

**THE END OF THE RAINBOW NATION?  
FACING SOME RELIGIO-POLITICAL CHALLENGES IN POST-APARTHEID  
SOUTH AFRICA**

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*This paper briefly introduces the key concepts of the Belhar Confession, which is seen as basic for the reconstruction of a “new South Africa”, namely unity, reconciliation and righteousness. Some recent developments in South African society are considered as indicative of the erosion of the vision of a transformed country, inter alia poverty, crime, racism and xenophobia. A possible religious response is advocated by means of prophetic protest, creation of spaces for interfacing, and the development of new theological paradigms.*

**1. WE HAD A DREAM...**

It is clear that South Africa, as a young democracy, is struggling to find its identity. In the euphoria of the political transition in 1994, much was made of the uniqueness of South Africa as representing “unity in diversity”, epitomized in Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s colourful phrase: the *rainbow nation*. The dark days of *ethnocracy* and *pigmentocracy* seemed to be over. The dream<sup>2</sup> of a *unified, reconciled and just* South Africa became reality, or at least, was beginning to be realized – that was the belief of many at the time. South Africa was hailed as an example to the rest of the world, a sort of micro-cosmos of our global struggle to co-exist as human beings, indeed a cradle within which a new humanity could be (re)born.

This dream did not only, or perhaps even primarily, originate on a political and social level. It was also the fruit of strong *religious* convictions, embodied by influential religious leaders such as Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude and Allan Boesak. As a matter of fact, religion has always been a major factor in political and social life in Africa, inter alia as a result of its spirit of wholeness or one-ness (*Ubunye*). In African worldviews life is not compartmentalized. Politics, society and religion are intrinsically intertwined (cf. Berinyuu AA 1988 :5).

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the term “dream” here because it was often used by the theologians responsible for drafting the Belhar Confession (cf. Smit 1984: 68). One could of course argue that this term sounds euphoric in nature and does not correspond with reality, and was therefore bound to be shattered. It does, however, capture the spirit of the *vision* of a “new South Africa”.

This dream of a new South Africa is, for instance, articulated forcefully in the Belhar Confession<sup>3</sup> of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).<sup>4</sup> In this document – an explicitly religious confession – certain social and political implications are drawn from biblical values. This confession was understood as the inevitable consequence of the *status confessionis*<sup>5</sup> that was declared in the light of the stance towards, and theological legitimization of, the ideology of apartheid by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Apartheid was seen as a system that affected the essential nature of the church and indeed the gospel itself, leaving URCSA with no other choice but to grasp the calling of the hour, and to resist the heresy that not only threatened and contradicted the core of the church and the gospel, but was tearing the very fabric of South African society apart (cf. Smit 1984: 22-38).

The basic argument of the Belhar Confession hinges on three key concepts, namely unity, reconciliation, and righteousness (Smit 1984: 60). Unity is not only seen as essential to the church, but it is also crucial “*that 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...*” (BC 2). The Confession furthermore states quite explicitly that the reconciliation which has been effected in Christ “*can open new possibilities of life for society and the world*”, and “*that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity*” (BC 3). The forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour was understood to be based on the conviction that people are *fundamentally irreconcilable* (Durand 1984: 125).

In the much discussed fourth article the Confession addresses the issue of God’s righteousness, and the fact “*that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged*”. It stresses the importance that the church should side with the oppressed and resist all ideologies

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<sup>3</sup> Attached as an addendum on pages 14-16.

