

Reading the Belhar Confession in a Wounded World

Thias Kgatla

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2703-3198>

University of South Africa

kgatla@mweb.co.za

Abstract

This paper was presented by the author as the annual Belhar Confession lecture at the University of the Western Cape on 21 April 2022. First, the paper presents what the Belhar Confession is, as well as how it has evolved in the church. The South African political, economic, social, religious and cultural landscape is portrayed as representing the “wounded world.” Second, the message of the Belhar Confession is applied to the situation, and attention is given to how this triune message can be read in the midst of emerging societal challenges.

Keywords: confession; fake news; inequality; corruption; Pentecostalism; globalisation

Introduction

Forty years ago, when the Church of Jesus Christ was confronted with a dark cloud of theological uncertainties and a political system that was called a “crime against humanity” by the United Nations, the Belhar Confession was conceived. The Belhar Confession was born of the Black struggle against the powers of darkness, greed and unbelief (Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Vosloo 2013, 185–203). At that time, some South Africans had difficulty accepting the Christian religion because of the contradictions they saw in the White churches that brought the gospel to them. The youth, in particular, believed the notion that said: “When the White missionaries came to the country, they had the Bible, and we had the land. The missionaries said to us, ‘Let us close the eyes and pray.’ After the prayer, the Whites had the land, and we had the Bible” (Tutu 2012, 2). Stories such as these had damaging effects on the youth, which were reinforced by the inhumane political system that was in place. Nevertheless, they eventually came to a confession, “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9–10), “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Zandman 2007, n.p.). “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” This was the time when a vibrant Reformed confession was “born” in the dusty streets of the Black

UNISA 

Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae

Volume 50 | Number 1 | 2024 | #11477 | 15 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/11477>

ISSN 2412-4265 (Online), ISSN 1017-0499 (Print)

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township of Belhar, and it became the first Reformed confession in the Southern Hemisphere (Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Vosloo 2013,185–203).

This paper uses a contextual lens to assess how the Belhar Confession can be read in our “wounded world” and how its legacy can give hope to the excluded people living on the margins. It is the contention of the author that the harsh realities in which the poor people find themselves breed frustration, apathy, a weak ego structure, lowered aspiration, anger, and even the call for violence, such as “the landless people,” service delivery groups, and “#FeesMustFall” (Langa et al. 2017, 13). The violence engulfing South Africa can be linked directly to socio-economic inequalities and resultant chronic corruption in the country. I, therefore, argue in this paper that the social and economic conditions we find ourselves in are linked to economic inequalities and chronic corruption in the country.

The Church is in a Wounded World

We are living in a disastrous and wounded world (Nolte and Dreyer 2010, 1–29), affected by ideologies such as racism, fascism, consumerism and greed, characterised by inequalities and corruption (Dreyer 2016, 7). The institutional church, more often than not, finds herself vulnerable and often opts to keep silent in the midst of all atrocities committed, especially against the powerless. What we know is that silence is not innocent (Boesak 1977, 7). Silence may mean a tacit approval of inequalities and corruption, especially as the church becomes enveloped by the powerful and the rich at the expense of the poverty-stricken majority.

The great crisis the church is facing is its inability to be a church in a wounded world (Dreyer 2016, 7). It was Karl Barth who said the challenge facing the church is to be a church and stay a church in the world of contradictions (in Busch 2004, 580). In a country such as South Africa, which is riddled with inequalities and corresponding corruption that results in abject poverty, misery and violent protests, and yet it professes to be the most democratic country in the world with the best constitution ever, it is a betrayal to not see the imbalances that are there. Often, corruption and inequalities are directly and indirectly supported and justified by the rich and the powerful in the name of “law and order” for the control of the economy and authority. They would go as far as to agree that the police, public servants and politicians are corrupt and need radical transformation, but only as far as those reforms keep the regime in place that protects their interests (Torres 2020, 1–54). The cries of the poor languishing in the streets with empty stomachs are not heard, and yet God is calling in Exodus 3:7: “The Lord said: ‘I have indeed seen the affliction of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their oppressors, and I am aware of their sufferings.’”

