



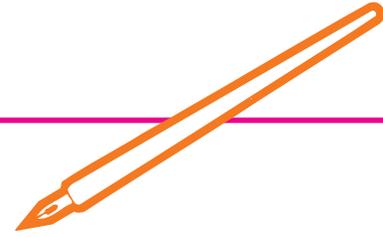
# Clarion

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*Helping Neighbours  
- Ice Storm '98*

By J. De Jong



## Confession and Church Unity

It is gratifying to note that in the pursuit of unity with other Reformed churches the Scriptural teaching concerning the church as we confess it has been brought into the discussion. In more than one local bulletin we may read of discussions which particularly focus on Articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession. It is our hope that through these discussions there is a greater understanding concerning our position on these issues.

However, personal discussion that I have had with representatives of other churches, especially in the United Reformed Churches, indicates that some have the impression that we as Canadian Reformed people are not united on our view of the church. In fact, brothers of one house are seen as quite regularly taking each other to task in the various venues open to them. This certainly does not help in presenting a clear picture of the standpoint of the Canadian Reformed Churches. It is not helpful for us to make these divisions among ourselves. (As if we could isolate ourselves from a certain group or sentiment in the churches who, while being members with us in one communion, purportedly do not have a good view of the church.) We would do better, in all our speaking, to foster as much as possible a unity in approach, despite more minor differences of opinion.

### A confessional stance

At the outset it is incumbent upon us to maintain the clear wording of the confession. The discussion at times indicates that there are a surprising number of novel ways to water down the clear language of the confession. Article 29 BC, in speaking of the true and false church, confesses that these churches are “easily recognized and distinguished from each other.” How are we to understand this phrase? Some have suggested that this is rather harsh and blunt language and that, fortunately, it has been softened by the language of the Westminster Confession, which in Article 25.4 speaks of “more and less pure churches.” In this view the language of the Westminster Confession is regarded as a necessary elaboration and explanation filling out the empty spots of the Belgic Confession.

However, this is an attempt to avoid the clear language of the confession. One should note that the categories of “true” and “false,” as used by Guido De Brès in Article 29 BC, are of an entirely different order from the categories “more and less pure” as used by the Westminster Confession.<sup>1</sup> The Westminster Confession speaks of degrees of purity within the pure or true church, whereas Article 29 BC clearly distinguishes the marks of the true church from the false. The Westminster Confession also speaks of *local* churches within the bond of one national church, not of various federations. It must be understood with the historical background in mind. Some churches were more independent, others more oriented to the Presbyterian structure; yet, in opposition to the perfectionist leanings of the Puritans and Congregationalists,

Westminster said: churches in the true church are still imperfect, i.e., “more or less pure.” But all these churches belonged to the Established church of the day. Westminster’s stand is one which we can all admit (also in opposition to modern day perfectionism!) since a perfect purity in the doctrinal and moral sense is never attainable on this earth. But the language of the Belgic Confession concerning the duty to discern the marks of the true church deals with a different matter. The central question occupying the Belgic Confession concerns the legitimacy and overall direction of the church. Is there a clear indication that all things are to be done in accordance with the teachings of the Word of God? Is the focus strictly on the honour of the Name of God in all things?

Another alternative put forward in order to soften the language of Art. 27-29 is to suggest that the wording crosses both “denominational” and doctrinal lines. In this view, the true church is easily distinguished from the false, but that true church may at any given time include other churches, say, for example, the Lutheran or the Baptist church, or for that matter any other Protestant “denomination.” Here the stand of these churches on church government, or on doctrinal matters like the sacraments, are considered issues of lesser importance. For example, a church which held to the true gospel, but denied only infant baptism, would not be excluded as a true church. Similarly, the Lutheran view on the Lord’s Supper would not be excluded as a possible viewpoint in the realm of the true church.

This is an equally questionable alternative as the former, since it effectually short-circuits cardinal elements of our confession that need attention and discussion. One of the marks of the church is the true administration of the sacraments. Who are we to state that doctrinal views and sentiments differing from what is confessed in the *Three Forms of Unity* may nonetheless be tolerated? What gives us the right to declare certain doctrines of less significance or importance than others? To be sure, there is a margin of difference in doctrinal matters. Calvin, for example, suggested that the exact way of the soul’s journey at death, whether it went to heaven or some other place, belonged to the realm of indifferent or non-fundamental matters.<sup>2</sup> But these matters are by their very nature non-confessional. Confessional matters cannot be declared to be indifferent or matters of secondary importance.

We conclude that the language of the Belgic Confession, and specifically Article 29, must be maintained. Also in our discussions with other churches, we should not promote views by which the force of the words is in some way relaxed. A lasting unity can only be attained by working within the limits as confessed together in the *Three Forms of Unity*. In fact, these *Forms* as confessions were brought together for the very purpose of forging and upholding a lasting spiritual unity among Reformed Churches, a unity specifically in doctrine and teaching.<sup>3</sup>

## Another danger

However if the strength of the words in Article 29 is maintained, can they be applied rigidly in a strict “denominational” way? By this I mean to ask whether we can retain the viewpoint that only one (visible) church can be the true church, whereas on this basis, all others in any given setting are to be declared as false. For example, one might suggest that if a church does not actively pursue unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches, it is by that very fact a false church. Or in the case of the United Reformed Churches, one may suggest that in the measure they have not directly sought unity with us (according to Art. 28 BC), they are false churches.

This is a narrow and restrictive interpretation of the confession that is far removed from the language and spirit of its author, Guido De Brès. Guido De Brès certainly did not mean to intimate by his words that the Reformed churches in the Netherlands constituted the only true church. He was prepared to recognize the Lutherans *at that time* as long as the situation was in flux, and as long as they had not made the corporeal view of the Lord’s Supper as binding on all Lutherans. In the period in which the Belgic Confession was written, the so called Philipist view of the Supper, named after Philip Melancthon, was espoused in several regions of Lutheranism. How could this then be termed a false church?

This distinction between true and false church must be maintained, but it must never be approached or applied statically. The real question is always: in what direction is a church going? Jesus said: By their fruits you shall know them

## What’s inside?

The Word of God teaches us that God will turn to our good whatever adversity He sends us in this life. Romans 8:28 says: “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.*” We believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. God who has created all things still upholds and governs them by His eternal counsel and providence. God is also the God of the weather. Although I was very young when he went to be with the Lord, I still remember clearly that my earthly father would not allow us to complain about the weather. To say that the weather was miserable or rotten was strictly forbidden. When we complained, he would remind us that it is the Lord who sends the weather, whether the sun shines or the rain falls. In our confession, we say that God so governs all of His creation that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come to us not by chance but by His fatherly hand. This confession was, recently, put to the test in the Ottawa area and points east. The Lord of the weather made freezing rain fall for days. The devastation is unimaginable and defies description. The Rev. J.L. van Popta, minister of the church in Ottawa, writes about what it was like there during the storm and adapting to its consequences. One of the families of the Ottawa congregation, the Calvin and Carolyn Pol family, spent nineteen days with no electricity or telephone. They also tell us what it was like.

God has shown us His majesty. We can only stand back and glorify Him.

GvP

(Mt. 7:14). We need to take the time to see what the fruits are, and which way a church is headed. In that sense it is always easy to distinguish right from wrong and true from false.

One might then raise the question: how dynamic must the lines of acceptance be? How flexible can we be in our approach to, say, the United Reformed Churches? What kind of limits must we draw? On such a point there may be discussion and debate, just as there has been debate on these points in the past. In the events leading to the union of 1892 there was much debate on the issue.<sup>4</sup> But finally the brothers agreed to recognize the churches of the *Doleantie* as true churches even though they did not directly join the seceded churches, but took the route of forming a provisional federation. The churches of this federation were acknowledged as “churches of Christ” as the Union began to take shape as an attainable reality. Why? The **direction** of these churches was positive; that was the decisive factor.