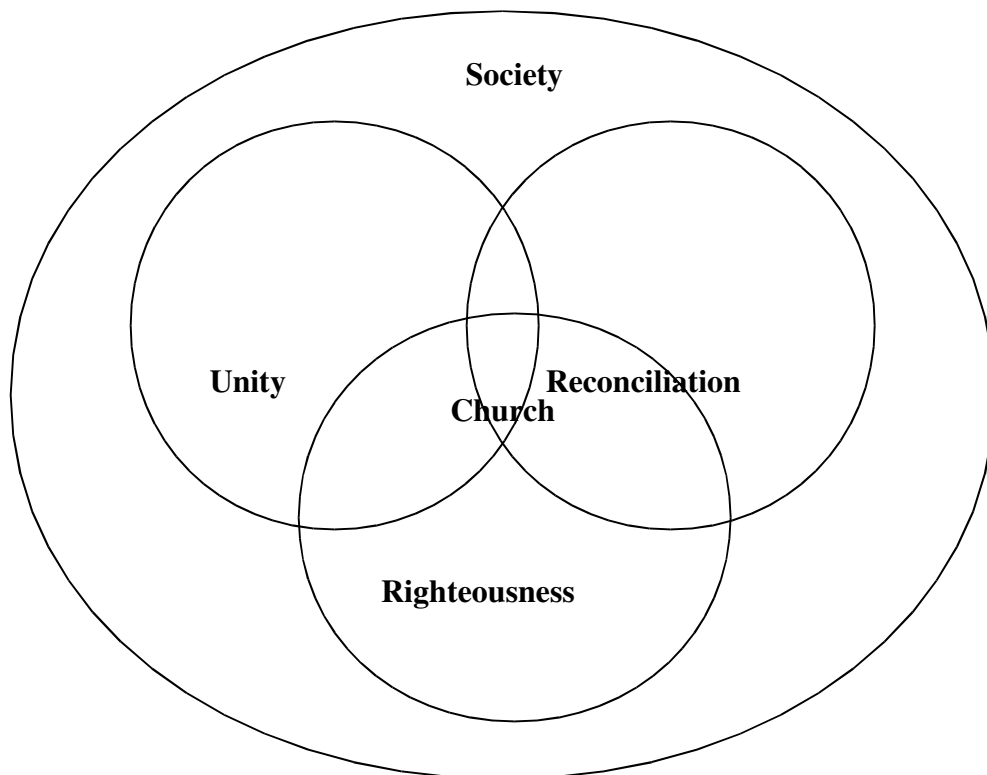
<sup>4</sup> When the Belhar Confession was drafted, the church was known as the *Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa*. In 1994 the *Dutch Reformed Mission Church* and the *Dutch Reformed Church in Africa* united to form the *Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa* (URCSA).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the historical analogies with the Barmen Declaration (1934), the Declaration of the Lutheran World Alliance in Dar es Salaam on apartheid and racism (1977), and the Declaration of the Reformierter Bund on nuclear weapons (1982).

“which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel” (BC 4).

The way in which this dream of unity, reconciliation and righteousness could be translated into reality was also spelled out, using imagery befitting the confessional mode of Belhar. The dream was to fulfil a fourfold function, namely to supply a *vision* of God’s (ultimate) reign and the calling of the church; therefore also indicating the *direction* for the ethos of the church en route to this ultimate reign; in this way providing a *critical test* through which the wrongs of this world, and the church’s reaction to this, could be measured; and as such also granting *inspiration* for the church to continue working in the hope of a better world (cf. Smit 1984: 68).

The three key concepts of the Belhar Confession, and its relationship to society, could be depicted graphically as follows:



## 2. “A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL”?

One could rightly ask, fourteen years after the dawn of democracy in South Africa, what has become of this (religio-political) dream? The answers to this question all seem to be *paradoxical in nature*. There is much to be lauded, but also much to be lamented. It is, for instance, common knowledge that the sound South African economy has been praised as one of the greatest achievements of our country since 1994. It seems as if the South African government understands the importance of a sound economy in achieving its goals of “a better life for all”.<sup>6</sup> Although the original intended growth rate of 6% per annum<sup>7</sup> has not yet been reached, it seems as if the general condition of the economy is stable and indeed healthy, inter alia because the government has allowed the open market to function and create wealth without too much political interference.

One of the paradoxes, however, is that in spite of political freedom gained through democracy, and in spite of increasing economic growth, violence and crime seem to be on the rise, or at least remain unacceptably high – even if statistics suggest a levelling out in terms of certain crime categories.<sup>8</sup> Whilst one could still blame the system of apartheid for atrocities committed during the period 1985-1994, for instance, this is strictly speaking no longer possible. Added to this is the fact that, while many acts of violence committed during the apartheid years were politically motivated, violence now has spread out over almost all of the South African society, affecting, often with horrific cruelty, all population groups. *Why did the dawn of democracy and increasing economical growth not bring with them a decline in crime and a safer and more secure society?*

This is not an easy question to answer. One possible analysis<sup>9</sup> would be that South African society is in fact at present *not* a unity celebrating its diversity, in spite of constant political rhetoric reminding us of the *rainbow nation*, but rather a group of mobile, industrialized and individualized consumers. The dawn of the video sphere<sup>10</sup> and

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<sup>6</sup> ANC slogan used during political campaigns.