The first article of the Belhar Confession states: “We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who through Word and Spirit gathers, protects and cares for the church from the beginning of the world and will do so to the end.” The church that is unable to be the property of God and stand where God stands is wounded and

incapacitated to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. To confess Jesus Christ with our mouths and fail to see the plight of the poor in our midst is reflective of the same “colonial arrogance” and bigotry of superiority, and the altruistic moral duty of development of the “other” (Richard 2018, 6). We, therefore, need a confessing church but not a confessional church.¹

The Need for the Confessing Church

The confessing church (German *Bekennende Kirche*) was a movement within German Protestantism during the Nazi regime that arose in opposition to government-sponsored ideologies. This movement sought to preserve the purity of the gospel as stated in the Old and New Testaments. The movement gave birth to the Barmen Theological Declaration of Faith in 1934, which affirmed the confessing church’s loyalty to Christ, and set forth the limits of secular influences from outside and from inside the church. The movement confessed the unique Lordship of Christ over every area of life, together with the rejection of any other ultimate authority in faith and conduct.

A confessing church is, therefore, that movement which resists being co-opted into any world ideologies that compromise the call of Jesus to be Lord and Liberator of the oppressed. The mission of the confessing church is to re-establish church freedom and uncompromised faithfulness to God’s Word, wherever these are under threat. The confessing church’s struggle involves three interwoven dimensions: first, the struggle between the confessing church and false teachings; second, the struggle between the confessing church and secular authorities over spheres of influence; and third, the conflict within the confessing church itself.

The early church was such a confessing church, where confession was a matter of life and death, of saying: “This is what we believe, and even if we have to die, we cannot compromise on it.” To them, to confess meant what they lived by, what they regarded as their reason for living and setting their hearts on what they believed and living by the consequences. When they confessed that Jesus is Lord, they were explicitly and boldly asserting that Caesar or any other emperor was not the Lord. To confess that Jesus is Lord was not only to say something about Jesus but also to say something about the emperor; it was a declaration that Caesar Augustus was not Lord. They were prepared to be charged with treason for their confession. That church could not compromise with fascism, racism, falsehood, inequalities, corruption, the escapism of structural sins, or the plundering of God’s creation. The closing stanza of the Belhar Confession captures this vividly: “Even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence,” we will follow Jesus (Belhar Confession

1 A confessing church hinges on church unity (Belhar Confession 1986). A confessing church aims for unity in Christ more than uniformity of belief by shaping its life around the heart of the gospel, especially when the integrity of the gospel is at risk. A confession of faith is like an anchor that marks the centre of the gospel. It helps the church not to drift far away from the centre. A confessing church cannot stray too far from the centre before the gospel comes into jeopardy.

1986). The Belhar Confession is clear in what the true church intends to live by and even die for.

What is a Confession?

Wolf (1968, 1) describes a confession as a text in which the biblical witness is summarised and focused upon a particular challenge in the life of the church. Confessing is a basic way of defining the daily tasks in the lives of all Christians. It has to do with how our faith bears on a multitude of issues—social, personal, economic, political, and cultural—that affect our daily lives and our relationship with God and his mission to the poor, oppressed, and underclass. The confessing church will be able to read and understand the anguish of the poor, while clearly seeing the agenda of the rich who protect their interests by controlling, for example, how knowledge, economy, and politics should be protected for their interests.

In the Belhar Confession, we can identify three hallmarks of a true church confession. First, confession is a response to an emergency that threatens the very essence of being the church. The confession calls upon the church to transcend limitations that prevent it from being a church. Apartheid, for example, affirmed that South Africans were all made equal and shared the same destiny, yet Indigenous people of the country were not as “equal” as their White counterparts. This was the kind of deceptive language they used and the knowledge they wanted to inculcate in the minds of the Black majority to establish their docility.