We can by analogy draw similar conclusions today. Just because the United Reformed Churches have not immediately joined with the Canadian Reformed Churches, we need not intimate that these are false churches. Their rejection of hierarchy and doctrinal deviation has made it clear that they are not false churches. However, much depends on the direction of these churches in the future – also on their ongoing ability to recognize us as faithful and true churches. We have an obligation here as well! We must continue to seek them out and to testify of our love to them, and our deep willingness to strengthen our ties, and work towards full unity. To be sure, this can only be done in the measure that they and we maintain the clear language of the confession, also concerning Articles 27-29. At the same time, we and they cannot and may not think in narrow categories: our federation is the representation of the true church and therefore by definition, all others are false.

## The unity we seek!

I write these words in the hope that also in the Canadian Reformed Churches some measure of unity will be maintained in the message we are projecting to the Reformed churches around us. We may not stifle the right of each one to voice his opinion, but it would be appropriate to bear in mind that all our opinions should be bound by the restrained and yet clear language of the Belgic Confession. Only by adequately understanding and promoting its sentiments can we be agents of unity, both within and outside the Canadian Reformed Churches.

<sup>1</sup>On this point see C. Trimp, “Meer of mindere zuivere ware kerk?” *De Reformatie* Vol 70, no. 6 (Nov. 5 1994), 108-110. See also idem, “Tussen ‘waar’ en ‘vals’” *De Reformatie*, Vol 70, no. 23 (March 4, 1995), 421-423. For a further discussion see J. W. Van der Jagt, “De katholieke kerk is te vinden!” in W.G De Vries, (ed.) *De Kerk. Kort commentaar op de artikelen 27-29 van de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis* (Woord en Wereld, Bedum, 1995) 67-69

<sup>2</sup>See *Institutes* IV.1.12, where Calvin implicitly operates with the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles.

<sup>3</sup>See J. Kamphuis “Eénheid en ‘Eenigheid’” *Nader Bekeken* Vol 2 no. 11 (November 1995), 275-277

<sup>4</sup>In the discussions leading to the Union of 1892, Prof. Lindeboom defended a more stringent view, insisting that the newly formed *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerken* were called to come over to the Seceded churches, rather than form their own federation. He held that the churches were obligated to join the Seceded churches since they were the manifestation of the line of the true church, and in the measure they refused to do so, they were false churches. But other voices in the Secession churches, notably Bavinck, were not prepared to make this judgment as quickly as Lindeboom was. 

By C. Bosch

## Faithful Mourning

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matthew 5:4*

The Preacher said, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven" (Eccl. 3: 1). He did not say this so we might be fatalists, accepting every situation in life with a shrug or a sigh. He said it so that in trouble and in joy God's people might seek His face and look for guidance and salvation!

In the days of our text the Lord Jesus Christ had come to grant many people that salvation. He had set up His "pulpit" on a mountain in Galilee teaching the disciples and crowds by His life-giving Word. First He showed them the necessity of laying all self-righteousness aside. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," He said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Then He went on to speak about blessed mourners who would be comforted. Here was another startling paradox. Mourners, people who weep and wail because of some great grief or pain, were pronounced blessed. How is that possible? Doesn't this fly in the face of our experience, our emotions? How can we speak of blessings when there is pain and sadness? The answer must be found in understanding who these mourners are and what it means that they are comforted.

Christ was not speaking of all and every mourner. He knew there was much grief that was in vain. Not all crying is bliss. There are rows of mourners the world over who are not consoled, nor blessed, nor comforted. Cain once lamented that his punishment was greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13). Yet his punishment bothered him more than his sin. Esau sought his father's blessing with tears (Heb. 12: 17), but not with genuine tears of sorrow for having despised God's covenant.

Christ was speaking of faithful mourners, mourners who do not tear their clothes or veil their faces at random but mourners who grieve according to God's Word. These know that man's sin is the root cause of crying and pain and death. So they mourn. Every time they hear the Law of God they know their sins are discovered. Will they be

blessed? Then they must "grieve with heartfelt sorrow that they have offended God with their sin" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33). With David, they sincerely confess those sins. "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. . ." (Ps. 51: 4).

They do not hide behind a cloak of self-righteous finger pointing. They do not dismiss their sins with, "No one is perfect, you know." Faced with the holiness of God and the evidence of their guilt, they say with the prophet, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5).

Mourning, they look beyond themselves. They see history, past and present, in the light of God's Word. They do not blame the ravages of war on the disparity between rich and poor; they do not blame illness and famine on a hole in the ozone layer. They do not close their eyes and mouths to the murder of countless thousands of infants the world over. They cry, they mourn for a world gone mad with hardness of heart, hedonism and insistence on human rights. They mourn with godly grief for churches, sliding a slippery slope of deformation. They grieve, as Paul did, knowing that "many live as enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18). They mourn, as Christ Himself wept when He saw Jerusalem and knew it would be utterly destroyed (Luke 19).

There is more to their mourning than grieving. When the prodigal son repented, he went back to his father (Luke 15:18). When God's people realized their idolatry and had wept, they offered sacrifices to God (Jud. 2). Heartfelt mourning is part of true repentance. It is a process that involves hating sin more and more and fleeing from it (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 33). It is the realization that the Holy Spirit is at work in us, so that we might fight the good fight of faith, and so that we might not become listless grumblers but a people constant in prayer. All the while we are to examine ourselves: "Is our love for God genuine? Am I truly sorry for my sins?" Such mourners as these

are "blessed" for "they will be comforted." The psalmist said, "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:5).

How true that was for Christ's hearers on that mountain in Galilee. How real also for Christ's disciples who would face much grief and misery and pain. Yet they all stood in the presence of Christ who would give His life on the cross. He gave up His life so that those who mourned under a load of guilt might have life; so that crooked and twisted lives, lost souls, perpetrators and victims of sinful disasters might have hope; so that they might have hope in Jesus Christ their Only Comforter in life and death. The prophet Isaiah had foretold it. "The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins" (Isa. 51:3). The "year of the Lord's favor" would come. So Isaiah could proclaim comfort "to all who mourn" (Isa. 61:2).

This comfort would not just be a momentary respite from the ravages of sin and death. There would be *lasting* comfort. God would dry the tears from the eyes of His true children. Instead of being crushed by the heel of godless oppressors they would inherit thrones and crowns.

Yes, there will come a terrible judgment. At the end of days the, "merchants of the earth will weep and mourn," over "Babylon the Great" because no one will buy their cargo anymore. This cargo includes not only gold and pearls, fine linen, iron and marble, but even the "bodies and souls of men" (Rev. 18:10-13). Christ's church will also face a time of great oppression, as is being experienced today in various parts of the world.

Yet Christ's blessed comfort will prevail. Faithful mourners will see Christ's face and His name will be on their foreheads (Rev. 22: 4). There, in Mt. Zion, Christ will dwell with His people. "There will be no more death or mourning, crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Rejoice! For He will turn mourning into dancing! 

# Zion, the City of the Living God (Conclusion)

By C. Van Dam

In the last issue, we began publishing the speech Dr. Van Dam delivered at a Reformation Rally in Langley, BC, on October 31, 1997. Our professor of Old Testament began to unfold the Biblical image of Zion. He spoke about the geographical location and features of Zion (Jerusalem). Zion, he pointed out, is used in Scriptures as a picture of the church. One finds this image in the OT already, and it becomes the more clear in the NT. In what follows, Dr. Van Dam shows how the Biblical data about Zion is worked out in the NT, reaching all the way into the future when the new Jerusalem will come down out of heaven prepared as a bride dressed for her husband (Rev. 21).

## Christ is our living water

The first thing to note about the future Zion, that ties in with the OT data, is that also today and in the future, Zion has and will have a stream of living water. To start with the present. The church of God may sometimes seem to be disadvantaged and not have an adequate supply of water, life-giving energy in the desert conditions of this world. But God assures us in His Word that we have more than we need. For, our stream of living water is none other than Christ himself and His Spirit. Did He not say in Jerusalem with a loud voice:

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. (John 7:37-39)

We cannot go into all the interesting detail here, but with these words Christ drew a clear line from the waters of the Gihon spring and the prophecy of the waters emanating from the temple to himself. He is the fulfilment of the temple and He is the source of the living water. By His Spirit, the people of God have everything they need to go on and to be Zion of the living God! It may sometimes seem as if the church does

not have enough energy and stamina to defend herself against the enemy or to continue on as holy city of God. But we may remember, God himself is our source of strength and energy! In faith we know this to be true. He gives us of grace all we need. He gives of himself, His Spirit. Indeed, as the words of Christ make clear, we can even be God's instruments to impart the living waters to others. These waters are a gift of Christ (John 4:4) but can be channelled through the believers to others.