<sup>7</sup> Currently 4.2%. Projected rate for the next two years: 4.5%. These figures are, however, almost certainly to be affected negatively by the phenomena of electricity shortages and, most recently, xenophobia.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) of the South African Police Service, the (reported) cases of murder were 25,965 per annum during 1994/1995, in comparison to 19,824 in 2003/2004. The (reported) cases of rape, however, increased from 44,751 in 1994/1995 to 52,733 in 2003/2004 – to mention only two categories of crime in South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> Cf., for instance, Johann Rossouw in *Die Vrye Afrikaan* 1 Oktober 2004, 4-5; also *Bylae by Die Burger* 30 September 2006, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the so-called eras or spheres of communication as proposed by the French philosopher Debray: the logo-sphere (oral tradition), grapho-sphere (printed media) and the video-sphere (transmission of images)

the rise of the mass media have exacerbated this cultural shift: the ethos of the so-called “free market”, with its emphasis on consumerism, has become a tyranny dictating and exploiting the *continuous stimulation of greed and desire*. South Africans have to a large extent bought into the ethos of buying, or at least attaining at all costs that which the mass media advertise as absolutely necessary for a “good life” and “true happiness”.

The problem, however, is that South Africa at this stage not only does not have the capital or natural resources to satisfy everybody’s dreams about “a good life”, but also that the stark reality since 1994 has been that wealth has not necessarily been redistributed equitably amongst South African peoples, but has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of a minority, including the so-called new black “elite” or “middle class”. In 2005 South Africa and Brazil shared the dubious honour of being the two countries with the largest gap between poor and rich – a fact that makes president Mbeki’s reference to “two nations within one South Africa”, namely a rich and a poor nation, understandable.<sup>11</sup>

For centuries most South Africans were subjected to poverty and discrimination. The dawn of 1994 brought with it enormous expectations of “a better life for all”. On the one hand, these expectations have not been met; on the contrary, for the majority the situation

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via electronic means) (Debray, Régis 2000. *Introduction à la médiologie*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France). Whilst the Western world has to a large extent moved (successfully?) through these spheres, South Africa has been slowed down in this process, specifically under apartheid, and now faces the challenge of processing in a condensed time-frame what other countries have achieved under more normal conditions. To a large extent Africa is still within the logo-sphere, whilst the grapho- and video-spheres have been integrated only in an elitist fashion on corporate and governmental level. Although South Africa shared in many of the fruits of the video-sphere (films, etc.), television was artificially withheld from its inhabitants until as late as 1975. After this date many South Africans departed at an increasing rate from the grapho-sphere in favour of the video-sphere.

<sup>11</sup> In an address delivered in the National Assembly in Cape Town, 29 May 1998. He was then still the acting Deputy President of South Africa. An excerpt from the address: “*We therefore make bold to say that South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. This enables it to argue that, except for the persistence of gender discrimination against women, all members of this nation have the possibility to exercise their right to equal opportunity, the development opportunities to which the Constitution of '93 committed our country. The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. It has virtually no possibility to exercise what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, with that right being equal within this black nation only to the extent that it is equally incapable of realization. This reality of two nations, underwritten by the perpetuation of the racial, gender and spatial disparities born of a very long period of colonial and apartheid white minority domination, constitutes the material base which reinforces the notion that, indeed, we are not one nation, but two nations. And neither are we becoming one nation. Consequently, also, the objective of national reconciliation is not being realized.*”

has worsened to unbearable levels. On the other hand, the mass media paint a picture of capitalistic bliss in a relentless propagandistic onslaught on all the senses, painfully reminding the masses that they in fact have not reached the goal of a new life and are still living in abject deprivation. The end result of this scenario is predictable: utter frustration, and in some cases, bloody violence.

The fabric of South African society is indeed under strain – and tearing - because of issues such as poverty and crime, worsened by the HIV and AIDS pandemic, and the stigmatization accompanying it.<sup>12</sup> It seems as if the dream of unity, reconciliation and righteousness is under severe pressure. An alarming number of recent incidents taking place in post-apartheid South African society could be cited to exemplify this: a young (white) man, barely 18 years of age, walked into a squatter camp called *Skielik* and started shooting indiscriminately, killing scores of (black) people, including a 3-month-old baby and her mother; a so-called “coloured” (brown) South African was refused entrance to his house in Khayelitsha (a predominantly black township); the Forum for Black Journalists chased away white journalists who wanted to attend a meeting held with recently elected ANC President, Jacob Zuma; a shocking video was made and unashamedly screened by students in a previously white hostel at the University of the Free State, showing black workers being degraded in the worst way possible, and which closes by saying: *In the end this is what we think of “integration”*.