To respond to this fundamental challenge, the confessing church had to respond with a big “no” to something that was fundamentally wrong and evil, and with a big “yes” to the affirmation of the fullness of life that the Creator wants all people to share equally. The “yes” of the confession called for “solidarity” and “advocacy,” as in Proverbs 31:8–9: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.” Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. “Stand with all those facing injustice, those who are excluded, and bid farewell to the pseudo-consciousness that tries to re-write the gospel to suit its greedy interests” (Bosch 1983; Clarke 1973).

Second, confession calls the church to a decision based on the entire Scripture and to take the struggle to a rightful level (Bonhoeffer 2004, 4). In a confession, the church is urgently called upon to look at what constitutes the Kairos moment (a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action; the opportune and decisive moment for action). The Kairos moment includes the need to repudiate heresy, not only in church life, but also in society. It is an opportune moment to cooperate with the Spirit of God to act without hesitation. This speaks more to specific, God-ordained times throughout history, sometimes called the “right time” or “appointed season” (Titus 1:3), a time for action against the principalities of darkness and death.

Third, confession begins with the acknowledgement of guilt and complicity (Meiring 2019, n.p.) It is a call to the church not to be caught up in grandstanding or being judgmental in character but to be involved in creating bold humility, interceding, exhorting, and interrogating its actions. This is done while inviting those who are outside (as per the Belhar Accompanying Letter 1986) to receive the gift of unity, reconciliation and justice. I now turn to seven interrelated areas that epitomise the woundedness of South Africa.

Seven Interrelated Areas in the Study of the Belhar Confession

In this paper, seven interrelated areas in the study of the Belhar Confession for today's wounded world are identified as follows:

- 1) Racism in all its forms and manifestations in society.
- 2) Femicide: the killing of women or girls by men.
- 3) Inequality leads to corruption; corruption leads to further inequality.
- 4) Unquenchable and unrestrained global capitalist consumerism and the Belhar Confession.
- 5) Between fake news and the Belhar Confession.
- 6) Climate change and environmental degradation.
- 7) Belhar and ecumenism.

I have already alluded to the fact that the Belhar Confession says “no” to a fundamental situation that threatens the integrity of the gospel; it is, therefore, a big “no” to racism, femicide, unquenchable global consumerism, fake news propaganda, and climate degradation, and a big “yes” for the affirmation of the fullness of life that the Creator wants all his creation to share equally. It is also a big “yes” to the confession that calls for solidarity with those who are on the margins and are excluded by design, as well as the treatment of all creation as a gift to be treasured, shared equally, and looked after.

Racism, Discrimination, and Xenophobia

South Africa has a long history of discrimination based on race. During the apartheid era, a plethora of racist laws were enacted in order to control racial configuration. According to Plaatjies-Van Huffel, racism was officially instituted and theologically justified by the White Reformed churches at the table of Lord's Supper in 1857 (Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Vosloo 2013, 185–203). In response to the situation, which constituted its Kairos Moment, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) said “no” to that ideology and “yes” to unity, reconciliation and justice of all believers at its first General Synod in 1994 (Acta URCSA, 1994). It was later joined by other Reformed churches (such as the United Protestant Church in Belgium, the Reformed Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church in America) around the world that accepted the gift of the Belhar Confession. Despite Christian witness, racism in South Africa is glaring everywhere in society, even in the churches and institutions of higher learning.

Racism continues to wreak havoc on human harmony and common goals in a country which claims that more than 80% of its citizens are Christians (Schoeman 2017, 7). In its vacillation, racism adopts offensive language and sometimes variates into euphemisms and coded language in order to render its actions invisible through words (Flyke 2013, n.p.). Often, racism employs altruistic gestures to hide its vicious face (*vroom oneerlikheid* or holy dishonesty). As an ideology of racial discrimination and racial inequality, it employs its tentacles of racial inequality, racial discrimination, and “othering” (marginalisation of people who have different skin colour, language, culture or identity). It is both explicit and implicit in its operation, depending on the circumstance and what it wishes to achieve. A reading of the Belhar Confession is not complete without mastering how elusive and tactical racism is.

