

GIELIE LOUBSER

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B | *the* **belhar** confession

IN CONVERSATION WITH ONE ANOTHER

DEVELOPED FOR THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE DR CHURCH

B | *the* **belhar** confession

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one | READING FROM THE BIBLE AND PRAYING

Begin your meeting with the reading of a Bible passage that means something to you, e.g. the weekly passage according to the Revised Common Lectionary, or else a passage that your group is journeying with. Use the questions of Walking in the Word (such as: What strikes you? / What questions come to mind?), or else use the methodology of the listening cycle in the Season of Listening (Resting, Hearing, Living). Alternatively, use any other methodology that can assist you and your group to key into the Word of God collectively.

{ WE SHALL NOW WATCH A SHORT FILM TO EXPLAIN THE PURPOSE OF OUR GATHERING. }

two | SHORT FILM 1: THE PROCESS

The general synod of the Dutch Reformed Church decided in 2011 to incorporate the Belhar Confession as part of its confessional basis, and to do so in a church orderly way. As far back as in 1990 and in 1998, the general synod of the Dutch Reformed Church had declared that the Belhar Confession as such is not in conflict with the other articles of faith of the church.

As a result discussions around the Belhar Confession have become the order of the day in the Dutch Reformed Church. It is a discourse that occurs in many a church gathering – from synods and presbyteries, to church councils and right down to the small groups of church congregations.

These discussions amount to nothing less than a thorough spiritual discerning process. Together we are going to listen to what the Word and the Holy Spirit has to say to us, and nobody is going to be forced or manipulated into any direction. We shall remain receptive to the Word of God while in prayer we await His Spirit, and we shall respect one another at all times.

As believers we accept that God changes us through His Word and Spirit. For us to be part of this process, there are five spiritual discerning questions we could pose to help us on our way:

1. Who is God?
2. Who are we in Christ?
3. For whose benefit does God create us to be a neighbour?
4. How does God use us in this world?
5. What does God now ask of us?

Firstly, we are going to talk about these matters and relate to one another what it is we believe about them.

Then we are going to compare the content of our own beliefs with what the Belhar Confession says, and ask ourselves:

DOES THE BELHAR CONFESSION HELP US ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS FOR OUR TIMES?

three | INTRODUCTION BY DISCUSSION LEADER

Distribute A3/A4 sheets that contain the five questions written on them in the small groups and explain the process (an example appears on page 5). The idea during this round is to remind one another about the passages and accounts found in the Bible and in our tradition of faith.

We will use the five questions:

1. Who is God?
2. Who are we in Christ?
3. For whose benefit does God create us to be a neighbour?
4. How does God use us in this world?
5. What does God now ask of us?

{ WE ARE GOING TO TALK ABOUT THESE MATTERS AND TELL ONE ANOTHER WHAT IT IS WE BELIEVE ABOUT THEM. }

The rules of the game in our discussion about the Bible and the faith tradition are as follows:

1. It is not important to be able to quote specific Bible passages or references.
2. The list need not be a comprehensive one.
3. Our purpose is to start verbalising what it is we believe, in response to the questions.
4. We need not draw conclusions straight away.
5. We must allow for as many members of the group as possible to contribute.

AFTER A COFFEE / TEA BREAK AND REFRESHMENTS, WE WILL COMPARE THE PASSAGES AND ACCOUNTS ON OUR BELIEFS WITH THE BELHAR CONFESSION, AND ASK OURSELVES:

DOES THE BELHAR CONFESSION HELP US ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS FOR OUR TIMES?

{ AS AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR DISCUSSION ABOUT THE FIVE SPIRITUAL DISCERNING QUESTIONS, WE WILL VIEW THE FOLLOWING SHORT FILM. }

four | SHORT FILM 2: FIVE SPIRITUAL DISCERNING QUESTIONS

As believers we believe that God transforms us through God's Word and Spirit. To be part of this requires spiritual discernment. There are five spiritual discerning questions that could assist us:

1. Who is God?
2. Who are we in Christ?
3. For whose benefit does God create us to be a neighbour?
4. How does God use us in this world?
5. What does God now ask of us?

THE FIRST QUESTION IS:

>> **Who is God?**

Believers have already answered this question in a very old set of confessional articles, namely the Apostolic Creed. God is threefold – Father, Son and Spirit – and ultimately God is One. This Trinity God calls on people to become his children, He gathers them as his flock and then sends them out to be the light and salt in the world.