In recent weeks South Africa has been plagued by unprecedented and widespread incidents of xenophobia. More than 50 people have been murdered, 25,000 people (some with refugee status, many illegal aliens, but also legal immigrants, and even people with South African citizenship) have been forced to flee their homes and livelihoods, and 47,000 people have decided to return to their home countries. Many reasons for this extreme form of social ostracism have been offered: that it is a so-called “third force” at work, perhaps inspired by right-wing ideology; or Inkatha (predominantly Zulu political party); lack of an adequate immigration policy and effective border control; criminal elements in society; perhaps the beginnings of ethnic cleansing; massive demonic possession; and most probably underdevelopment and unemployment, leading to a harsh

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<sup>12</sup> In 1998 Gugu Dlamini, an AIDS activist in Durban, was beaten to death by her neighbours after declaring that she was HIV positive on World AIDS Day – a death epitomizing the extreme consequence of the syndrome of silencing and stigmatization around the pandemic.

struggle for economic survival. Perhaps it would be closest to the truth to say that these frenzies of xenophobia are an *expression of extreme, systemic anger*. People have been institutionalized into poverty for centuries; they have been promised a new life by the present government – but this seems frustratingly slow in coming. Although Africans are renowned for their resilience and patience, the seemingly uncontrolled inflow of people from other countries into areas that are already straining under poverty, crime, and HIV and AIDS has burst the dam walls of endurance.

Linked to this could be the question of the relationship between the effects of *globalisation* and the call for *glocalisation*. The latter term was coined by Robertson (1992) as an indication of the importance of local issues and the impact of culture on local communities. Glocalisation guards against the tendency of globalisation to homogenize. Poor South Africans, being bombarded with (global) images of affluence and “success”, on the one hand, and struggling with the bitter plight of survival on the other, have to a large extent cracked under the tension of “making ends meet” - literally. In the case of South Africa, xenophobia could perhaps be understood as a brutal but honest expression of glocalisation – as a response against globalization.

Whatever the case may be, it is an extraordinary and ironic turn of events, taking place in a country renowned for its dismantling of apartheid during a period when many freedom fighters found refuge in exactly the same countries whose people are now being forced to leave South Africa in bus-loads (Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Somalia, etc.) as their homes are being burnt down and their shops looted and pillaged.

*Xenophobia is the exact opposite of the dream of a unified, reconciled and just South Africa; it is this dream reversed in the most ghastly form thinkable.* In a South Africa striving for “a better life for all” we are supposed to face one another and work out our problems together; in xenophobia we turn our faces from one another and destroy one another. In xenophobia the fear of the other becomes hatred for the other, and in the end, the ravaging of the other. Xenophobia cries out against the spirit, the dream of the new South Africa. *It is incomprehensible in the light of our history.* No wonder the British newspaper *The Guardian* commented on the spate of xenophobic attacks in South Africa with the following headline: *The end of the rainbow nation.*

However, according to Dr Fanie du Toit of the South African Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, these incidents painfully remind us of the fact that, precisely because of our history, the *potential for racism* is still very much alive in South African society and that it could surface in various forms at any given time.<sup>13</sup> The fact that South Africa is going through a time of political uncertainty – especially in terms of the leadership of the ANC – leads to competing people or groups, who could be quite tolerant otherwise, turning against each other. A recent poll done by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation clearly shows that more people have lost their confidence in the ability of public bodies such as parliament, the police and the justice system to manage the country. One of the results of this “institutional glue” coming undone is the fact that racial tension seems to be flaring up.

According to Dr Zonke Majodina, the deputy chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission, there indeed are numerous charges being filed with the Commission, coming from all levels of South African society: higher education, journalism, the private sector, the farming community, the tourism industry and the justice department.<sup>14</sup> Experiences of racism seem at present to be permeating the very fibre of our society and this challenges our young democracy in a major way.