So, the church is the Spirit-filled people of God who draw on "the spring of living water," the Lord God himself (Jer. 2:13; 17:13). He calls us of grace to participate in His gifts. No one need to go parched for water! To quote the words of the LORD as recorded in Isaiah 55:1, 3a

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;  
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost . . .  
Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live.

This means that as people of God who heed this call, we too can rejoice with the Psalmist:

(we) feast on the abundance of your house;  
you give . . . (us) drink from your river of delights.  
For with you is the fountain of life!  
(Ps. 36:8, 9)

The implication of all of this is staggering for the church. The life of the Spirit is nothing less than being placed in communion with the living God himself. With this our God we may have



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personal fellowship and receive the life that savours the glory of His presence (cf. Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 5:22-25).

Sometimes we may think that we have only a small Gihon spring of water, but in faith we see that there is a river which makes glad the city of God! – a river of blessings of life with God in Christ! And, . . . what we enjoy in our life with God now is only a foretaste of what is to come (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-16)! When the apostle John was on Patmos he was shown the Zion of the future. Then he saw

the river of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the middle of the great street of the city. (Rev. 22:1-2)

John also tells us that there will no longer be any curse and that the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and His servants will see His face (Rev. 22:3-4). Life with God in fullness!

We are given this picture of the future in part to encourage us now in our present situation so we can celebrate the life with God at all times, yes so we can be thankful also when it seems that our springs and wells seem to be too meager or drying up. Yet we know in faith and may God's Zion today experience it: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God!" (Ps. 46:4), a river which will be fulfilled in the paradisaal river of life.

### The Mother of us all

This brings us to a second area. Since the Lord provides the stream of life and because with our God is the fountain of our life (Ps. 36:9), there is a certain basic unity of life in the church of God. The life of Zion has a single source. One way in which Scripture expresses that unity of life is to picture Zion as the Mother City. We find this characterization in Galatians 4. The apostle Paul makes a contrast between the bondage of those who live under Judaism and who are children of the present city of Jerusalem and the freedom of those who live from the grace of God and who are citizens of the Jerusalem above that is free. Then he says, this Jerusalem above "She is our mother!" (Gal. 4:26). As members of the people of God we are children of the heavenly Zion for we are citizens of this city (cf. also Phil. 3:20). We belong to the Zion above! She is our Mother!

Mind you, not just we, but all God's children! They all have the heavenly Zion as their mother! This is a profound truth that already found expression in the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 49:14-18; 66:5-13). Let us pause now for a mo-

ment especially at Psalm 87 and note a couple of points.

In the first place, the fact that we all have the same mother, the Zion above, stresses the grace of God in our lives. After all, a child cannot choose his mother. It is purely due to the grace of God that we belong to the same Zion of the living God! Psalm 87 stresses that God records, he writes down, the names of all kinds of peoples, even former enemies of Israel, as citizens of Zion as born in her because they now acknowledge Him as Lord. These are those whom God has caused to be born by the Spirit and the Word. They are children of the Most High! One can only be a citizen of Zion when one acknowledges the Lord of Zion. This is only possible by the electing grace of God.

In the second place, just as a member of a family here on earth cannot choose his siblings, his brothers and sisters, so too we as citizens of Zion cannot determine or decide who we would like to have as our brothers and sisters. God does that for us. All those born of God are our brothers and sisters, fellow citizens of the Mother of us all, the Zion of the living God. That means that there is the unity of Zion in our midst tonight. Although the heavenly Zion will only later be revealed in its full glory when it comes down from heaven, yet it is present and is real. We are citizens of it! This speaks of a unity from God which we also recognize by praising God and celebrating together tonight in prayer and thanksgiving.

This unity does not mean uniformity. Indeed, Psalm 87 which celebrates the glory of the city of God also details the diversity of its citizens. They are from all over, even from Israel's historical enemies! Rahab which is Egypt and Babylon! Philistia and Tyre. In all this diversity, there is unity for these are all recorded as born in Zion, children of the Most High! We can say, this speaks of the world-wide church of God, European, Mexican, Chinese, Korean and African. There is here however also a more subtle diversity, found within the nation of Israel that we do well to note. Israel was a nation of rather different tribes. One must remember that this was in the day before mass media, long distance telephone and computer networking could put a common cultural mold on a nation. So the tribes could live in relative isolation from each other and develop idiosyncracies and even their own dialects (cf. Judg. 12:5-6). Yet, in all the diversity there was the unity, unity that became visible as the tribes went up to

Jerusalem. How they encouraged each other to holy worship and rejoiced as they went up. Think of Psalm 122:1-2,4.

I rejoiced with those who said to me,

"Let us go up to the house of the LORD."

Our feet are standing in your gates O Jerusalem . . .

That is where the tribes go up, The tribes of the LORD

to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel.

But how could those tribes go up? By means of the roads that were built to Zion! The geography of the holy city was difficult. The nature of the terrain made it difficult for the tribes to collectively express their unity as a nation. But the necessary roads were built. Yes they were built expressly with a view to the multitude of worshippers going to Zion. And all those different and diverse tribes went up, together! They worshipped together and rejoiced in their unity in the LORD of the covenant.

When reflecting on this, one cannot but think of our present situation. We tonight as we celebrate God's goodness and grace cannot deny the wonderful unity that the Lord has given us. We also cannot deny the diversity of the tribes of the Reformed faith. We come from different parts of the ecclesiastical map, although most of our history is common to us all. But, there is a present diversity. The one church is said to stress this aspect, another that. Yet we all love the LORD and His church and collectively rejoice in His work of reformation! We all have the same baptism and no one denies the truth or validity of whatever element of doctrine or practice the other may want to stress. Yet, there is a fragmentation of Zion in the ecclesiastical scene and in our regular Sunday worship.

One of the mottos of the Reformation was that the church should always be reforming, always testing, fine-tuning their performance to God's demands and seeking fuller obedience. Resting in the status quo does not always do justice to the ongoing work of the Living God who continues to gather His people. God's work is a great enterprise. His church is world-wide! We cannot oversee it. Praised be His name! The tremendously wide terrain that the Zion of God occupies today is difficult from our perspective. The world-wide church is divided in many ways – by language, geography and nationalities – to mention some factors. Yet God gathers them together and prepares them for that great day.

God also gathers us. At the moment road building for Zion is going on in discussions with consistories of different Reformed churches here in BC and elsewhere. As people of God we rejoice in that. It reflects something of the ongoing dynamics of the work of the living God who continues to work for the unity of His people. Let us continue to work on those roads that lead to a united worship in Zion. We as North American Reformed people are only a very small part of God's world wide church. May it be possible by God's grace that this small sector of His church (the faithful Reformed churches in North America) may experience more and more ecclesiastical unity as the years go on. That the roads of understanding and unity may be built through the terrain that is by nature difficult – roads that lead to a united Zion.

After all, God writes in the register of nations: "this one was born in Zion!" (Ps. 87:6). There is only one Zion! Let us remember to our comfort and encouragement the larger picture as we build the roads; that is, the Jerusalem above she is our mother and we are her children!

There is a final third area. It speaks of the future of Zion, a future which God allows us to see a glimpse of for our encouragement. This is the picture of the Zion given in the book of Revelation – the new creation, the city of God to which all the nations will enter.

### The new creation

Within the context of this evening, let us very briefly consider the following. The coming of the Zion from above is solely the work of God. It is all of grace. When the apostle John sees in a vision the new heaven and the new earth, he sees

the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from

God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev. 21:2, cf. 10).

As the description progresses, we are told that

the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it (Rev. 21:24).