Femicide: The Killing of Women or Girls by Men

South Africa has one of the highest femicide rates in the world, with recent statistics released on violence against women putting South Africa at number five out of 183 nations. The latest crime statistics released by the Department of Police reveal the depth of the crisis: Nearly 3 000 women were murdered between April 2018 and March 2020 (Mlaba 2020, n.p.). According to the latest reports, approximately 51% of South African women have experienced physical violence of some kind. President Ramaphosa calls femicide a second pandemic after Covid-19 (State of the Nation Address 2022).

The crisis of femicide in South Africa calls on all churches to do what they did to apartheid in the 1970s to 1980s. Confessing that Jesus is Lord while remaining silent on the brutalising of his children by fellow humans, does not constitute a big “yes” from the Belhar Confession. However, declaring femicide a national crisis and announcing *status confessionis* does constitute a big “yes” and is a step toward unity, reconciliation and justice. Bonhoeffer cautions that “the church is the church when it is a church for others” (Bosch 1991, 374). The church is set in the reality of the world, and this reality should disclose God. The church is the bridge for the truth of the Word. Self-disclosure means bridge-building that leads to the church sharing its life with the poor, hence Hoedendijk’s expression of “church inside out.” As stated in 1 Thessalonians (2:8): “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”

Inequality Leads to Corruption; Corruption Leads to further Inequality

According to a World Bank report on “Inequality in Southern Africa: An Assessment of the Southern African Customs Union,” released on 9 March 2022, South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, ranking first among 164 countries. The World Bank also reported that the richest 20% of people in South Africa control almost 70% of the resources (Mlaba 2020, n.p.). South Africa is a huge ship that is sinking.

Equally, based on statistics of its inequalities, we can say that South Africa is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Corruption thrives on economic inequalities, while

economic inequalities provide a fertile breeding ground for corruption, and in turn, corruption leads to further inequalities (Uslaner 2007, 3). The path from inequalities to corruption (Uslaner 2007, 14) may be indirect, but the connection between the two is key to understanding why some societies are more corrupt or unequal than others (Gupta, Davodi, Alonso-Terme 1980). Uslaner (2007, 20) describes the “inequality trap” as a phenomenon in cultures where high inequality levels lead to low trust in out-groups (majority poor outsiders) and increase high trust among the in-group (minority wealthy insiders) who, in turn, closes the ranks.

Mgoqi (2018, n.p.) defines out-group communities as people who experience extreme poverty in a land of plenty, chronic domestic violence, homelessness, violence, powerlessness, unemployment, excluded and living in insecurity and squalid conditions. They live in environments where they are fundamentally denied choices and opportunities, their humanity is violated, they are denied the basic capacity to participate in society, and they have no space to lead a decent life (Mgoqi 2018, n.p.). They are susceptible to violence and live in marginal or fragile environments, have no access to clean water, and their identity is shaped by damaging aspects of poverty, such as poverty of motivation, poverty of initiative, poverty of hope, poverty of opportunity, poverty of resources, poverty of spirit and, in fact, poverty of death (Mgoqi 2018, n.p.).

Unfortunately, the very people who gain the most when the poor are crushed are those who control the political and economic systems (Uslaner 2007, 21). Many of these people have considerable devotion to the “orderly” social status quo that protects their wealth and upward mobility (Mgoqi 2018, n.p.). They can hardly give up their privileges to share with those who are at the bottom of the poverty ladder.