### **3. A RELIGIOUS RESPONSE?<sup>15</sup>**

#### **3.1 Proclaiming “the law of the hour”?**

How then should the (religious) community in South Africa respond to these challenges? By drafting another confession? Perhaps. Perhaps we have indeed reached another *kairos* in our history. Perhaps we need a new generation of religious leaders who prophetically challenge the authorities and structures that threaten our dream of a better life for all.

Perhaps the church should heed Bonhoeffer’s advice and preach the gospel as the law (*Gebot*) of the hour (1955: 72 f.). When Bonhoeffer refers to the “*Gebot*” he has the

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<sup>13</sup> In an SABC interview.

<sup>14</sup> In a public statement to journalists.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, many issues could be mentioned here. I limit myself to three, restricting myself furthermore to some preliminary and cursory remarks in this regard. I also limit myself to perspectives from the Christian Church, but do not deny the important role that other religious communities have played and should indeed still play in the reconstruction of South Africa.

whole of “ordinary” life in mind – the law creates structures within which humans can live normally and enjoy their existence. Within these existential structures we need not make life and death decisions between good and evil every day. Therefore we should also not overburden life with ethics in a pathological way. Life as a whole is not ethics.

But there can come moments in life when the ordinary existence of human beings is threatened and destroyed in such a manner that the church has no other option but to proclaim a direct ethical and prophetic word. Then the gospel should be proclaimed as the law of, and for, the hour, or else the church will lose all credibility. In this sense the church cannot merely proclaim “principles” that are eternally true, but only the gospel as law of God, which is true, here and now. Because, says Bonhoeffer, that which is “always” true need not be true “today”. God, however, is “always” God-for-us, “today”. Therefore the church cannot sidestep the issues of today, but should rather proclaim and embody the ethical law of God as gospel in an hour of crisis (1955: 72 f.).

Perhaps this hour of crisis is indeed now upon us.

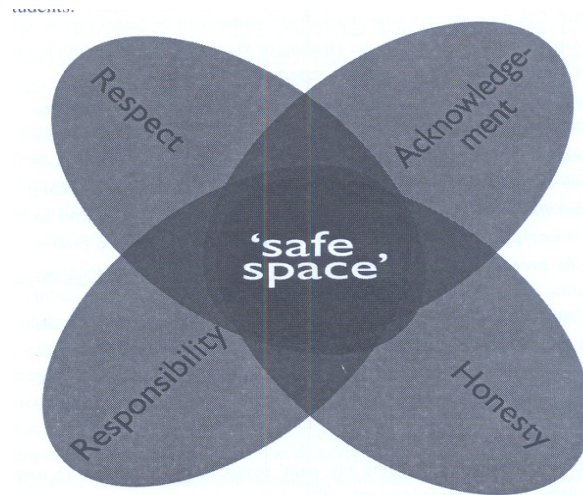
### **3.2 Creating “spaces for interfacing”?**

The “dream” of the new South Africa was translated into reality in the 1990s when leaders started to face and talk to one another. Spaces were created for “inter-facing” and dialogue. I am of the opinion that the concept of *facing* (as also alluded to in the title of this paper) remains of paramount importance if we hope to move forward in South African society. Facing is the opposite of fear, of phobia, of xenophobia. It is also the opposite of denial. The latter seems to be a useful technique, implemented by politicians especially (cf. Cilliers 2007: 158 f.).

The notion of *creative and respectful space* must be revisited. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, which in the past three years has facilitated several interactions in communities across the country, aimed at creating and fostering dialogue between former enemies and ordinary citizens who are attempting to build a common future after generations of violent conflict, has developed an approach that aims at so-called “safe spaces” (cf. Du Toit 2003: 212-217). These spaces originate in relationships where *honesty* is a sine qua non, but held in tension with *respect*. In other words: differences are put on the table and not hidden or masked or denied, but these differences may never lead

to disrespect of the other. On the other hand, *acknowledgment* of past and present transgressions is held in tension with *responsibility* – a deep confession coupled with the sincere desire to act and to transform that which was and still is wrong in our society. In this way, through mutual adherence to these four basic values, a framework for dialogue in a “safe space” can be created: honesty, but with respect; acknowledgment, but with responsibility.