This is the city of which we now already are citizens. This is the city that will come down from heaven in all its glory and perfection. Let us not think too small of our God! This is where world history is going! Yes, world history! For at the centre of history, at the centre of God's dealings with the world today, is Zion, the city of the Living God!! To this city, kings and rulers will come to pay homage. To this city, the Lord will gather His people and bring together an innumerable multitude from all the tribes and nations (cf. Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 15:4; 22:2). Here is found the river of life with trees of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Yes here is God in glory with His people! From His throne the waters of life proceed (Rev. 22:1-2). He gathers the nations to himself.

In view of all of this, it hardly needs to be said how important the mission task of the church is. Churches of the Reformation are mission churches because it is only by the proclamation of the gospel of grace that the Lord gathers together that innumerable multitude (cf. Rev. 14:6).

The time hastens. We live in the last age, the age of the Holy Spirit, otherwise called the last days (Acts 2:17). The full glory of the city to which we belong will not be attainable in this fallen creation. But God has shown it to us in His Word! There is a new world coming! Yes, for the Zion coming down from heaven speaks of a new creation to which all the children of promise belong.

Sometimes the citizens of Zion can feel out of place in this world. But this world is the world that will be renewed when the heavenly Zion descends! This is the world that ultimately belongs to those whose citizenship is with the Zion above. We are on the last stretch. As Abraham looked ahead "to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:10) so we may look ahead and know that God has also prepared this city for us (Heb. 11:16). Here we do not have a lasting city, but we are to look with expectation for the city that is to come (Heb. 13:14). It is, so to speak, in view. Indeed, God's Word says in Hebrews 12:22 that we have come "to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God!" – the God who is for real and who is faithful to His promises! Think about it. We have come close to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God! It is in our view. It is the next point for fulfilment on God's holy agenda.

O, the grace of God that we too may be part of His Zion work – a work which endures! Cities rise and fall. Metropolises such as Nineveh and Babylon are only ruins today – a fact inconceivable when these centers were at the height of their power. They had no lasting foundation. There is only one city that is guaranteed to last. That is Zion. Not the Jerusalem, the earthly city in the land of Israel but the city of God where are found the living waters! It is eternal and of that city we may be citizens! May God continue to have mercy on us and bless us. We're in the last stretch! The gates of hell will not prevail against the Zion of the living God! Let us rejoice and celebrate His victory in Christ. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!



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# Speech delivered at the Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America,

October 21-23, 1997, at St. Catharines, ON.

*Editor's note – The following speech should have been included with Rev. den Hollander's report (Volume 47, No. 2, p. 32) of his visit to the URCNA synod. It was inadvertently omitted. With apologies to both our readers and the Rev. Den Hollander, we publish it here.*

## Esteemed brothers

Thank you very much for the invitation we received from your clerk, the Rev. Jerome Julien, to send a representative to bring greetings. In lieu of your discussions of the overtures before you, we consider ourselves privileged for being on the list of churches with which you are advised to pursue the establishment of ecumenical relations. Perhaps we may betray even a sense of curiosity to see whether in the outcome of these anticipated discussions we will come out as ecumenical observers or may be promoted by your meeting already as ecumenical delegates. However, whatever the outcome may be, at this point we suffice with accepting your invitation to be received as representative, and we are more than gratefully pleased receiving the opportunity to convey greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Indeed, we share in the riches of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and wish you a rich measure of His grace, mercy, and peace, expressing the hope that your meetings today and tomorrow may be blessed with fruits that will enhance our ecumenical relationship with Him and with one another.

Brothers, we are very thankful for the progress we have made over the past year concerning our relationship. Even though our contact as deputies for the promotion of ecclesiastical unity has been one of correspondence by letters with your Interchurch Relations Committee, we are convinced that they truly and sincerely represented your interest in us. The fact that they share their sentiments in such a candid and forthright way in their report to you, confirms our impression of a better understanding, a greater appreciation, and a more promising understanding of our position in the past and present. Considering your Committee's request that their work be approved, we would be de-

lighted to see your wholehearted endorsement of their position on certain essential aspects in the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

We will have come a long way if a mutual understanding were forthcoming that the Liberation of 1944 was an act of obedience and a necessary development for the truthful continuation of the Church gathering work of Christ. As well, if you could concur with the observation that this development should have received attention from the CRC at the time of the immigration of members belonging to these liberated churches, leading to a different choice of sisterchurch relationship in the Netherlands. Indeed, brothers, in that respect we may say that at the time the inception of the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches was a provisional act, pending such an awareness, implying as well that we wanted to be united with you and desired to see the unity of the true faith and the mutual brotherly love expressed concretely in church unity (as we conveyed repeatedly in the appeals of 1963 and 1977!). We are encouraged, therefore, when we hear of an assessment of the theory about the pluriformity of the Church as unscriptural. How strong an encouragement, therefore, your endorsement would be for your Committee and ours to further pursue a confessional understanding of the Church.

In our pursuit of ecclesiastical unity we seek a unity in understanding of the Scriptures and of its expression in the confessions first and foremost. Our lesson of the 1892 Union certainly is, that only a confessional unity will last. We, too, are therefore fully committed to what you view to be the Scriptural objective of our dialogue, viz. full integrative ecclesiastical unity of the two federations. We realize that reaching this goal will take much time and should be pursued carefully, yet expeditiously. Seeing that we have set our objectives and the parameters of an agenda for such a dialogue by way of correspondence, we are now ready from our side to sit down together!

Yes, we are more than eager to discuss differences which are perceived but which in some way may be matters

of misunderstanding. Particularly the matter of ecumenical relations and the way this is pursued at the level of synodical committees as well as on a local level, needs further clarification. It is regrettable that a Classis of ours, which had to deal with requests pertaining to possible interaction at the local level, did not give extensive and articulate expression to the way these two levels of interchurch relationships should be aligned and in step with each other. Greater clarity and explanation of our dealings with these matters would have generated more understanding rather than frustration, as was the case now.

Another important reason for face to face meetings with your Interchurch Relations Committee is the fact that you are so actively pursuing your organization of church government by way of an updated/revised Church Order of Dort. Besides, you have proposals on your agenda for the evaluation and examination of a Psalter Hymnal for your federation. In regard to important matters such as Church Polity and Liturgy, we would appreciate some form of involvement at the preparatory level in order to prevent new forms and practices from becoming new obstacles in our future negotiations of church unity, merely due to lack of consultation or consideration. In this respect it may merit repeating our past requests and advice to proceed with federation provisionally, for we gladly recommend to your attention and for your consideration the consultation (in an advisory capacity, of course) of expertise and material in the matters of Church Polity and Liturgics as this is available in the midst of our churches.

Brothers, you will understand our eagerness and serious anticipation as we see you progress in your work of uniting and federating. We wish you much wisdom, understanding, harmony, love and unity at this Synod. Be assured of our continued prayers for you. May the Lord lead and direct you, and may, in His time, we find each other in the unity of the true faith in order that we may worship together in Spirit and truth! Thank you for this opportunity; thank you for your hospitality! God bless you!

W. den Hollander 

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# I Do Not Like the Dark Eather

By J.L. van Popta

It was quiet in our neighbourhood this morning. The only sound was the wind whistling through the row of trees out back. It was a strange quiet, the sound of gas powered generators no longer droning through the night. The power to our village had come back on at midnight. It was an exciting moment. When I had stepped out my front door last night I greeted various neighbours who also were coming out with their flashlights into the numbing cold to shut down their generators and disconnect the temporary wiring from their panels. That way we could ensure that in the morning there would be heat, hot running water for showers, and toast and coffee.

