In Memoriam: William Hendriksen

It was on November 18, 1900 that Willem Hendriksen made his entrance into this world in the city of Tiel, province of Gelderland, the Netherlands. He was the youngest child in a family of eight sons and one daughter.

His father, Bernardus Antonie Hendriksen, a carpenter and specialist in wood carving, was a perfectionist in his work. He was very generous in helping the poor, as well as a man who loved children and who spent much time fixing toys for them. In his later years Bernardus Hendriksen wrote a book of beautiful Dutch poetry.

Willem’s mother (Jannetje van Ravestijn) was a woman with a sound and practical faith. She committed to memory a great amount of poetry and would recite it by the hour as she went about her housework.

It was at the age of 5 or 6 years that little Willem, when asked what he was going to become when he grew up, replied that he would be a minister. He was already much impressed by the story of God's love for sinners as he learned it from his parents, his Sunday School teachers, and a pastor whom he loved.

Education

Willem began his education in the Netherlands where he completed the fourth grade before immigrating to America. The family settled in Kalamazoo, Mich., where William (to which his name was changed) was placed in the third grade because he had no knowledge of the English language. After completing the fourth grade he was advanced to the sixth. He took the seventh and eighth grades in one year and hoped that he would be allowed by his parents to spend at least one year in high school, but they insisted that he take a job instead of continuing his education.

During the summer of 1916, while he was still 15, his mother died. Several weeks later he and his father went to the Netherlands for a lengthy visit. Efforts to return to the United States were complicated by World War I and the sudden illness of his father. After his father's recovery and a dangerous trip, they arrived in Kalamazoo in May 1917.

William soon found work in a stationery factory. He also enrolled in a correspondence course covering the first two years of high school, and completed the course in nine months. He received a one-semester appointment to teach in the Fourth Street Christian School, Roseland, Chicago. He then secured a teaching position in a one-room school near Hospers, Iowa, where at the age of 18 he carried the responsibilities of teaching children of all ages. It was while living in the vicinity of Hospers that Dad made his profession of faith under Rev. M. Vander Heide.

Dad's desire to become a pastor did not diminish over the years. He wrote his friend Anthony A. Koning for information concerning requirements for entrance into Calvin College's pre-seminary course. He diligently studied the necessary books, took exams to receive credit, and was admitted into Calvin. He took the four years of college in three, graduating in 1924.

After his first year in the seminary, William married Rena Baker. She was born in Friesland, the Netherlands, and was the daughter of Daam Bakker and Pietje Kikstra Bakker. It was she who became the mother of William's three children, Bernard, Daniel, and Geraldine. She was a wonderful wife and mother. Rena encouraged her husband to publish his manuscript of More Than Conquerors by borrowing the necessary funds after a publisher to whom it had been submitted.
turned it down. This book, an exposition on the Book of Revelation, was to become his best selling publication. After *More Than Conquerors* appeared in print it received very favorable reviews. In 1940 Baker Book House took over as its publisher.

**Pastor**

After graduating from the seminary in 1927 Dad received three calls. He felt the Lord wanted him to accept the call from the Third Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, Mich. It was in that church that he was ordained into the gospel ministry. He served that congregation faithfully for over three years and in 1931 accepted a call from the Allen Ave., Muskegon, congregation. He greatly enjoyed his work in Allen Ave. When in 1935 the call came from the Oakdale Park CRC in Grand Rapids he did not feel he should accept. But the Lord made it clear that he should heed the imploring letters he was receiving from that congregation's members. It was with heavy hearts that the Hendriksen family left the warmth of Christian friendship at Allen Ave. (During the years he was in Muskegon Dad received the Th.M. degree from Calvin Seminary.)

The work load at Oakdale was tremendous. For seven years Rev. Hendriksen faithfully toiled among its people. Many lasting friendships were made.

**Professor**

In 1942 he received an appointment to become professor of New Testament Theology at Calvin Seminary.

Along with the appointment a year's leave was given to study toward Securing a Th.D. degree at Princeton Seminary. He began teaching at the seminary in the fall of 1943. During the next five years, besides the heavy load of teaching required courses and developing elective courses, Dad wrote his doctoral dissertation on "The Meaning of the Preposition anti in the New Testament." At the request of the seminary faculty he also wrote *Bible Survey* (which is now entitled *Survey of the Bible*). Professor Hendriksen was awarded the Th.D. degree in 1948.

