite and kind—the grace of God and the aroma of Christ seemed to emanate from them. Then there was lunch with a former Mormon who has nine children and was wonderfully converted to Reformed Christianity. And how can I forget the African American in his late thirties whose wife served him divorce papers several years ago after bearing their eighth child? This dear brother told me how he cried out to God, and the Lord heard him and delivered him out of all his distresses (Ps. 34:6). His marriage was miraculously restored and he now has a wonderful family, transformed by the sovereign, covenantal grace of God. What a testimony he gave! Other old friendships were cemented deeper and new ones were forged. Unfortunately, I couldn’t stay for the last day, as I had to fly on to Texas.

#### **Forth Worth, Texas (October 29, 2011)**

Early on Saturday morning I flew from North Carolina to Fort Worth, Texas, to the annual Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, which was founded to promote scholarship on the early modern era (AD 1450–1600) from professors around the world. I had been asked by a Dutch scholar, Dr. Herman Selderhuis, to contribute a paper to a panel he sponsored on “Conscience in the Lutheran, Calvinistic, and Puritan Traditions.” Dr. Randall Zachman, a Calvin scholar, first presented a paper on Calvin’s idea of conscience and providence as exemplified in his commentary on the Psalms. Dr. Benjamin Mayes then presented a paper on the sixteenth-century Lutheran view of conscience, which consisted of a synopsis of his recently completed doctoral dissertation on this subject. I was amazed at how many parallels there were between the Lutheran and the Puritan views on conscience. I then delivered the last paper of the panel on “The Puritans on Conscience and Casuistry.”

After the Q&A that followed, I had a quick lunch with Dr. Selderhuis and his assistant, Karla VanAperloo, then flew from Texas to home, completing my sermon preparation on the plane. Though this day was packed a bit too tight for my comfort level, I was enabled to stay calm throughout and was very grateful for kind providence allowing all three plane flights to be on time.

#### **Canton, Michigan (November 11–13, 2011)**

Pastor Gordon Cook, son-in-law of Pastor Al Martin, invited Pastor Martin and me to do a conference for his church, Grace Baptist, in Canton, Michigan, on being “Busy for the King.” Al Martin spoke on “Are You Busy for the King?” and “Busy but Fresh,” and I spoke on “Busy but Fruitful” and “How to Cultivate Holiness in the Midst of Busyness.”

The goal of the conference was, by God's grace, to convey helps to pastors and men on how to manage time effectively and live lives of fruitfulness for God, without burning out or losing one's spirituality. Both of us as speakers stressed the importance of being diligent, productive, and fruitful in the places where God has sovereignly put us. We also tried to provide practical guidelines on how to maintain proper priorities in the midst of busyness.

I stayed overnight to preach for Pastor Cook on Sunday morning and to lead the church's Sunday school hour. I then returned home well in time to preach in Grand Rapids for the evening service.

### **Lawrenceville, Georgia (November 15–16, 2011)**

Being appointed to attend NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches) on behalf of our Heritage Reformed Congregations together with my colleagues, Rev. Bartel Elshout and Rev. Michael Fintelman, I spent two days attending its meetings in the impressive Mission to the World (MTW) office building of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) in Lawrenceville, Georgia. As last year's chairman, Rev. Elshout gave a moving, Christ-exalting opening meditation. The new chairman, Rev. John Bouwer, a United Reformed pastor of Jordan, Ontario, did an outstanding job of chairing the meetings. A variety of matters were addressed, but the major event was Dr. W. Robert Godfrey's exposition of his dream of how conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America could unite more closely in fellowship and counsel. His main idea is that a number of federations might come together periodically for a nonbinding kind of "synodical or assembly gathering" to assist each other in grappling with various issues that surface in church and society today. Dr. Godfrey, who is president of Westminster Seminary California, made it clear that he was just throwing out some seed thoughts that need considerable discussion before germinating and growing in one or more directions. An exploratory committee was appointed to contemplate his ideas as well as others that might sprout from his presentation. The committee is to report to this fall's meeting in Dyer, Indiana.