***"It sort of snuck up on us in the night and coated everything with a sheen of ice."***

## A sheen of ice

The ice rain had started ten days earlier. It came quietly enough. It sort of snuck up on us in the night and coated everything with a sheen of ice. Because of an unusual weather pattern, where northern air as cold as -9C was trapped in the Ottawa and St. Lawrence valleys with warm Texan air above, it was raining ice water. The *super-cooled* water froze on contact. Everything was ice cold: cars, houses, streets, trees, power-lines. Layer by layer, ice built up. In New York City and Toronto it was raining. North of us it was snowing. Neither causes trouble in normal circumstances, but from north of Lake Huron to Montreal it rained into a deep freeze. Usually this kind of weather lasts only for a few hours. That day, January 5-6, it rained into the cold Ottawa Valley for 30 hours or more. And it pelted down rain: 35 mm (1.5 inches). Wednesday we tried to enjoy the lull but then on Thursday it began again. And again on Friday. When it was over, in Ottawa 68 mm of rain (more than 2.5 inches) every bit of it frozen solid. In outlying areas as much as 100 mm of ice-water had fallen. Each

drop frozen within a few millimeters of where it touched down. Trees and power-lines laboured under the burden of ice.

The power failures had begun on Monday morning already but only sporadically throughout the Ottawa-Carleton Region. By Monday night the streets were a Canadian winter nightmare. Tuesday the schools were closed, the buses not running and power was beginning to fail all over the region. And the freezing rain continued. The trees were a fabulous sight that only freezing rain can bring. By Monday night, ice had covered everything at least an inch thick. The smallest branch and twig was now as thick as a grown man's thumb. Even the blades of grass and weeds and reeds that still poked their brave heads through the snow cover were now bars of glass. Everything had become a glass sculpture. By mid-morning Tuesday the trees began to break. Limbs came crashing down in a shower of shattered ice.

The world was transformed into a surreal and hauntingly beautiful place. As darkness fell the magnitude of the power failures began to become apparent. On Wednesday morning the rain stopped for while. I needed to go to the city. We live in a village – Metcalfe – 20 km south of the urban area of Ottawa-Carleton. As we drove in, we could hardly believe our eyes. Every where trees were broken, limbs fallen, lines down. Half the traffic lights were out. Police were unable to attend to all the intersections without power. Traffic slowed to a crawl as cars and trucks alternated through the intersections of busy city thoroughfares. Traffic slowed to a crawl as drivers surveyed the spectacular damage to the trees. Many were split right down the middle, to the roots, as if struck from the sky with a cleaver.

## Death by drizzle

Most weather events come with catastrophic suddenness: tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards, flash floods. Most disasters appear with unforeseen abruptness: earthquakes, avalanches, volcanic explosions. This was, as some-

one said, "death by drizzle." Normally, catastrophes are ugly; this one was marked by fabulous beauty. But on Wednesday morning the weatherman warned us of impending disaster. More rain, more subzero temperatures. Twenty-eight mm was predicted. That was wrong. *Thirty-eight* mm fell. Hydro and municipal emergency teams realized that trouble of unprecedented magnitude was imminent.

***"Blue green flashes filled the night sky. Street by street, neighbourhood by neighbourhood darkness encased one of Canada's largest cities."***

The hydro system began to fail all over. Our power had first failed on Monday. On Tuesday it was restored, but sometime Wednesday we were again plunged into darkness. We had no idea that we would be without power for the next seven days. That evening we went for a walk in our village. Our children were awed by the eerie sight. No street lights, no house lights, just a few candles and oil lamps flickering in the windows. Trees were broken everywhere. Branches littered the streets. A car approached in the darkness, still behind the crest of a hill. The headlights shone on the overhead power lines and through the tree tops. Everything was ablaze with light. It was a sight not seen before and one we will likely never see again. By now everything had nearly two inches of ice. The ice was so thick we could hardly see the branches or wires in the centers. But it was not over yet.

That night the rain continued to fall. Throughout the night transformers began to explode as wiring pulled free from its anchors. Blue green flashes filled the night sky. Street by street, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, darkness encased one of Canada's largest cities. Village by village, town by town Eastern Ontario was plunged into darkness and into the cold. Huge trees began breaking like sticks. Wiring



*Everything was covered with a sheen of ice.*



*Once proud trees stand with bowed heads as if in shame.*



*Trees are bent over double, literally with their crowns frozen to the ground.*



*Willows and poplars along creeks and rivers lie ruined and tattered.*



*Wind breaks are skeletons of their former self. Many have only the trunk and a few branches left.*



*For miles and miles trees are snapped as if sticks.*



*"The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic, the voice of the LORD breaks the cedars. . . . The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare" (Psalm 29:4,5,9).*



*Tree lines and wind breaks stand like broken teeth against the sky line.*



*Transmission lines and power substations are ruined.*



*The community center becomes the Armed Forces' Command Post.*



*More than 13,000 soldiers were deployed into what had become the largest peacetime military operation in Canadian history.*

stretched to its limit began to snap. Limbs pulled down pole after pole. The old part of our village looked as if it had been bombed. And still it rained into the subzero night.

***“Tree lines and wind breaks stand like broken teeth against the sky line. Willows along the creeks and rivers lie in ruins and tatters. Proud elms and oaks stand with bowed heads as if in shame. Trees bow to the ground as if in mourning.”***

It was Thursday that the wind began to pick up. And then it got scary. Trees limbs broke like gunshots; the ice came crashing down. Anyone living near a forest or tree-line slept little that night. Friends in the city said that it sounded like a war zone. Outside our windows the trees limbs were dropping tonnes of ice on our roof and on the ground. We moved our two youngest to another bedroom in the middle of the night, fearing that a branch might crash through their window. Their tree fort, 10 meters up in a tree, now hangs precariously over our roof. (We'll get to that in the spring time, I guess.)

### **State of emergency**

The newly elected Regional Chair, Mr. Bob Chiarelli, declared a state of emergency on Thursday morning. Ottawa and ten other regional municipalities with a combined population of 750,000 people, was crippled. The universities began to send students and staff home. The major employers in the city did the same. The inter-city bus lines quit operating. VIA Rail ceased operations in Eastern Canada as all lights and crossing signals fail. The Ontario Provincial Police closed the 417 (the Trans-Canada Highway to Montreal). The Macdonald-Cartier Airport (Ottawa International) was closed. More and more communication links were being cut off. The Bell Telephone system began to unravel. AT&T long distance systems collapsed. And still it rained, even though it was -8°C. The ice continued to build.

Defense Minister Art Eggleton announces that the Prime Minister has ordered more than 3500 troops to help the citizens of Eastern Ontario and South-Western Quebec. Montreal, Canada's second largest city is being plunged into darkness. The weather begins to change a bit. Ice pellets begin to fall.

(That's what this stuff is called when it freezes before it hits the ground.) About two inches of it accumulates on the already fallen 2 inches of ice, but then it begins to rain again and all the ice pellets freeze together as the rain percolates through the beads of ice pellets.

Throughout all this we are without power. Our house is a “wired house.” We need electricity to run our well and water pressure system. We need power to pump our sump to keep the basement from flooding. We need power for our sludge sump, for our laundry, for our vacuum. My computer sits unused on my desk. We need power for our furnace, lights, kitchen. We are thankful for a natural gas stove. We use the stove top to ward off the cold. We manage to keep our home from freezing. At least the living room and kitchen are warm.

Tuesday night catechism classes were canceled. On Wednesday night the adult Bible study was canceled. It was difficult to get work done. I did need to prepare sermons, however. I hoped each day, each hour that the power would come back on. I had never hand written my sermons before. This was a new experience. I'm one of those techno-slaves who needs a computer and keyboard to write. I didn't even have electric lights and my study was, oh so cold! I bundled up as I sat behind my desk with an old chimney lantern, burning lamp oil. I literally burned the midnight oil! The temperature in my study dropped to 7°C. My boys laughed at me as I sat there wearing my winter coat and scarf, my hat and gloves. I would take off my right glove when I picked up my pen to write. It was so cold in my study I could see my breath!

### **Trees we have loved**

It is the trees, however, that are the most noticeable casualties. In one old neighbourhood, Rockcliffe Park (that's where ambassadors and CEO's live, as well as where Stornoway, the home of the Leader of the Opposition, is found) 85% of the trees lining the streets and gracing the lawns have been damaged, three quarters seriously. Ottawa alone probably has more than 45,000 seriously damaged trees along city streets. Thousands of mature trees, one in ten in the city, will be cut down. The worst hit were the ash, silver maple, Manitoba maple, birch and poplars. Throughout the region hundreds of sugar maples lie devastated. This spring the sap will flow freely from their every wound and break. Many wonder if the maple sugar industry can survive. The Dominion Arboretum, a plantation of exotic and rare trees has

been severely damaged. A century of work damaged in places beyond repair.