Uslaner (2007, 4) further argues that the roots of corruption are largely not institutional, but rather stem from economic inequality and mistrust in the ruling elite, where the majority of the poor become despondent and lose faith that their future will ever be bright. They resign to their fate as they begin to harbour resentment towards their wealthy neighbours (Uslaner 2007, 20). Inequality breeds corruption by turning the majority of poor people inward and reducing their trust in their wealthy neighbours, and then the “inequality trap” ensues: Inequality=low trust=the system. Finally, this vicious circle leads to violent protests such as #FeesMustFall, service delivery protests, or “landless people” marches.

The opposite of the “inequality trap,” on the other hand, is when the majority of people trust that the foundation of the “well-ordered society” is in place and when they believe that “most people can be trusted” and are looking out for the welfare of others (Uslaner 2007, 21). High levels of protests and violence denote a low level of trust in the people who should deliver services. Citizens who have trust in their leaders are usually more satisfied with what their leaders are doing than the citizens who do not trust them (Uslaner 2007, 23).

Unquenchable and Unrestrained Global Capitalist Consumerism and the Belhar Confession

Globalising hegemony, as some scholars (Beerkens 2006; Ibrahim 2013; Moss 2009) call it, is a global “driving force” by large companies, for example, Coca-Cola and McDonald’s, with their drive for an unlimited acquisition of wealth (in 2020 the Coca-Cola² company was very upset with the footballer Cristiano Ronaldo when he pushed aside two Coca-Cola bottles placed in front of him for “Aqua,” picking up a bottle of water and encouraging others to do the same).

On the religious front, fundamentalist religious groups such as megachurches export prosperity gospel in unprecedented measures, seriously distorting social values and communal life (Holland 2011, 1). Furthermore, Pentecostalism, under the influence of the health-and-wealth gospel, has become a globalised, entrepreneurial spirit that flourishes on the appalling social conditions in which poor people live, while enriching powerful self-styled prophets (Kgatla 2018, 8). This cult is built on the notion that God loves his people and wants them all to have material possessions in abundance, and it brushes aside all scriptures that clearly locate human suffering as part of God’s plan (Job and Psalm 73) (Kgatla 2018, 8).

Framing the cause of poverty as the work of Satan (principalities of powers of darkness in the space but not human-constructed) is an outrageous act of criminality. This view serves the delusional escapism that prevents the facing of responsibility for corruption, inequalities, greed and unfair policies by blaming abstract forces that have nothing to do with the crime (Myers 2015, 3). Portioning blame to metaphorical beings, while ignoring the evil social structures of inequality and violence, is a manifestation of chronic deception that betrays the entire agenda of Christianity (Cannon 2014, 2). Boyle (2003, 5) speaks of a world that has lost the coolness of mind where soberness has dried up. This constitutes the serious “woundedness” of the world in modern times. True confession should, appropriately, declare a big “no” to this lie while saying a big “yes” to the fullness of life, as Christ promised the poor. The witness of the Belhar Confession is made unequivocally clear in such environments.

Between Fake News and the Belhar Confession

Truth and truthfulness are indispensable to Christian witness. Jesus told his disciples that they would know the truth, and the truth would make them free (John 8:32). Free from what? Free from the enslaving fake bubble of falsehood (Chatteris 2017). Most professing Christians view truth according to Jesus’ statements: “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Christians view truth as part of God’s character (Exodus 34:6–7), which identifies truth as part of the very character of the Being who leads their lives (Keyes 2004).

2 Coca-Cola and McDonald's are multi-national corporations that stand for global consumerism and they have been complementing each other since 1933 (Starman 2014, 3).

