

THE LETTERS OF
GEERHARDUS VOS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JAMES T. DENNISON JR.



P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865

CONTENTS

Preface	11
Introduction: The Life of Geerhardus Vos	13
The Writings of Geerhardus Vos: A Bibliography	87
Letters of Geerhardus Vos	
<i>To W. H. Roberts (August 17, 1883)</i>	115
<i>To Abraham Kuyper (May 28, 1886)</i>	116
<i>To Abraham Kuyper (June 7, 1886)</i>	118
<i>To J. W. Felix (September 4, 1886)</i>	119
<i>To Abraham Kuyper (October 7, 1886)</i>	120
<i>To Herman Bavinck (June 16, 1887)</i>	122
<i>To B. B. Warfield (February 2, 1889)</i>	128
<i>To B. B. Warfield (October 22, 1889)</i>	129
<i>To Herman Bavinck (February 1, 1890)</i>	131
<i>To Abraham Kuyper (February 1, 1890)</i>	133
<i>To Herman Bavinck (March 4, 1890)</i>	136
<i>To B. B. Warfield (April 9, 1890)</i>	138
<i>To B. B. Warfield (June 13, 1890)</i>	139
<i>To B. B. Warfield (July 2, 1890)</i>	140
<i>To Abraham Kuyper (July 12, 1890)</i>	140
<i>To B. B. Warfield (August 5, 1890)</i>	143
<i>To Abraham Kuyper (October 27, 1890)</i>	144
<i>To B. B. Warfield (January 31, 1891)</i>	145
<i>To B. B. Warfield (February 12, 1891)</i>	147
<i>To Abraham Kuyper (February 21, 1891)</i>	148
<i>To B. B. Warfield (March 12, 1891)</i>	151

Contents

To Herman Bavinck (May 13, 1891)	153
To Herman Bavinck (June 30, 1891)	158
To B. B. Warfield (July 7, 1891)	160
To Abraham Kuyper (July 30, 1891)	164
To B. B. Warfield (August 29, 1891)	166
To B. B. Warfield (September 8, 1891)	167
To B. B. Warfield (September 28, 1891)	168
To B. B. Warfield (March 18, 1892)	170
To Abraham Kuyper (May 11, 1893)	172
To Herman Bavinck (July 3, 1893)	174
To Abraham Kuyper (July 3, 1893)	177
To Herman Bavinck (October 20, 1893)	178
To Herman Bavinck (November 21, 1893)	180
To Herman Bavinck (February 1, 1894)	182
To Abraham Kuyper (February 26, 1894)	183
To Herman Bavinck (March 28, 1894)	185
To Herman Bavinck (December 22, 1894)	187
To Herman Bavinck (July 6, 1895)	189
To Abraham Kuyper (April 30, 1896)	191
To Abraham Kuyper (June 10, 1896)	193
To Abraham Kuyper (July 11, 1896)	194
To Abraham Kuyper (October 7, 1896)	195
To Abraham Kuyper (November 11, 1896)	197
To Abraham Kuyper (March 6, 1897)	198
To Abraham Kuyper (June 15, 1897)	199
To Abraham Kuyper (October 11, 1897)	200
To William Elliot Griffis (December 15, 1898)	201
To Herman Bavinck (April 29, 1899)	202
To William Elliot Griffis (January 13, 1902)	204
To Herman Bavinck (May 17, 1905)	205
To Herman Bavinck (February 21, 1906)	206
To Herman Bavinck (January 7, 1909)	208
To J. Gresham Machen (January 26, 1909)	210
To Henry Beets (March 16, 1912)	211
To Henry Beets (October 4, 1915)	212
To Cornelis van Felderen (September 5, 1921)	213
To Directors (August 11, 1926)	214
To Sylvester Beach (July 13, 1928)	215
To Frank Stevenson (December 19, 1928)	217

Contents

To J. Gresham Machen (? 1930)	218
To J. Gresham Machen (March 31, 1930)	218
To J. Gresham Machen (May 1, 1930)	220
To F. W. Grosheide (February 19, 1932)	221
To J. Gresham Machen (April 28, 1932)	223
To Paul Woolley (September 9, 1932)	224
To Albertus Eekhof (October 28, 1932)	225
To Donald MacKenzie (February 26, 1935)	229
To Donald MacKenzie (March 20, 1935)	231
To Paul Woolley (January 27, 1936)	232
To Paul Woolley (January 29, 1936)	233
To Paul Woolley (February 22, 1936)	234
To J. Gresham Machen (May 7, 1936)	236
To Arthur Machen (January 5, 1937)	238
To Ned Stonehouse (December 15, 1938)	239
To Ned Stonehouse (May 18, 1940)	240
To Henry Beets (October 16, 1940)	241
To Henry Beets (January ?, 1941)	242
To Henry Beets (January 9, 1941)	244
To Henry Beets (February 12, 1941)	244
To Ned Stonehouse (July 21, 1944)	245
To Ned Stonehouse (January 11, 1945)	246
To Edwards Elliott (January 25, 1946)	247