The devastation in the country side is beyond belief. For miles and miles trees and power poles are snapped as if sticks. Hundreds of thousands, millions, of trees are damaged and destroyed. Almost every tree has its crown broken. Many have only the trunk and a few branches left. Tree lines and wind breaks stand like broken teeth against the sky line. Willows along the creeks and rivers lie ruined and tattered. Once proud elms and oaks stand with heads bowed as if in shame, many with their crowns literally frozen to the ground. Forest canopies are destroyed. It defies comprehension. TV cameras and photographs cannot capture the enormity of what has happened. Psalm 29 comes to mind. *“The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic, the voice of the LORD breaks the cedars. The LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. . . . The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare”* (Psalm 29:4,5,9).

***“. . . it has become clear that we are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis.”***

### **Helicopters**

On Friday we began to notice the presence of the Canadian Armed Forces in Metcalfe. They set up a base at our community center. Day by day, more and more soldiers are moving in. The Fire Hall becomes the civilian Command and Emergency Planning Center for our township. Across town, the community center becomes the Armed Forces' Command Post. We are getting used to the thud-thud-thud of military helicopters roaring overhead at low altitude. The Macdonald-Cartier Airport is open again and Metcalfe lies on one of the approach flight paths. The choppers come in low under the civilian flight lines. The sound of the helicopters shakes our house. Our boys' eyes grow big; they don't mind the distraction.

As the temperature dropped the military presence increased. More and more military equipment moved into our village. Between Ontario and Quebec more than 13,000 soldiers were deployed into what had become the largest peacetime military operation in Canadian history. The soldiers are cleaning up the debris, providing services, distributing relief supplies, helping Hydro workers, protecting property.

## Crisis

By now it has become clear that we are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. The rain still continues to fall. It is still subzero. The ice continues to build. Power poles have broken all over eastern Ontario. In some areas 80% of the poles are broken off. The whole power grid lies in ruins. On the road to a family of our church every pole but two or three is broken along a three kilometer stretch. Behind their place the high tension power poles lie crushed under the weight of the ice. Transmission lines and power substations are ruined.

***“It was like music, music we had never heard before. Sometimes soft and faint, then vigorous and resounding.”***

In our village the shops close at 5 p.m. The tills don't work. Sales are added up on paper. Light comes from candles standing on wine bottles and from lanterns. People shop by flashlight. The banks don't open. Cash is not readily available. Debit cards don't work. Gas pumps are closed. Yet, village life goes on. The shop keeper extends credit to customers he knows. IOU's are written on small papers. Neighbours reach out to help neighbours. Rumors fly. The power has been out now for three days. When will it come on again? Someone says that he heard, "Tomorrow." Others say, "No, not for a few days." The reports on radio and TV are contradictory. No one really seems to know what is going on. It's only -1C and everyone is still managing to stay quite warm in their homes. But the temperature is falling in all our houses. The neighbour behind our place says that his basement is beginning to flood. An other neighbour has a generator to run his sump. His is the first of what will become a common and essential piece of home equipment. The neighbour with water in his basement hears that the township has a vacuum truck going around pumping out basements. He calls and has help within the hour. By that time he had 10 cm of 3C water. His carpets are ruined because he has no heat to dry out the basement.

## Hope and disappointment

The forecast for Saturday was better except for the wind. High winds are forecast. We thank the LORD the winds did not come, just a gentle breeze. The rain would stop and the temperature was to

rise to 1C. Saturday morning the sun came out for the first time in a week. Never before had we ever seen such a sight. The breeze was moving through the trees and the sun was glistening and refracting off a brilliant shining wonderland. And then it began. The temperature crossed the freezing mark and the ice began to fall. Avalanches of ice came crashing through the trees but now the branches sprang back knocking more ice loose, causing more branches to join in their dance of freedom. It was like music, music we had never heard before. Sometimes soft and faint, then vigorous and resounding. The sun brought with its rays hope of restoration and release from the icy cocoon encasing our world. We enjoyed the bright sunshine. I stood in wonder, however, as the ice came crashing down off the 115,000 volt lines behind our house. Walking under the lines would be life threatening as two to three meter lengths ice, as thick as a man's arm, fell 25 meters to the ground below. It seemed, though, as if the whole village was on the streets. Fathers, mothers, children, all out talking, sharing stories. The army driving down our streets supplying bottled water, checking basements, offering assistance. We thought the worst was over. But it wasn't.

Saturday afternoon a Provincial Police cruiser came down our street with news we could hardly believe. "The Emergency Measures Unit has been informed by Ontario Hydro that Metcalfe will not have power restored for 5-10 days. Evacuation measures are being put in place. You can go to the community center for more information." The evacuation measure came because the weather forecast was not good. Canada's regular weather patterns were building back into place. The "Siberian Express" was getting ready to dump bitterly cold air into our storm ravaged region.

Throughout those four days we were getting calls from relatives and friends across the country asking how we were making out. We realized that things were serious but since we were not venturing out we had not yet understood the magnitude of the disaster. We were simply trying to cope. Those outside the region as well as those in the city who had power could watch the television news. We needed to get into the car and listen to the radio. We now began to realize that not only were we inconvenienced, we were in danger. We would not be able to keep the cold out if the temperature began to drop. In our township 5,300 of 5,550 homes were without power.

## Generators

I made a phone call to Southern Ontario. (Our phone lines were not down, like so many others.) Within an hour a friend had found a large generator. At the same time my neighbour found two portable generators. A few calls and all was arranged. A young man from Ancaster and his girl friend set out on a mission of mercy into the winter night. The large generator was on wheels, the portables in the back of the pickup. As they drove into Metcalfe at 2 a.m. Sunday morning they were pulled over twice by the police to find out what they were doing with all this equipment. Was it stolen? The first time, just outside of town, the second time was on our street three doors down from my house. We then asked the police for a letter of safe passage in order to deliver the other equipment. This was met with a laugh and a wish for "good luck!" By Sunday night the furnace was running, the sump was dry, the water system was pressurized, even the oven worked. Amazing how quickly a little electricity changes your life.

***“The catechism says that we are to diligently attend the Church of God. The congregation took that seriously.”***

## Diligently attend the church of God

We did gather for worship on Sunday. The church building had heat, light and water. Most of the congregation was able to make it to church. In the afternoon our treatment of the Heidelberg Catechism brought us to Lord's Day 38 on the Fourth Commandment. There, about the day of rest, the catechism says that we are to diligently attend the Church of God. The congregation took that seriously. Most who were able to attend did attend. Diligently. Where else would the people of God want to be in the midst of trouble? Here the people of God worship the Father Creator who brought the storm. "He spreads snow like wool and scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down hail like pebbles. Who can withstand His icy blast? (Psalm 147:16,17 NIV)" In Eastern Ontario many speak of Mother Nature; we worship Father Creator. In Job 37 we read that the breath of God produces ice (Job 37:10). God had breathed on Eastern Ontario! We stood in awe of the power of the storm.

## Help and fellowship

Many members of the churches as well as various churches asked if it was possible to do something to help out. Covenant Christian School in Flamborough Ontario raised some money for supplies. Someone went into their community and asked at hardware stores and lumber yards for discounts or donations of flashlights, batteries and candles. These were delivered to the Fire Hall in Metcalfe along with a poster with Christian greetings to our village from the school. Even as we stood there unloading the supplies people came asking for D cell batteries. They were not to be found in the local stores. Church members in the Grand Valley area brought up five generators. By Monday evening every family of the congregation in the areas affected by the power failure had heat and light. Here too the communion of saints was expressed in concrete ways.

Timothy Christian School in Hamilton raised money. This money was forwarded to Redeemer Christian High which was providing free hot breakfasts and lunches to those students who were still without power when the school began operating again. These acts of kindness and generosity by students warmed the hearts of many.

We began to find one family per day from our neighbourhood that still lacked power, with whom we could share our table. Each evening was filled with good conversation and companionship.