According to Wu (in D'Acona 2017, n.p.), the propagators of fake news are “attention merchants.” Fake news operates like propaganda that is employed only to the extent of persuading rather than informing. Wu (in D'Acona 2017, n.p.) says that fake news is full of hoaxes, misinformation, and distortion, sometimes serving populism (Levinson 2018, 1). Post-truth manifestation takes many forms in South Africa—including politics, economics, religion and cultural practices. Politics and lying have become the art of survival for the incorrigible. Kestler-D'Amours (2017, 1) calls post-truth the “fake news” of our time. She contests that the fake-news phenomenon is global and flourishes in an environment of social media. Fake news thrives on the selection of information, exaggeration, distortion, and omission, which add up to deception (Kestler-D'Amours 2017, 2). Levinson (2018, 1) sees “fake news” as a manufactured action designed to imitate a real action, in the hope that the listeners will interpret it as meaningful. Levinson also describes fake news as news in which falsities appear by deliberate intent rather than by accident or in error. Political parties use fake news (which is unrealistic and unachievable) in their manifestos in order to win elections. In the capitalist corporate world, the essence of advertising is not to tell the truth but to persuade, and this inevitably entails exaggeration, and sometimes omission of pertinent facts, which Levinson (2018, 1) calls deception.

The stark reality today is that some mainstream politicians are unwilling to surrender their view of what the truth is (Glanzberg 2009, 1–9). High-profile people such as journalists, politicians, religious leaders, and corporate executives sacrifice the integrity of their social positions in pursuit of self-interest at the demise of the majority of people inhabiting the earth. The proliferation of corruption, abject poverty and acute inequality flourishes where dishonesty and distortion of truth are rife. Using state propaganda to fake the material conditions under which people are living, with the sole purpose of promoting self-interest, obscures the facts that the elite are enriching themselves and their allies at the expense of the majority and the poor (Levinson 2018,1)

It is important for the Belhar Confession to explore the voracity of the post-truth era that triggered the lessening of true values and the introduction of fake news and alternative facts (Ogola 2017, 1–16) into the world. It is also important to investigate the connection between these new phenomena and globalisation, as well as how they dovetail, since they have a big impact on the prophetic church and its witness. Globalisation gives a posture of altruism, whereas the underlying philosophy is to pursue the same interests that were pursued during the time of colonialisation. Deception and distortion have become commonplace at all levels of the contemporary political, economic and religious world (Ababa 2002, 2). Unfortunately, many churches have fashioned themselves accordingly in South Africa. In a country of many resources, high levels of unemployment, greed, corruption, and drive for instant wealth, truth is sacrificed on the altar of expediency. Telling lies in order to achieve personal interest (sometimes at the expense of the entire nation) has become a norm as long as the person is not caught and brought to book. The voice of the Belhar Confession is made ostensibly clear on matters like these.

Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and the Belhar Confession

Nordhaus (2018, 44)—Nobel laureate in physics of 2018—describes a new era in which the world is seen as a “climate casino”; he said that we are rolling the global-warming dice. Climate change and its connections to the global economy, consumerism, racism, femicide and fake news are intrinsically linked to church confession (Corringe 2014, 3; Duhrow 1987, 10). What is happening with creation today? The earth has been turned into a casino economy, involving reckless living with absolute disregard for the poor, for the creation, and, in fact, flinging the gift God has given to humanity in his face (Nordhaus 2018, 441). German human rights theologian Ulrich Duchrow (1987) questions whether the church still champions the life of all human beings and the whole earth or whether it sides with the global economic system, which tolerates the death of humanity and destruction of the earth. The Belhar Confession is in the service of truth, unity, reconciliation and justice, and it resists any temptation of being co-opted into the elitist, populist or expedient theologies.

Belhar and Ecumenism

Ecumenism is the movement to promote Christian unity. Jesus founded one holy Catholic and Apostolic church; Catholic with an upper case “C” is used for the proper noun, naming the Catholic (Universal) Church. Ecumenism is needed because, despite the will of God, we—the people—get divided when individuals and groups don’t hear what God is saying. The Belhar Confession is well placed as a “gift” to serve unity, reconciliation and justice in the church of Jesus Christ. The first six statements paint negativity of the woundedness of the world, and the last contributes to how Christians need each other to fight evil forces; and in the way the world communities need each other in their fight against evil forces.