Rev. Elshout, Rev. Fintelman, and I were able to meet with several delegations (URCNA, RPCNA, and OPC). We also had fruitful discussions with a number of brothers individually from other denominations. In my opinion, the most valuable part of these meetings is strengthening old friendships and making new ones, though it is also helpful, of course, to hear in the large-group discussion how other denominations grapple with a variety of contemporary issues and problems. These meetings can help iron sharpen iron. One cannot help but come away with a deeper appreciation of our own Reformed experiential heritage, which I am deeply convicted we must do all in our power to retain, strengthen, and propagate.

### **West Barnstable, Massachusetts (November 18–20, 2011)**

It was great to return a favor to my good friend James La Belle, pastor of the growing Presbyterian Church of Cape Cod (Orthodox Presbyterian), by speaking at his inaugural Cape Cod Reformed Conference. La Belle traveled to Europe with me some months ago to spend time together discussing various matters. He is also coauthoring a series of books with me on the cream of what the Puritans said on various subjects.

The theme of the conference was “Living Christ-Centeredly.” Here was my speaking schedule:

Nov. 18—Friday p.m. church address: “Cultivating Holiness in Christ”  
Nov. 19—Sat. a.m. men’s breakfast address: “Leading Family Worship”  
Nov. 19—Sat. noon women’s lunch address: “Facing Disappointment in Christ”  
Nov. 19—Sat. p.m. sermon: “Considering Christ in Your Afflictions”  
Nov. 20—Sunday school: “Living Submissively under Christ”  
Nov. 20—Sun. a.m. sermon: “Gethsemane’s Lamb and King” (John 18:1–14)  
Nov. 20—Sun. p.m. sermon: “Enduring in the Christ-Centered Race” (Heb. 12:1–2)

I had a great time at this conference—speaking, visiting, and selling books. People attended from both the local church and vicinity and from far away. A group of a dozen folk came down from Maine. Lisa Pepin, who came with her daughter, Rachele, who has Down syndrome, sacrificed a great deal to be present and left greatly blessed. I thoroughly enjoyed speaking and praying with her sweet daughter.

One of my greatest joys was getting to know the La Belle family better. James’s wife, Chantry, is so tender and supportive of her husband. And how responsive their seven children are to the Word! They are a sheer delight. Two of the children wrote me touching letters after the conference—one was a six-page, single-space description of how the Lord visited this child at our last PRTS conference in August, which their entire family drove all the way from Massachusetts to Michigan to attend! The letter concludes: “I have never been so blessed in my life. I sincerely believe that the witness of the Holy Spirit had such a powerful impact that I can never be the same again. Save the moment of my regeneration, God used this conference for the revival and reinvigoration of my life and my mind like nothing before.”

Elder Tom and Phoebe Hoffrage were pleasant and helpful hosts for me. Between services on the Sabbath, I enjoyed a relaxing lunch and fellowship at Elder Arnie and Pam Johnson’s home, with the five elders and their wives (Hoffrage, Johnson, Pereira, Mores, and La Belle). At the end of my stay, I was given a card signed by sixty people, interspersed with comments about what the weekend meant to them. That card was worth more than words can express. The following morning, I was up at 2:30 a.m. to catch the first flight home.

### **Hull, Iowa (December 18, 2011)**

On December 18, I was privileged to serve the Hull, Iowa, Heritage Reformed Congregation, which includes a number of people that I served in my first congregation in the 1970s. It is great to witness that throughout these decades several of them have come to saving faith and others have been brought to much greater spiritual maturity and assurance. I preached about wrestling for internal holiness and persevering in the Christian faith and also gave an address on the seminary after the morning service.

It is always a blessing to return to serve this dear flock, where Rev. Michael Fintelman is now ministering together with his wife, Nelly, with joy. I also enjoyed staying with Pete and Linda VanBeek, my brother- and sister-in-law, and their two girls, Anna and Leah.

### **East Lansing, Michigan (January 22, 2012)**

Rev. Kevin DeYoung, a gifted young pastor of a growing Reformed Church of America congregation in East Lansing, Michigan, is spearheading a movement to steer his denomination back into old Reformed paths and to restore the Heidelberg Catechism to its historic place in the churches. On Sunday morning, January 22, I preached the same sermon twice (on spiritual maturity) for his flock. About five hundred people attended in all, roughly 250 at each service. The congregation is a remarkable mix of people. About 25 percent of those attending are students from Michigan State University; about 15 percent are minorities or internationals. Some are non-Christians. Most are well educated. Some speak English as a second language, and a few barely speak English at all. The congregation is young—lots of families and couples in their twenties through their forties, but few retirees.