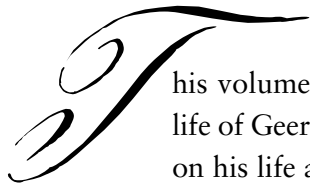
Poetry of Geerhardus Vos

<i>The Sword</i>	251
<i>A Song of the Nativity</i>	252
<i>Kerstfeest-Gebed</i>	255
<i>The Magnificat</i>	256

Index of Scripture 259

Index of Subjects and Names 261

PREFACE



This volume contains the most thorough account of the life of Geerhardus Vos published to date. Previous work on his life and career must now be checked against this essay. Even my former work has been enlarged, revised, and corrected by this version. Undoubtedly, many rabbit trails remain, which will yet yield tidbits of information about the mysterious premier Reformed biblical theologian of the twentieth century. Thus, even this edition of the story of Geerhardus Vos is open to further enlargement, revision, and correction.

This volume is the result of the combined efforts of many years and many helping hands. First, the archives of Calvin College (Heritage Hall), the Free University of Amsterdam, Princeton Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, and the Presbyterian Historical Society have provided the raw data for this volume. Second, since my native tongue is not Dutch (nor have I learned it), many Dutch readers and translators have given of their time to make this volume readable to the English-speaking audience. The Rev. Fritz Harms and his wife Brenda, Nicholaas Van Dam, David Harrell, Mrs. Don (Shirley) Harrell, Sandra Fokkema, Derk Bergsma, and especially Ed M. van der Maas have moved words from one world to another. Mrs. Newman (Lena) Lee and her daughter, Mrs. David (Ling) Harrell, did

most of the typing; they were assisted by Mr. Jack Dundas. My brothers, the late Rev. Charles G. Dennison and Dr. William D. Dennison, have provided materials and encouragement. The Rev. William Harris and Mr. Richard Harms have generously provided archival materials and expert counsel. The Rev. Brian Vos has excavated several primary documents by tediously turning page after page. Mrs. Barbara Lerch of P&R Publishing has always been an encouragement. Special mention should be made of Shirley De Boer, Alice Hamstra, John Shaffer, Stephen Lambers, and Raymond Cannata. Other librarians, archivists, and research assistants too numerous to mention have been involved. My thanks to you all!

The late Mrs. William (Marianne) Radius, only daughter of Geerhardus Vos, was the wonderful promoter of her father's work and labored heroically to recover the remains of his papers in 1975 and 1976. Without her involvement, this volume (and my interest in her father) would never have come to print. My conversations with her and our correspondence were a source of insight, direction, and discovery.

Dr. George Harinck of the Free University of Amsterdam has given unselfishly of his broad expertise in Dutch-American relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of the explanatory footnotes to the Dutch letters have been formulated from information provided by him. *Vriendelijk bedankt voor U help met de vertaling van de brieven.*

But there is one person who deserves the supreme honor in this section. This "elect lady" is Miss Grace Mullen of the Westminster Theological Seminary library in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Gracie has plundered the files, driven many miles, written many letters, and provided many phone conversation reports on rabbit trails and serendipitous discoveries. It has been a joy to work with an unassuming daughter of the Lord Jesus Christ. Gracie, *gratias tibi ago, in novissimo agno!*

TO W. H. ROBERTS

To W. H. Roberts

August 17, 1883
Grand Rapids, Michigan
48 Spring Street
Rev. W. H. Roberts, D.D.¹

Dear Sir,

You ask whether I intend to pursue a full course and advise me to do so. There are several reasons however, which make it very difficult for me to follow your advice, at least without further information.

1. As you will have seen from my testimonials, I studied theology two years.² Three additional ones would make five, a time rather too long. Besides, the matter might be too expensive for my parents. If possible my studies must be finished in two years.³

2. I studied in nearly all the branches appointed for the first year of a regular course. Also in Hebrew I passed an examination of which the diploma was not sent you, because it could not be of any influence on my admission. I will bring it with me however on my arrival.

This taken into consideration, it would suit me best to enter the middle class. As the Catalogue does not give evidence on this point, I must trouble you once more and ask:

1. Will I be admitted to the middle class?
2. Is it possible by studying successively or simultaneously all the branches to take a full course in two years?
3. To what kind of diploma or certificate will I be entitled when entering the middle class and leaving the Senior after a study of two years?

Expecting your information on these points and hoping to be present at your opening September 20th, I remain,

Most respectfully yours,
G. Vos

P.S. We received a Catalogue of Laurenceville School⁴ and thank you very much for procuring it. My brother⁵ will probably remain here to be prepared for entering college next year.

1. William Henry Roberts (1844–1920) was librarian and registrar at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1877 to 1886. He did not actually receive the D.D. degree until 1884 from Western University of Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh (now the University of Pittsburgh).

