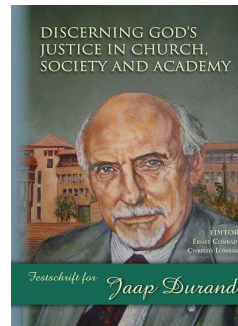


WHY BELHAR? WHY NOW?

A Presentation to the Lippische Landeskirche

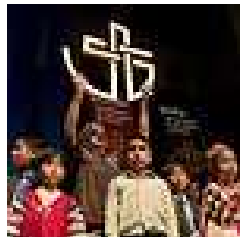


It began in a Classroom – 1978

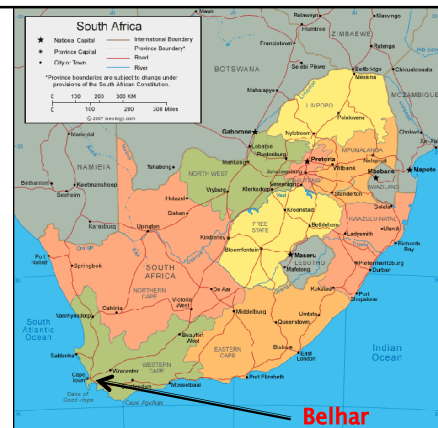


World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Theological support of apartheid declared a “heresy” – suspension of Dutch Reformed Church at WARC General Council in Ottawa in 1982.



Belhar Adopted in SA in 1986





SA Gestig, where the Belhar Confession was adopted in September 1986



Dirkie Smit

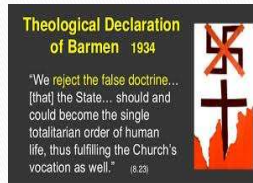


Russell Botman



A Reformed Confession

- ▶ Reflecting the Confessional History of the Church
- ▶ Modeled on the Barmen Declaration – with each section having affirmations and rejection.



Accompanying Letter

- ▶ The Gospel is at risk among us:
- ▶ An unchristian ideology of racial separation infects us, our Church, and our nation.
- ▶ A cry from the heart based on truth of Scripture.
- ▶ We call on all Christian people everywhere for all time, to join us in confessing the truth of the Gospel for this time, place, and setting.



Adopted first in USA by Reformed Church in America

- ▶ After a five year period of church discernment
- ▶ Adopted by Classes and Genral Synod in 2010
- ▶ Declaring that Belhar's three themes are the core themes in life of RCA:
 - Unity
 - Justice
 - Reconciliation.



Proposed to PCUSA in 2008

Brought by PCUSA Task Force on Reparations

“as a means of deepening the commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to dealing with its racism and a means of strengthening its unity”

Approved by 2010 General Assembly but only 60% of presbyteries, thus not added to the Book of Confessions, but rather sent again to the Presbyteries with a vigorous program of study



Growing Sense that Racism Very Much Alive in USA

- ▶ First Nation peoples still live in dire poverty on Reservations;
- ▶ young African American men are incarcerated disproportionate to percentage of population;
- ▶ Legal status of Latinos, both native born and immigrants is subject to question in virtually every quarter of the nation
- ▶ “Stop and frisk” and “stand your ground” put poor, black and brown young men at risk
- ▶ immigrants of all descriptions are increasingly unwelcome

Racism Very Much Alive in USA

If we didn't already know it, we have gotten a wake-up call from:

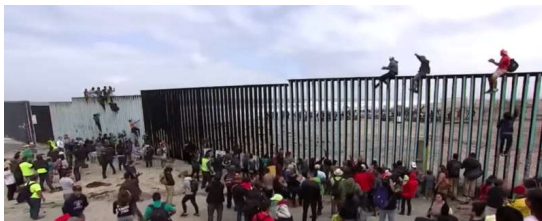
- ▶ Michael Brown
- ▶ Eric Garner
- ▶ Trayvon Martin



A cry to the church to speak out for God's justice!