Pastor DeYoung felt a bit down after the second service. In his prayer, he asked the Lord to convert the Mormons who were worshiping in the building next door. It was the first time he had ever explicitly prayed for them. Unknown to him, a Mormon had decided to attend his church for the first time that morning. She came up to him after the service and told him she was offended and would not return. I tried to encourage him to surrender this over to God's sovereignty, for we can never know what God might do with such an unusual providential event.

I didn't have much time to mix with the people here as I needed to get back to preach in our own church in the evening. I was delighted, however, to see in the congregation the family of fifteen children mentioned above that I had met at the NCFIC. They had driven about an hour to attend—and there they were, all seventeen of them, as sweet as ever. The parents invited Mary and me to visit them sometime, which, if we can find the time, we hope to do. I am sure it would be a fascinating—and humbling!—visit.

### **Hamilton and St. George, Ontario (January 28–30, 2012)**

Mary and I drove up to Hamilton, Ontario, on Saturday afternoon and stayed over the weekend with our good friends Connor and Susan Keuning. They are always a joy to be with; conversation about both spiritual and temporal matters flows easily and freely with them. I preached twice on the Sabbath in the now-vacant Maranatha Free Reformed Church of Hamilton and in the afternoon for Rev. Jack Schoeman in the St. George Free Reformed Church. Three weeks later they would move into their spacious new church building, which we were privileged to see. After church on Sunday evening, we enjoyed fellowshiping with the Keunings and Elder and Mrs. Simon Kranendonk, the parents of one of our alumni, Rev. David Kranendonk.

### **Dutton, Michigan (February 12, 2012)**

On Sunday morning, February 12, I had the privilege of preaching again for the Dutton United Reformed Church—a congregation of some five hundred people who attend church faithfully both morning and evening. (Recently, Rev. Brian Najapfour accepted a pastoral call to this church and hopes to be installed there on August 10, D.V.) Afterward, I taught an adult class, bringing them up to date on seminary developments and engaging in a Q&A discussion of the sermon preached that morning.

### **Yazoo City, Mississippi (February 17–19, 2012)**

A longtime friend, Sonny Peaster, who is a well-known cotton farmer and former board of trustee member for the Banner of Truth Trust from Edinburgh, invited me to come down to lead a conference in Yazoo's Second Presbyterian Church on "Living Fully for Christ." In all, I spoke on the conference theme six times that weekend with considerable help from our gracious, heavenly Father. It was a delight to be there. I enjoyed befriending the able pastor, David Gilbert, whom I had not known before, and it was great to see and visit with several of our southern associate members who made the long trip to be there: Greg and Katherine Gurunlian from Louisiana, Alvin and Liz Shows from Mississippi, and Jim and Mary Trawick from Alabama.

I was particularly grateful to see Tommy and Linda Peaster, who are dear personal friends and friends of the seminary as well. Tommy Peaster contracted throat cancer a few years ago and nearly died. He has been through numerous treatments and is slowly improving, due to God's kindness and his wife's amazing love and nursing skills. He can now speak by pushing a button on his tracheotomy, although sometimes he can get only a few sentences out. He was able to attend both evening sessions. The second evening, after I spoke on affliction, he handed me a scribbled note at the door:

Joel, Thank you for coming from Grand Rapids  
just to preach to me. I wish I could shout Amen,  
but I do in my heart.

Book sales were a bit sluggish at the beginning but picked up near the end, particularly when two friends offered to buy a number of books for each seminary student that was present (several had come up from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson). Moreover, these dear friends were also willing to buy all the rest of the books at the end of the conference for distribution to others. I was most grateful for their serendipitous act.

I had excellent visits with Sonny and Patsy Peaster and their family and also with a student intern and his wife, Aaron and Rachel Halbert, who had me over for a Sunday dinner, together with another recently married student and his wife from Reformed Theological Seminary.

A Samuel Rutherford quotation in the church bulletin that Sunday was particularly impressive: "The thorn is one of the most cursed, and angry, and crabbed weeds that the earth yielded, and yet out of it springeth the rose, one of the sweetest smelling flowers, and most delightful to the eye, that the earth hath. Your Lord shall make joy and gladness out of your afflictions; for all His roses have a fragrant smell. Wait for the time when his own holy hand shall hold them to your nose; and if ye would have present comfort under the cross, be much in prayer, for at that time your faith kisseth Christ and he kisseth the soul."