2. At the Theologische School (now Calvin Theological Seminary), Grand Rapids, Michigan; Vos was a student there from 1881 to 1883.

3. Vos completed his work at Princeton in 1885.

4. Now spelled Lawrenceville (New Jersey), the town is located about five miles northeast of Trenton. The Laurenceville School for Boys was established in 1810.

5. Bert John Vos (1867–1945).



TO ABRAHAM KUYPER *Abraham Kuyper*

May 28, 1886
Friedrich Str. 205 III
Berlin bei Frau Oberstabsarzt Bluhm

Valued and Very Learned Sir:

Please forgive me for not having answered you sooner. Your letter posed unexpected questions which I myself had never considered seriously, and upon which I also now, after further consideration, am only able to answer in part.

It is not because of lack of sympathy with your endeavors and with the institution which owes you her existence,¹ that makes me hesitate to meet you halfway. Directly and indirectly your book has exerted a formative influence on me.² Because of that, I willingly and thankfully

grasp the opportunity to personally make your acquaintance, which you so kindly offer to me.

What makes it so difficult to agree with your proposal is mainly the following. Last autumn I came to Europe with no other plan than to sojourn there for some time for the continuation of my study. The possibility of a lasting stay on this side of the ocean was far out of my thoughts. Naturally I considered the country where my parents live as the assigned circle where God wanted me to labor to the measure of my capacities and opportunities.

Then you placed another prospect next to this one, that, if it were realized, would replant me into the old native soil and on the other hand pull me away from my newly won circle of friends and separate me from that which is dear to me.

I trust you will approve that I am not making a decision about the major issue of your correspondence for the reasons listed above. If you would demand this, more mature consideration with others and myself should precede.

Under this restriction I will be pleased to facilitate the closer acquaintance as much as I am able. I do not know however if the Pentecost recess offers the best opportunity to that end. It is almost too short to make such a long trip without urgent necessity; I was recently in the Netherlands. Allow me to make a counterproposal, and I shall be pleased to await your opinion about its acceptability. The summer semester semi-officially closes mid-August. At the end of that month, I hope to return to the Netherlands. Would we not be able without difficulty to find time and occasion at that point which would allow us to make the desired acquaintance?

If such a plan would present difficulties from your side, nothing else would remain for me to try to fulfil your kind invitation. The only time during this semester which I cannot attend classes for a few days without a proper excuse is during the Pentecost recess. Still, not yet thinking of the financial burdens, I do dread the trip a little, and would prefer to postpone it until the latter part of the summer.

Be so kind as to inform me with a few words what you think of my counterproposal.

Thanking you for your brotherly confidence, I remain after greeting and good wishes,

Yours in Christ,
Geerhardus Vos

* This letter has been translated from the original Dutch.

1. Vos refers to the Free University of Amsterdam, founded by Kuyper in 1880. The doors opened on October 20, 1880.

2. Vos probably refers to Kuyper's *Tractaat van de reformatie der kerken, aan de zonen der reformatie hier te lande op Luthers vierde eeuwfeest* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1884). For a complete list of Kuyper's writings, see J. C. Rullmann, *Kuyper-Bibliografie* ('s-Gravenhage: J. Bootsma, 1923–40).



TO ABRAHAM KUYPER

June 7, 1886
Berlin

Valued and Very Learned Sir:

Please do not have a low opinion of me; I have to cancel a visit at Pentecost. Allow me to inform you briefly of the reason for that.

I cannot reconcile myself with the thought of taking even this temporary step without my parents' knowledge. It is true that the circumstances make preceding deliberations with them impossible. Still I would rather avoid the appearance that in such an important case I dared to act with an independence that showed a lack of piety.

A second objection is of a more personal nature. It seems to me that during my visit I may actually say more than I can account for at this

moment, and would assume a position at the same time for others and myself, which gives me a nauseating feeling. I could have perhaps gotten myself over this last objection, if this was the only opportunity to meet you. But this is not the case, is it? Finally, my health also presents difficulties. I cannot make long journeys without harmful consequences to my system. I hope you will find these reasons sufficient to excuse me this time.

If all goes well and I come back to the Netherlands for the autumn vacation (mid-August to mid-October) I will willingly answer your request for a meeting, when and where that is possible, if you still desire to do so. I hope by then my first and third objections will be completely removed. Also the second one should be lessened as well.

Not considering all the other issues, I fervently wish nothing more than an opportunity to hear your thoughts concerning American church affairs. In the meantime, I remain after your greeting and good wishes

Yours in Christ,
Geerhardus Vos

* This letter has been translated from the original Dutch.

TO J. W. FELIX



September 4, 1886
Leiden

Dear Sir,

I shall accept with pleasure the kind invitation of Rev. Felix and call at his house at the time you mentioned.¹ Although I am not very familiar with Utrecht, I nevertheless hope to be able to find the way there