INSTITUTIONAL FORMS OF HATRED AND VIOLENCE THRIVING

Building the Wall
“Muslim Bans”
Police Violence
Rising White Nationalism



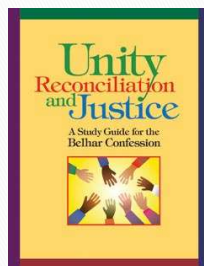
Racism Alive in PCUSA

- ▶ “Sunday morning at 11:00 am still the most segregated hour of the week”
- ▶ PCUSA (and its leadership at all levels) still an overwhelmingly a white church in an increasingly multicultural society.



220th GA (2012) Belhar Again

- ▶ Names Special Committee which again recommends Belhar and an accompanying letter for the PCUSA
- ▶ Launches a churchwide study process

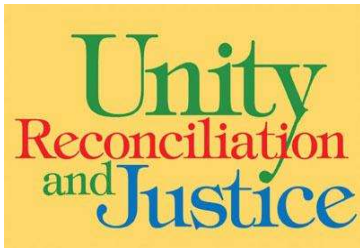


pcusa.org/belhar

BEING Reformed
FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Race and Reconciliation

LIFTING UP THE THREE MAJOR THEMES OF BELHAR



Articles 1 & 2 – UNITY

- ▶ Begins with affirmation of Trinity (ends with affirmation that Jesus is Lord)
- ▶ Unity is a gift and obligation
- ▶ This unity must “become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered”



Article 3 – RECONCILIATION

- ▶ God has entrusted the church with Christ’s message of reconciliation
- ▶ God’s life giving Word and Spirit have conquered the powers of sin and death, irreconciliation and enmity
- ▶ Reject: any doctrine that “sanctions in the name of the gospel...the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color”



Articles 4 & 5 – JUSTICE

- ▶ “God...is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged”
- ▶ “the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need...and strive against any form of injustice”
- ▶ Reject: “any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice”



In 2016 the Belhar Confession adopted with near unanimity as a Confessional standard for the PCUSA

- ▶ **No Biblical themes could be more relevant to churches in our time than those of unity, reconciliation, and justice**

PCUSA Accompanying Letter

- ▶ The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is again facing a critical time in its history. We are rent apart by division and schism, we have yet to directly confront and confess the racism that has been a significant force in our own history, and we have shown a failure of resolve to make courageous stands for justice. We believe that the Confession of Belhar, a profound statement on unity, reconciliation, and justice in the church, comes to us as a word from God for this particular time and place for the PC(USA).



Making a Difference in World

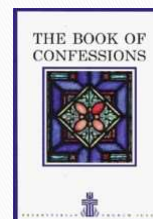
- ▶ Contribution to Liberation Movement in South Africa
- ▶ Inspiration for Justice Struggles across Africa, i.e. the Accra Confession
- ▶ Importance to Palestinian Liberation Struggle
- ▶ Adoption by Other Churches in USA and Worldwide
- ▶ Embrace by Reformed Churches in Germany



CONFESSION OF
BELHAR

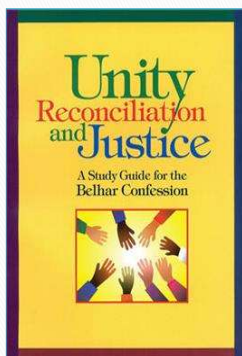
Important for our Integrity as a Confessional Church

- ▶ Built on the model and content of the Barmen Declaration
- ▶ Very appropriate on the 50th Anniversary of the Confession of 1967 (for PCUSA)
- ▶ Enabled by a fresh understanding of the role of Reformed Confessions in the 21st Century



Framework for Mission

- ▶ A unique biblical witness to unity, justice, and reconciliation – in the church!
- ▶ A theological commitment to overcome racism and work for the 'beloved community'
- ▶ A voice from the Global South in our Book of Confessions
- ▶ A witness to the church universal



Hopes for the Church

- ▶ Adopt and live Belhar as a faithful witness to the unity, justice, and reconciliation that God intends for us.
- ▶ Take leadership in promoting a churchwide study of the Confession of Belhar
- ▶ Be sent into the world as leaders for unity, justice, and reconciliation.



CONFESSION OF
BELHAR