***"We pray that this storm might bring our nation to awareness of the Father Creator who made heaven and earth. All creation testifies to His power."***

## The Hydro workers

On Monday most of the urban areas had their power restored but we are still without. The forecast is not good. It is extremely cold. We have to bundle up in our parkas and gloves to brave the elements. We had portable generators on toboggans and sleds in order to pull them from house to house. We did not have enough for every house on our street but we were able to keep everybody warm.

As the second week progressed the temperature plummeted. By Wednesday morning the wind was howling, the wind chill at -37C. And still the Hydro workers toiled through the night to

restore power. Whole areas of Eastern Ontario had the power grid destroyed. Work normally done only in the long summer days was being done in the most extreme weather, much of it in the dark. Thursday is terrible; the snow begins to fall. Out in the countryside the snow is drifting, driven by 40 km/hour winds. The temperature is -20 during the day, colder at night and still the crews press on. Thousands have come to help. We see utility trucks from all over North America. It is a wonder that anyone can oversee this project. Street by street, town by town, village by village, township by township, the lights are coming back on. Though for the more rural areas it may be February before the power is restored, the hydro linemen are considered heroes for working in such adverse conditions.

## Powered up

After seven days and some hours our power was restored. We took time to reflect on the past week. We will never forget these last 10 days. We have learned what a community can do. None of our neighbours had frost in their houses. Only one had water in the basement. All of us were reasonably warm and well fed. The church federation has stood by us, one of the smallest congregations in the federation. Through them we were able to help many others in our neighbourhoods. Many congregations wish to continue to help out. We thank the LORD for the generosity of our brothers and sisters who understand what it means to help out and to do good to all men.

## I can tell how you feel

A primary grade student sent a hand made card to my family: *"I understand your troubles. I can tell how you feel. I also know how your children feel. I do not like the dark eather. Giving you best wishes. Psalm 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? Yes, whom shall we fear? With the LORD we are not afraid of the dark! Out of the mouths of children the LORD has ordained praise!*

## You are not alone

The media speaks of Mother Nature. Most blame *El Niño* (Spanish for *boy child*) that massive warm body of water welling up in the Pacific. The *Boy Child*, of course, is Jesus Christ, for the ocean phenomenon most seriously affects western South America at Christmas time. Not many consider this storm as from the hand of the Father Creator in whom is our only help. We pray that

this storm might bring our nation to awareness of the Father Creator who made heaven and earth. All creation testifies to His power. Most do not and will not acknowledge that. After Christmas we reflect that *The Boy Child, El Niño*, is King of kings, Lord of lords and all creation is ruled by Him. He has authority also over wind and wave, ocean warming and winter ice storm. Prime Minister Jean Chretien addressed the people in the midst of the power failure via radio broadcast. He assured the people: "You are not alone." The irony escaped most of our fellow citizens.

*Rev. J.L. van Popta is the minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa. Many members of the congregation live in urban Ottawa-Carleton though about one half live widely spread throughout rural Eastern Ontario.* 

## Dear Editor

The congregation and deaconry of the Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa has been overwhelmed by the concern, interest and generosity shown towards us during the January 1998 ice storm and its aftermath. Many churches held collections; deaconries made funds available; individuals sent money; schools held fund raisers. Others drove to Ottawa from Southern Ontario (a twelve hour round trip) bringing supplies and generators to "power-up" our darkened and cold homes. Churches as far away as Australia and the Netherlands offered their help.

Because of the gracious giving of many, the deaconry of Ottawa was able to generously assist families in our congregation, covering costs of damage, expenses and lost income due to the storm. This assistance was also offered to and accepted by others in the broader Reformed Church community in Eastern Ontario and in Montreal.

Though at this moment the final numbers are not available it seems that more than \$40,000.00 will have been given. This amount will be more than adequate for the needs we identified in the Reformed Churches. Any surplus will be given to the agencies overseeing the aid programs put in place by our local governments.

With Christian Greetings  
For the Deaconry  
M. Wildeboer

# Ice Storm / Siege

## To the Canadian Reformed Churches:

It is through hardships and suffering that our Lord builds and unites us. We have felt the support God has given us through your prayers. We also thank Him for the generosity of brothers and sisters in the Lord who have helped with supplies and financial gifts in the difficult time during and after the ice storm. Here is a short insight into living through the ice storm/siege and being without hydro or telephone for nineteen (19) days:

- Many roads were closed as hydro poles and wires lay dead on the road. (including our road – 105 hydro poles snapped at their base)
- You can't tell anyone your family is fine – no phone.
- Phone booths don't work either – no power.
- Sound sleep becomes a luxury . . . you must continually feed the fireplace, crashing tree branches jolt you awake.
- Cannot flush, the well pump needs power.
- You must drive to Town for water (they have a water tower).
- You cannot buy gasoline as the gas pumps need electricity.
- You need cash because Insta-bank machines and Visa do not work.
- Snapped tree branches protruding from your roof cause concern.
- Water dripping from the ceiling fan falls into a waiting pail.
- Bread soon becomes impossible to find, as does canned food and meat, store shelves are bare.
- You cannot shower, no hot water.
- You have to put out your own fire (fireplace insert overheated – dust and debris behind caught fire) because you cannot phone for help and your neighbours are at the shelter (fire department is 3 kms away).
- Firewood is scarce – use whatever you can find.
- Freezer/fridge food quickly goes bad.
- Sump hole fills with water.
- Cabin fever.
- You see your breath as you climb out of bed in the morning.



ICE STORM 98

Jan.7 – Jan.24  
No Hydro or Phone

- Candles, batteries, propane, kerosene, lamp oil, matches, flashlights, salt, electrical connectors, generators, etc. vanish from store shelves.
- Schools are closed and other public activities are cancelled.
- All public facilities are closed (arena, halls, libraries, etc.).
- You get a break from vacuuming and laundry.
- Police and fire truck lights flash by through the night.
- Army trucks and army personnel become commonplace.
- You lose ten enormous trees (had to cut down), while the remaining ten have only 30-40% foliage left (pine trees survived but lost their tops).
- Visitors stand in awe at the destruction in the forests.
- Drainage creeks are filled with broken trees and branches (flooding is assured this spring).
- Some steal and take advantage of the situation in other ways, but many more give of their time and energy.

Most of all, fellow Christians and the Church community prove their importance, as we seek each other, visiting, giving a helping hand and meeting each others needs. Many, many thanks for your prayers and kindness.

*Calvin and Carolyn Pol  
Aaron, Natalie, Nathan and Julia  
Russell, Ontario*

# Ice Siege

January 5-10, 1998

*Five days of freezing rain,  
The trees feel the pain;  
Branches covered in ice,  
Held firmly in a vice.*

*Snap and crash is all we hear,  
Lying awake in fear;  
Ice pounding on the roof and ground,  
Branches cracking, what a sound!*

*God sent this freezing rain,  
The earth is under His reign;  
We stand in awe;  
Waiting for a thaw.*

*Birch trees bow down,  
Tree branches are piled in a mound;  
Hydro lines lay silent  
Trees and poles are bent.*

*Ice and branches fall while we hide,  
Warmed by the fireplace inside.  
Candles light and warm our home,  
Outside we dare not roam;*

*Children cannot go out and play,  
That's what we parents say;  
Falling ice and branches you know,  
Thundering down upon the frozen snow.*

*When will we ever get our power back?  
The ability to communicate is what we lack;  
After nineteen days we are back on line,  
Our clocks can now tell the correct time.*

Calvin Pol  
Russell, Ontario

(No power or phone for nineteen days)



*Steel towers in background are crumpled.*



*South Russell Road*



*Day 4 of 5 days of rain*



*Route 400 /  
South Russell  
Road*



*Our house – the four poplars are now cut down.*



*Our backyard.*



# THE HI-LITER

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## News from Here and There

By J. de Gelder

Upon request of the editorial staff, I have accepted the challenge to fill the Hi-Liter column with gleanings from local church bulletins. It's a bit of a delicate job. I know there is a great variety of opinion about this column ranging from: "It's useless; don't stick your nose in our local business!" to "It's so interesting, and also helpful in keeping in touch with each other within the federation."