While teaching at the seminary Dr. Hendriksen also served the church in general by preparing and delivering series of lectures on eschatological themes as well as accepting invitations to preach. He developed graduate courses to help pastors in their preaching. It was also during his years of teaching that his first volume of the *New Testament Commentary on the Gospel of John* was published.

A deep wound, which left a lasting scar, was created when the Synod of 1952 decided not to renew his teaching appointment. But the Lord did have vital work for his faithful servant. Dad became the pastor of the First Byron Center, Mich. church, where his ministry was eagerly received and greatly appreciated by young and old. It was toward the end of this pastorate that his wife Rena passed away after severe illness.

**Writer**

In 1961 Dad accepted a call from the Creston CRC in Grand Rapids in the hope that shepherding a smaller congregation would leave more time for commentary writing. Not long after he made this move he was united in marriage to Reta De Boer, who had been a member and friend from the Oakdale Park congregation. She was a loving and devoted wife to him and has been loved and appreciated greatly by us children and grandchildren. She was also of great assistance in the typing of Dad's manuscripts. Due to his love for writing Dad retired from the ministry as soon as he reached age 65. Florida was chosen as the place in which to spend the retirement years. By this time his commentaries on *The Gospel of John*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, *Philemon*, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, *1 & 2 Timothy*, and *Titus* has been published.

The retirement years were very productive. Dad would rise each morning at 5:00 a.m. to begin his work, maintaining that these were his best hours for clear thinking. He completed work on his commentaries on *Ephesians*, *Galatians*, *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* and revised his *Bible Study*. He
also completed a two-volume commentary on Romans and had begun work in 1 Corinthians. During those years he accepted periodic lecturing engagements and preaching requests. A high point in his later years was a visit to England where he spoke several times in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London in which Charles Spurgeon spoke many years ago.

Serious illness, from which Dr. Hendriksen remained free most of his life, came in 1980 when our dear father submitted to surgery for the removal of a malignant tumor. Even though this surgery curtailed his strength so that he was no longer able to preach, he continued with his writing. (He also played the piano frequently. Most of the music was memorized.) But in August of 1981 another malignancy was discovered which made it necessary for the surgeons to perform more drastic surgery. As a result of this, Dad's strength was greatly reduced. It was decided between Dad and Mother to move back to Michigan so that they could be near the children for the remainder of his life here on earth.

On Friday, January 8, after they had been in their home in Grandville only ten days, a visit was paid them by Rev. Jerry Pott who presented Dr. Hendriksen with two copies of his *New Testament Commentary on the Gospel of John* translated into the Spanish language (recently completed). How it thrilled him that God was using his writing for the benefit also of people in foreign countries. (He never accepted any royalties from the printing of his books in other languages. Certain of his books have been translated into Spanish, Dutch, Korean, Afrikaans, Japanese, and Tamil.) Less than two hours after this presentation, while his beloved wife was getting him ready for a doctor's appointment, his strength gave out and he collapsed. He was taken to the hospital by ambulance where it was found he was suffering from pneumonia. After four days of labored breathing, the Lord took him home.

On the day of his death, Tuesday, January 12, his wife Reta read to him a letter from an old friend and classmate, Rev. J. H. De Haan. Among other things, he wrote:

"...We feel the breaking down of this earthly tabernacle. We are traveling to our eternal home, and we must keep the bright reward in view ... What a blessed assurance is ours."

Having heard the letter read and commented upon by his loving wife, Dad nodded and closed his eyes as though drifting into a peaceful sleep, following a restless night. At noon he breathed his last as his loved ones were gathered at his bedside. Thus it was that the soul of one who so eloquently spoke and wrote about heaven and God's amazing love, went its way to the eternal mansions above.

However, he left behind more than his disease ravaged body, which was buried a few days later in the blessed hope of the coming resurrection. He left behind a treasure of biblical insight and admonition which will be a blessing to thousands here below who are still walking this pilgrim journey. We give thanks to God who gave to us as a family a wonderful Christian husband, father, and grandfather, to the church a gifted pastor and teacher, and to the Christian community at large an author with the unique combination of keen insight and down-to-earth communication. We truly believe he was, by God's grace, more than a conqueror whose work will continue to point men and women everywhere to God's love for sinners, by means of which they too may gain the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Louis and Geraldine Kerkstra

© 2015
www.christiansstudylibrary.org