The Belhar Confession in the Service of Truth, Unity and Justice: Seven propositions

In conclusion, I want to elaborate on seven propositions to summarise what the Belhar Confession can and cannot do to the community of faith in a wounded world:

- 1) The Belhar Confession stirs believers to action, humbles them to see themselves as those gathered, protected and cared for by a Triune God, and inspires them to witness unapologetically about Christ the crucified in the wounded world.
- 2) The Belhar Confession performs a critical function by continuously challenging the church to “hear what the spirit is telling the churches” (Revelation 3:22) while calling her to “read the signs of the time.” It accompanies a prophetic voice, constantly modelling its witness to that of pre-exilic Old Testament prophets such as Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and Hosea, who called Israel to repentance and to pursue social justice, or they would otherwise perish (cf. De Gruchy 2016). The Belhar Confession checks, as it were, whether the church has authentic or false teeth and pronounces what she does or fails to do.

- 3) The Belhar Confession denounces the structural and social establishments that deny the poor fullness of life, and denounces the church's compromising on the sin of indifference to the social and structural sins in the world.
- 4) The Belhar Confession acts like a gadfly in the house of the church, creating uneasiness and tension as it resists complacency (Bosch 1991, 246) and opposes any inclination towards self-preservation. It stings like a bee, causing annoyance to the privileged and rich while creating hope for the poor, downtrodden and marginalised. It cuts like a two-edged sword, leaving injuries in the very house it was born.
- 5) The Belhar Confession, in contrast to false ideologies or truncated theologies serving the interests of elites, sides with orphans, the destitute, oppressed, persecuted, those condemned for being prophetic, and those killed for being the opposite of the greedy and corrupt of this world. It condemns court prophets or priests who support kings and are shameless in their proclamation of "fake gospel" and gives legitimation to unjust policies and idolatrous practices (Brueggemann 2017, n.p.). The Belhar Confession engages in innovative collaborations to share and learn from the transformational services of ecumenical partners.
- 6) The Belhar Confession speaks with clarity and boldness against political, economic, cultural and social practices that contradict the purpose of God (Brueggemann 2017, n.p.). It re-imagines an alternative world of well-being, justice and peace, prosperity for all, and security (Boesak, Weusmann, and Amjad-Ali 2009, 27). In the Belhar Confession, we see the possibility of replacing human suffering and hurt in this world if the powerful change their hearts and embrace the grace of the liberating God's presence among the poor (Boesak 2009, 20). Its main aim is the search for social justice and the liberation of the oppressed and the downtrodden. It always draws public attention, not to the church's interest, but to God's liberating presence (Moltmann 2000, 120).
- 7) The Belhar Confession constitutes prophetic witness, that is, God authorising voices to speak on his behalf to the world as Good News to those who are in distress and carrying indelible scars of exploitation, injustice and misery, and pronounces on those who are following their own selfish and corrupt ways to turn around and face the truth (Nyirawung 2010, n.p.). In response to social and structural sins, the prophetic church is an agent of social transformation and re-alignment. In this regard, the Belhar Confession calls for unity, reconciliation and justice, as in Amos 5:24, "But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Conclusion

Finally, I ask you to join me in cherishing the spirit of the Belhar Confession, to feel great and privileged to be able to participate in the call of this vibrant reformed confession "midwifery" in the Southern Hemisphere, in the dusty streets of Black townships. May the spirit of the Belhar Confession connect our vast community of alumni and friends across URCSA, member churches in Southern Africa, ecumenical

partners from Africa, North America, Latin America, Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, in fact, in the whole world.

Acknowledgement

My sincere appreciation to UWC and URCSA. You have bestowed on me the greatest honour that a university and church could possibly bestow on a person: the opportunity to serve as the servant of the Belhar Confession legacy. I cherish this trust, and I will honour it.

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