As a matter of fact, I am not even sure how to look at it myself! But obviously the editors are of the opinion that it should continue, so, let's give it a try.

In exchange for everyone's cooperation in sending me the bulletins, I hope to make use of the information with proper discretion. And if I want to make some comments, I will try to be careful.

Probably due to the change of address, it took a while before the bulletins started arriving in my mailbox; but, it's getting better. So, here we go. A short one for starters.

### Ottawa

Many members of the church in Ottawa have been directly affected by the massive power outages as a result of the terrible ice storm in the beginning of January. The same can be said about members of the l'Église Réformée du Québec. In several of our churches special collections have been held, and special activities have been organized in response to an offer from the deacons in Ottawa "to assist others in directing aid to our storm ravaged area." A wonderful example of the mercy of Christ, visible in the "diacal presence" of God's Church in a needy world!

### General Synod Fergus 1998

Reading through the various short reports of council and consistory meetings, one can notice clearly the impact of the upcoming General Synod in Fergus. Many brothers are busy studying the reports, and several consistories are preparing proposals and overtures, or writing letters.

Special attention is often given to the report of the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. From Rockway we read:

A proposal from our church's committee for contact with the local United Reformed Churches that our church submit an overture concerning this issue to General Synod 1998 was discussed. An overture to General Synod 1998 will be prepared to mandate the deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity to approach the federations of the United Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches and Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches with a view to establish unity with these federations.

### Rockway

Presently the Rockway congregation is worshipping in the building of the church at Lincoln. That may change in the near future:

The building committee has been very busy following up offers and suggestions for a suitable site to build our own church building as well as finding a place where we can worship the Lord in the meantime.

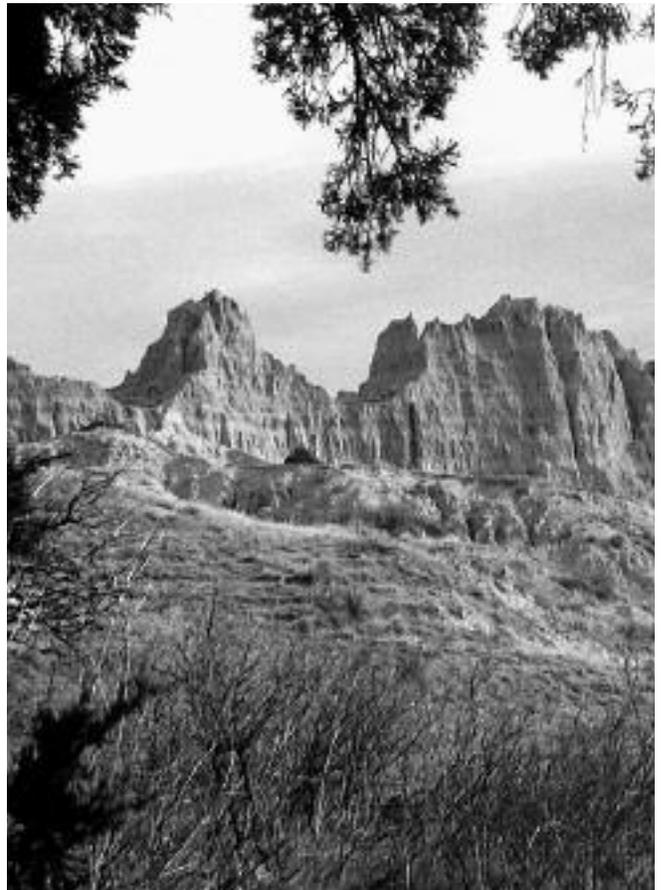
### Chatham

I came across a valuable suggestion under "Pastoralia" from Rev. Versteeg in Chatham. He addresses the need to pray for each other as members of the body of Christ, also in our family prayers around the dinner table. Then he suggests:

Why not make a prayer list of those whom we should remember in prayer so that each time we hold our family prayer we will not only remember our own needs but also the needs of others.

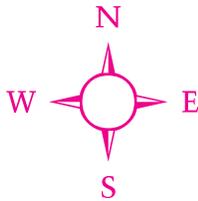
### Watford

Finally, I wonder how my colleague in Watford is doing. In Watford's bulletin I read: "The last week of holidays for our minister will be held the week of April 19." So, that's it – after April no holidays for Rev. VanWoudenberg, never again!





**GIVE THE DIRECTION**



1. God planted the garden \_\_\_\_\_ of Eden.
2. The temple in Jerusalem, the Lord's house looked \_\_\_\_\_.
3. An \_\_\_\_\_ wind brought locusts during the plagues of Egypt.
4. The men from the \_\_\_\_\_ came to Jerusalem seeking the Christ child.
5. Jonah sat on the \_\_\_\_\_ side of the city of Nineveh.
6. Abraham travelled in this direction when he left Haran. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Galilee is \_\_\_\_\_ of Samaria.
8. Jesus said to the people, "When you see a cloud rise out of the \_\_\_\_\_."
9. Mt. Carmel was \_\_\_\_\_ of Jerusalem.
10. After the Flood, God made a \_\_\_\_\_ wind to pass over the earth.

Answers below



**UNSCRAMBLE 12 ZOO ANIMALS**

by Busy Beaver Debbie Olson

- eclriodco \_\_\_\_\_
- okoarnag \_\_\_\_\_
- tenlaehp \_\_\_\_\_
- ymoekn \_\_\_\_\_
- egfrifa \_\_\_\_\_
- tpreak \_\_\_\_\_
- shuipmpaotpo \_\_\_\_\_
- rpeahnt \_\_\_\_\_
- hcahete \_\_\_\_\_
- azreb \_\_\_\_\_
- nlio \_\_\_\_\_

Answers below



**FROM THE MAILBOX**

Wow, three letters from three sisters. Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Sophia Brouwer*. Thank you for your letter and puzzle. Can you play quite well on the organ already? When you're older, are you going to play the organ in church to help the congregation to sing? That would be really using your God-given talents, don't you think? Till next time.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver club, also, *Nelene Brouwer*. Thanks very much for your letter and puzzles. Do you live on a dairy farm? Do you help milk the cows? I have helped with milking cows; I think it's a lot of fun. And in the spring, there must be lots of calves. They are so cute, don't you think? Bye for now, Nelene.

Thank you also to *Melissa Brouwer* for your letter and joke, and welcome to the Busy Beaver Club. Do you have a horse at home on the farm that you can ride, or is the horse just your favorite animal? It was great to hear from you. Please write again soon. Bye.

A welcome also goes to *Debbie Olson*. Thanks for your letter and puzzle. Do you get into trouble when your cat gets into mischief? Do you have lots of fun with your dog? And have you got plenty of snow to slide on now? I hope you do, because snow can be lots of fun. Have you made a snowman, yet? Bye Debbie.

**WANTED**

Pen pal for Sophia Brouwer. Sophia is 10 years old, is in grade 5, and like to play the organ. If you would like to write to Sophia, her address is:

Sophia Brouwer  
RR #4 . Grand Valley, ON L0N 1G0

**ANSWERS TO:**

hippopotamus, panther, cheetah, zebra, lion  
crocodile, kangaroo, elephant, monkey, giraffe, parakeet,

**Unscramble 12 Zoo Animals**

- 1. East (Gen. 2:8); 2. East (Ezek. 11:1); 3. East (Ex. 10:13); 4. East (Matt. 2:1); 5. East (Jonah 4:5); 6. South (Gen. 12:9); 7. North (see map in Bible); 8. West (Luke 12:54); 9. North (see map); 10. West (Gen. 8:1)

**Give the Direction**

cost, ant, pants, pant, noise, constant, an, leap, pole, pool, tin, sin, on, tie, tan, plant

**How many words can you make out of CONSTANTINOPLE**

- 1. John; 2. James; 3. Peter; 4. Andrew; 5. Thomas; 6. Philip; 7. Judas; 8. Bartholomew; 9. Matthew; 10. Simon; 11. Thaddaeus; 12. James

**Unscramble 12 Disciple Names**

**AUNT BETTY**

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