At 4:00 on Monday morning, Kent Thompson, the owner of two furniture stores whose private quarters I was privileged to stay in over the weekend, drove me to the airport. We had a great theological discussion all the way to the airport.

### **Chino and Los Angeles, California (February 24–27, 2012)**

This trip got off to a rough start—it took me twenty-two hours to get from Grand Rapids to Chino, California, which is about the length of time it normally takes to fly to Australia on the other side of the world! My plane was supposed to be airborne on Thursday

evening, February 23, about one hour prior to a major snowstorm descending on Grand Rapids. Just as we were going to board, we were told that there was “a minor mechanical problem” and that the mechanic would arrive in less than forty-five minutes. Well, he never showed up, and two hours later we were told that they were going to call in “a road crew,” who would arrive in about three hours. Privately, one of the workers told me that the plane would not be flying at all that night, or the next day because of the coming storm, and that my only chance of arriving in California by conference time was to leave the next day from Detroit. Two other stranded passengers and I then took a taxi from Grand Rapids to Detroit, arriving in heavy snow at 1:00 a.m. I tried to evangelize them on the way, together with my Muslim taxi driver, who hailed from Kenya, without much success. The driver kept insisting that there was only a small difference between Christianity and Islam concerning their various interpretations about Jesus Christ. When I tried to press him a bit, he changed the subject.

Eleven hours after arriving in Detroit, my flight from Detroit to Los Angeles did manage to get airborne an hour before a second storm was scheduled to hit Detroit. The five-hour flight went smoothly. I was able to proof a new title by G. Saldenus and W. Brakel on the Lord’s Supper, freshly translated from Dutch by Rev. Bartel Elshout and edited by Dr. James DeJong. It is now available in the Dutch Further Reformation spiritual classics series.

Larry VandenBerge, a delightful brother who gives most of his time in his retirement years to serving the church, was on hand to pick me up at the LA airport. Heavy traffic from Los Angeles to Chino turned the one-hour ride into two, but Larry was a good conversationalist. I finally made it to the United Reformed Church in Chino just in time for the start of the Growing Reformed Churches Conference on Friday evening. So, by God’s grace, this lengthy marathon turned out all right except that I missed my scheduled chapel at Providence Reformed College. That was a disappointment, as I have never been there and was looking forward to speaking at this chapel. How often we have to learn in life that God’s ways are above our ways!

The conference was on marriage and family. Dr. Cornel Venema, president of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, spoke on the Trinity as a pattern for the husband-wife relationship and on the calling of elders and ministers to rule their houses well and have their children in submission. Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, president of Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, spoke on how the Lord builds and blesses our families from Psalms 127 and 128. Dr. Steve Kortenhoeven, the dean of student life at Providence Christian College in Pasadena, California, addressed the subject of writing truth on children’s hearts. I spoke on the Puritan model of marriage and family and on how fathers should lead family worship. The four boxes of Reformation Heritage Books that arrived ahead of me nearly all sold. I should have had twice the number.

A highlight of the conference was spending some time with two young men who feel called to the ministry and are contemplating applying to PRTS. By the end of the conference, one of them told me that God had used this conference to convince him that he needed to come to PRTS because of its experiential emphasis. “You will receive my completed application next month,” he said.

After the conference was over, I went out to dinner with Dr. Cornie and Ardith Bleeker and three of Ardith’s sisters—Lila from California and Joanne and Karla from

Wisconsin. The four women are all daughters of Bert and Agnes Harskamp, formerly of Sioux Center, Iowa. Bert Harskamp served as an elder in my first pastorate in the 1970s and became one of my very best friends, so we had lots of fond memories to share with each other.

On Sunday morning, I preached for the Chino URC, which has about five hundred members and is pastored by Rev. Ronald Scheuers (senior pastor) and Rev. Quentin Falkena (youth pastor). Before the worship service, I met several students from John MacArthur's church and college, two of whom are interested in coming to Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. One of these young men spoke about his desire to be trained in a seminary that values Puritan and Reformed experiential preaching and piety.