If this is who God is, we subsequently have a good idea of who we are in Christ.

THEREFORE, THE SECOND QUESTION THAT BELIEVERS WILL ASK, IS:

>> **Who are we in Christ?**

The selfsame Apostolic Creed (confession) tells us who we are: one, holy, catholic (universal) Christian church, the communion of saints. Through Christ we share in the body of Christ, and in Him we are unified by deep ties with the brothers and sisters whom God has given to us.

If we know who God is and we know who Christ is, *THE THIRD QUESTION ASKED BY BELIEVERS WHO WISH TO LIVE BY VIRTUE OF THE WORD AND SPIRIT, IS:*

>> **For whose benefit does God create us to be a neighbour?**

In this Jesus himself provides us with the answer: Love your neighbour as you love yourself. This love that God harbours for people and which God has in store for us who are in Christ, must be channeled from us to those who cross our path.

The ability to mend relationships, to dispense love, and to live the new world is given by God to us. It is God's express choice that God's love flows through us to all people who we come into contact with.

Once we understand these things thoroughly, *THE FOURTH QUESTION, FOLLOWING DIRECTLY FROM THE PRECEDING, WILL BE:*

>> **How does God use us in this world?**

The fact that the church is the bearer of light and healing gives us an indication of how God wants to repair this world. The early believers spoke about the *missio Dei*, that with which God busies Himself. God is present where people experience pain, where folk are suffering; God is where people are being unjustly treated, and He steps in where unfairness is the order; God is there where people are being abused.

Through the ages believers have vowed to follow God in the tasks that He has set himself. We are called to share the abundance we have in Christ with others, and in effect to be a blessing to them.

This brings us to the action question, *THE FIFTH QUESTION:*

>> **What does God subsequently ask of us?**

That we imitate Him in this. That we serve Him by serving others in the day-to-day practice of life. Is it easy to imitate God in this? No. But the faithful have always believed God will provide

them with the strength to do the right thing, that He will assist them to stand up for the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

five | TABLE DISCUSSION 1

During your group sessions, make lists on the A3/A4 work sheets of some texts / passages and Bible stories – from the Old Testament, the New Testament and from the Confessions of the church – that you would like to reference in order to answer each of the five questions.

Allow yourselves 8 minutes per question, and see how many Biblical passages and accounts you are able to list as a group. Appoint someone to keep an eye on the time, so that all the questions can be duly addressed.

5.1 Who is God?

NOTE: It is not important to quote the specific passage or reference. This need not be a comprehensive list. The purpose for us here is to start verbalising what we believe in as regards this question. We need not draw final conclusions at this stage. Try to involve as many members of the group as possible in making contributions.

OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS ABOUT WHO GOD IS.	PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ABOUT WHO GOD IS.	CONFESSIONS OF THE CHURCH ABOUT WHO GOD IS.
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5.2 Who are we in Christ?

NOTE: It is not important to be able to quote the specific passage or reference. The list need not be comprehensive. Our purpose here is to start verbalising what we believe in regard to the question. We need not draw final conclusions about the question at this stage. Try to involve as many members of the group as possible in the making of contributions.

OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS ABOUT WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST.	PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ABOUT WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST.	CONFESSIONS OF THE CHURCH ABOUT WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST.
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5.3 For whose benefit does God create us to be a neighbour?

NOTE: It is not all-important to be able to quote the specific passage or reference. The list need not be a comprehensive one. Our purpose here is to start verbalising what it is we believe in, in regard to the question. We need not draw final conclusions about it at this stage. Try to involve as many members of the group as possible in making contributions.

OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS ABOUT FOR WHOSE BENEFIT GOD HAS MADE US TO BE A NEIGHBOUR.	PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ABOUT FOR WHOSE BENEFIT GOD HAS MADE US TO BE A NEIGHBOUR.	CONFESSIONS OF THE CHURCH ABOUT FOR WHOSE BENEFIT GOD HAS MADE US TO BE A NEIGHBOUR.
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5.4 How does God use us in this world?

NOTE: It is not all-important to be able to quote the specific passage or reference. The list need not be a comprehensive one. Our purpose here is to begin to verbalise what it is we believe in, as regards the question. We need not draw final conclusions at this stage. Try to involve as many members of the group as possible in making contributions.

OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS ABOUT HOW GOD USES US IN THIS WORLD.	PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ABOUT HOW GOD USES US IN THIS WORLD.	CONFESSIONS OF THE CHURCH ABOUT HOW GOD USES US IN THIS WORLD.
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5.5 What does God ask from us now?

NOTE: It is not all that important to be able to quote the specific passage or reference. The list need not be a comprehensive one. Our purpose here is to start verbalising (putting into words) what it is we believe as regards this question. We need not draw final conclusions already. Try to involve as many members of the group as possible to make contributions.

OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS ABOUT WHAT GOD ASKS FROM US RIGHT NOW.	PASSAGES & ACCOUNTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ABOUT WHAT GOD ASKS FROM US RIGHT NOW.	CONFESSIONS OF THE CHURCH ABOUT WHAT GOD ASKS FROM US RIGHT NOW.
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six | FEEDBACK



Let the group in their session pin their A3/A4 sheets to a wall. Now is a good time to break for coffee / tea and refreshments.

seven | INTRODUCTION BY THE DISCUSSION LEADER

We have now put into words what it is we believe in and we did so without putting anyone into a box or manipulating them to think in a particular direction.

NOW LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT QUESTION NUMBER SIX:

>> Does the Belhar Confession help us answer these questions with regards to the times we are living in?

{ WE ARE FIRST GOING TO TAKE A LOOK AT A SHORT FILM THAT TRIES TO ILLUSTRATE THE STANCE OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION IN RELATION TO THESE FIVE QUESTIONS. }

eight | SHORT FILM 3: IN DIALOGUE WITH THE BELHAR CONFESSION

How should we regard the Belhar Confession? There are numerous believers across the world who say the Belhar Confession is a gift to the church. Let us again look at the five spiritual discerning questions, and ask ourselves what the unique contribution of the Belhar Confession in each of the instances is.

1. Who is God?

From the time of the Israelites right through to the early church and the confessional articles of the church, believers have confessed that God is one, that God intercedes in human affairs and that He shapes human beings into a community of believers. The Belhar Confession confirms all this without adding anything.

2. Who are we in Christ?

We have already seen how the early church embraced the unity created by Christ and proclaimed to us by Paul. With the Confession of Belhar the church endeavours to repeat this confession but at the same time to deepen it. The main thrust of this deepening focuses on the church confession that unity is a gift. But because it is a gift it is also a command. This command has two sides. One cannot force people into unity. And we must remove the obstacles in the way of unity. The church confession implies that because we live out unity, it also renders the Good Tiding of Christ visible. Broken relationships, people who live in enmity and the people who hate one another will not have the last say over our lives.

3. For whose benefit did God make us to be a neighbour?

Jesus uses words like “salt” and “light” when He explains that who we are has a bearing on the relationships in which we stand. His Spirit reconciles us with God and shapes us into people who love, who reconcile and who promote the triumph of good over evil. While believers have for centuries believed that the Good Tiding is about reconciliation, it was not spelt out clearly by the early confessions how this will affect our relationship to our fellow humans. The Belhar Confession reminds us that reconciliation with God cannot be made sense of in a one-sided way. The reconciliation with God leads straight to reconciliation with people around us. This renders life new, it makes society different.

4. How does God use us in this world?

The Bible is brimful with accounts of people who experienced great distress. They were incarcerated, or were poor, or felt dejected. And over and over again they confessed that God was with them in these situations. The Bible is likewise brimful of accounts of believers who could have helped these folk, but did not. Spiritual leaders in the Bible admonish people routinely that God hears the cry of the suffering people and that He intercedes for them. The Belhar Confession reminds believers of this reality, of the fact that if these are the people with whom God involves Himself, we have no choice other than to be there ourselves where God is, and to do what He asks from us.

5. What does God want from us now?

The very first confession of the followers of Jesus stated that Jesus is the Lord. By that they were saying Jesus is the God whom the Jews had known for thousands of years. The implication of this was that they would be more obedient to God than to earthly powers such as the emperor. The early church referred to Jesus as their Head. The implication was that Jesus had the last say over their life with one another. The Belhar Confession reaffirms both these confessions and spells out the implications for our times: Even in the face of punishment and opposition, we dare not pay more attention to governments and societal rules than to Jesus’ command that we love our fellow human beings.

nine | TABLE DISCUSSION 2

Let someone from the group read out loud what you have written down in response to question 1. Then let someone read the Belhar Confession’s article 1 to the group. Draw a circle around everything that is in agreement with what you have said, and underline everything that is not in accordance.