Where these values overlap, we experience “safe spaces”. This could be depicted graphically as follows:



The concept “safe space” does not indicate neutrality or inactivity, or a type of new *securocracy*. On the contrary, it is intended to denote a spiritual space of intimacy, where reciprocal enrichment can take place. What is needed in South Africa is a *reciprocal, safe space for redefining our identity. Religion, being part of culture, can operate as a definitive and formative space-creator and space-setter within culture.*

### **3.3 A “theology of reconstruction”?**

The facts that glaring economic inequalities lie at the root of many of South Africa’s societal problems, and that the church should urgently take part in this debate, have been acknowledged many times before (cf. Smit 1984: 71). In essence, what is needed is a new theological paradigm, often called a *theology of reconstruction* (Villa-Vicencio 1992:2 f.). According to Mugambi (2003: 61), the period of political liberation, with its

concomitant liberation theologies, should now be complemented by a theology of reconstruction, in which the issue of systemic poverty is tackled head-on. According to him, liberation and reconstruction represent different socio-political processes within specific cultural contexts, requiring different theological paradigms (2003: 61).

This theology of reconstruction, however, is not an elitist enterprise – it encompasses, and is nurtured within, the community (Mugambi 2003: 74). The *pedagogic of reconstruction* is aimed at harnessing the energies and resources of the communities in a collaborative effort to rebuild society. The challenge is therefore not to return to old modes of doing theology, but to work with all relevant partners in constructing an innovative theology that builds on the humanity and dignity of life (Villa-Vicencio 1992: 2).

In order to do this the church needs the wisdom of tradition, but also of discernment, to translate the gospel in terms of socio-political realities of the day. In this process there should, on the one hand, always be a suspicion of the possibility of misuse of power by political systems and destructive ideologies, but, on the other hand, also the development of a healthy interaction with systems and ideologies, as opposed to denial and avoidance (Villa-Vicencio 1992: 38). Theology has no other choice but to be actively involved in, for instance, the dismantling of poverty and in protesting against authorities that keep situations of deprivation intact.

In a theology of reconstruction pertinent questions are asked about the economy and developmental endeavours that influence the lives of ordinary people on a daily basis. As such it represents a specific form of contextual theology (cf. Bergman 2003: 106), as it identifies with theological issues such as *healing and restitution*, as they emerge in economic and social realities. A theology of reconstruction takes a hard look at the *root causes* of injustice, especially also in its economic and systemic modes of appearance (Elliot 1987: 181-182). In short, a theology of reconstruction demands a new form of discourse, which is in principle open to other disciplines (Lategan 1995: 225), and strives to address the issue of poverty within a different paradigm than just alleviation through “compassionate hand-outs” (cf. Swart 2004: 9). Perhaps Mugambi’s (2003: 166) description offers a helpful summary of the essence of a theology of reconstruction:

*This theology should be reconstructive rather than destructive; inclusive rather than exclusive; proactive rather than reactive; complementary rather than competitive; integrative rather than disintegrative; programme-driven rather than project driven; people centered rather than word-oriented; participatory rather than autocratic; regenerative rather than degenerative; future-sensitive rather than past-sensitive; cooperative rather than confrontational; consultative rather than impositional.*

In whatever way the religious communities react to the challenges facing South Africa at present, whether it is by way of prophetic protest, or mediatory space-creation, or new theological paradigms, the time for making a difference is running out.

The dream of a new South Africa is rapidly turning into a nightmare.

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## **The Confession of Belhar September 1986**

**1. We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

**2. We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

### **We believe**

- that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another (Eph. 2:11-22);
- that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain (Eph. 4:1-16);
- that 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, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17:20-23);
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity (Phil. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; John 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:1-6; Eph. 3:14-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; Gal. 6:2; 2 Cor. 1:3-4);
- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:7-13; Gal. 3:27-28; James 2:1-13);
- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

### **Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

### **3. We believe**

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22).
- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world (Eph. 4:17-6:23, Rom. 6; Col. 1:9-14; Col. 2:13-19; Col. 3:1-4:6);
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

### **Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which, in such a situation, sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

### **4. We believe**

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;
- that God calls the church to follow him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;

- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right (Deut. 32:4; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Eph. 2:14; Isa. 1:16-17; James 1:27; James 5:1-6; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 6:20-26; Luke 7:22; Luke 16:19-31; Ps. 146; Luke 4:16-19; Rom. 6:13-18; Amos 5);
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

**Therefore, we reject any ideology**

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

**5. We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Eph. 4:15-16; Acts 5:29-33; 1 Peter 2:18-25; 1 Peter 3:15-18).

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

*Note: This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).*