In the afternoon I rode with two young men, Paul Ruchtie and George Whitlock—both of whom feel called to the ministry—from Chino to Los Angeles (a one-hour drive) to preach for the Los Angeles Reformed Presbyterian Church, which is pastored by one of our alumni, Rev. Nathan Eshelman. We had “real” conversation from the first mile to the last. They also asked numerous questions about our seminary.

God is blessing Rev. Eshelman's work immensely. It was so good to witness firsthand how much the people treasure his ministry and how he has matured in such a few years into a well-established minister who feels at home among his sheep. I had the privilege of preaching Rev. Eshelman's ordination sermon three years ago, when the congregation numbered thirty souls; today, that number is near seventy. But, more importantly, the people seem spiritually alive and freely speak about the good things of God.

Rev. Eshelman's wife, Lydia, is doing well also. She was expecting their fifth child soon. Their first four children are named after one New Testament believer (Anna), two Puritans (Owen, Watson), and one Reformer (Calvin). As if that were not enough, when I shook their hands, another boy was with them who wanted to shake hands as well. His name? John Knox Owen!

After church I spoke at length with five students visiting from MacArthur's church. They asked lots of questions about a variety of issues. Three of them feel called to the ministry, and two of those expressed considerable interest in coming to PRTS. Happily, I had some leftover seminary catalogs and material from the conference that I could pass on to them. About two dozen people stayed for a simple dinner fellowship in the church building, during which they asked me a number of questions and shared how they were converted and had come to the RPCNA church. It was a delightful time of spiritual fellowship. Howard and Irene Huizing then drove me back to my home-away-from-home. They spoke to me for nearly an hour about their daughter's fruitful mission work in southern Sudan and their unforgettable visits there.

I got up at 3:15 a.m. on Monday morning to take the long trek home, arriving safely by late afternoon. I felt grateful to our faithful God for not only blessing this trip with a felt sense of His gracious presence, but I was particularly moved at how kind providence brought across my path six young men who are seriously contemplating coming to our seminary. This trip was certainly more fruitful than most for the seminary.

**Orlando, Florida (March 15–17, 2012)**

Plenary speakers at this year's Ligonier Conference were Sinclair Ferguson, Robert Godfrey, Michael Horton, Steven Lawson, Stephen Meyer, Albert Mohler, R. C. Sproul, R. C. Sproul Jr., and Del Tackett. The major theme was "The Christian Mind." The most helpful addresses for me were "Losing My Religion" (Ferguson) and "When Worlds Collide" (Tackett). Numbers were a bit down this year—*only* 3,500 people attended!

I was asked to give an address over the dinner hour on my recent book that Ligonier's publishing arm (Reformation Trust) printed, *Parenting by the Promises of God: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace*. About a thousand people were present. It did help the book sales—about 450 copies were sold.

My friend Greg Bailey, who works for Ligonier and edited the books I have published with them, took good care of my needs throughout the conference. A real treat was being able to stay in a condo with several friends from our HRC church in Hull, Iowa—Rev. Mike and Nellie Fintelman, Howard and Marilyn Dekker, and Dr. Cornie and Ardith Bleeker. Their daughter, Laura Hermann, wife of one of our seminarians, Russell Hermann, was also present with us. Good discussions abounded.

Most of my time was spent behind the book table selling books, however, and speaking with people about a variety of issues. I was not able to stay for R.C. Sproul's closing address as I had to fly to Indiana.

### **Indianapolis, Indiana (March 18, 2012)**

I spoke the final addresses for the Reforming Families Conference at the Free Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis on March 18, preaching in the morning on enduring in Christian living and in the evening on family worship. I also participated in a Q&A with the other speakers, addressing such questions as:

- What do you see as the best method for developing a Christian culture in the work world?
- Where should the biblical lines of authority be drawn between families and the church?
- What should the Christian's attitude be toward homosexuals when they show up at church, at work, or next door?
- How does engagement in, or neglect of, family worship impact our ability to live Christianly in an unchristian world?
- What can the Puritans teach us about parenting?

Ryan Elliott, the able director of the conference and an elder in the congregation, was most gracious to me, as was the pastor, Geoff Banister. Since these men are from the same denomination as Dr. Michael Barrett (the Free Presbyterian Church of North America), in God's providence we had a helpful meeting about Dr. Barrett's coming to PRTS.

Next week I hope to present you with one more letter that will bring us up to date. Every blessing to you and yours.

Warmly, Rev. Joel Beeke