Do the same in the case of question 2 and article 2; and so forth.

1. Who is God?

READ ARTICLE 1 OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION

// 1. 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 to the end. //

2. Who are we in Christ?

READ ARTICLE 2 OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION.

// 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; Joh. 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 baptised 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 everything that may threaten or hinder this unity; Fil 2:1-5; 1 Cor 12:4-31; Joh 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 take form only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the diversity of 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; Jam 2:1-13;

that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church;

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which absolutises either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutisation 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 whilst 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. For whose benefit does God make us a neighbour?

READ ARTICLE 3 OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION.

// We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Matt 5:13-16; Matt 5:9; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21 – 22;

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;

that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity; Eph 4:17 – 6:23; Rom 6; Col 1:9-14; Kol 2:13-19; Col 3:1 – 4:6;

that God's life-giving 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;

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 colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. How does God use us in this world?

READ ARTICLE 4 OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION

// 4. We believe that God has revealed Godself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that in a world full of injustice and enmity God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that God calls the church to follow in this; that God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that God frees the prisoners and restores sight to the blind; that God supports the downtrodden, protects the strangers, 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 people of God to do what is good and to seek the right; Deut 32:4; Luk 2:14; Joh 14:27; Eph 2:14; is 1:16-17; Jam 1:27; Jam 5:1-6; Luk 1:46-55; Luk 6:20-26; Luk 7:22; Luk 16:19-31;

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; Ps 146; Luk 4:16-19; Rom 6:13-18; Am 5;

that the church, belonging to God, should stand where God 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. What does God ask from us now?

READ ARTICLE 5 OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION.

// 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 Pet 2:18-25; 1 Pet 3:15-18.

Jesus is Lord.

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

ten · **DISCUSSION OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION**

This discussion takes place in the large group. The role of the discussion leader is to make sure that the discussion remains open, invites participation and is conducted respectfully. Keep on reminding the group that we are awaiting guidance from the Holy Spirit for the road ahead.

How does the Belhar Confession help us answer the questions for our times?

eleven · **CONFESSION OF FAITH**

Come let us confess our faith, not only together with the church of today but together with the church of all ages.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.
Amen

twelve · **ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION: HOW DO THE 5 QUESTIONS ASSIST YOU?**

// Once upon a time there was a grandfather who was driving his grandson to the bus station after a vacation spent together. They were driving in silence, when the grandson asked out of the blue: "Grandpa, why do you believe?" //

The grandpa fixed his gaze in the road in front of him, and gave a measured answer: "Let me tell you about God. God is one. God is Father, Son and Spirit. God loves the world. That is why God extends a hand to us to heal the world."

In silence they drove on. The grandfather was thankful for this opportunity to share his thoughts with his grandson. With great care he went on to add something: "Part of the healing, is what happens to you and me. Let me tell you who we are. We are in Christ. This changes us."

"But how does it change us?" the grandson asks. "You see yourself as a fellow human for others, someone through whom God can channel his love to others," the grandpa answered.

They stopped at the bus station and the grandpa could see the youngster had one last question before he got out: "Is this how God wants to heal our world grandpa?" "Yes, everyone who thinks like this, are being

called to help heal the world, because this is the great task of God," the grandfather said as they parted.

As the bus departed and they waved to one another, the old man muttered to himself: "My child, you must never forget that God grants us the power to love, despite the world being filled with people who break it up even further."

Maybe your grandchild, or someone else, will ask you another question, which you might answer in a different fashion. These five spiritual discerning questions, however, can help us to answer the question as to what it means to believe, and to be a church.

thirteen · ACCOMPANYING LETTER

The Belhar Confession has an Letter Appendix that comes with it. Therein the drafting and acceptance of the Confession is explained. Read it by all means, to help you come to a considered conclusion about what God's will is for you and for the body of Christ.

// 1. We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation. We are aware that such an act of confession is not lightly undertaken, but only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake. In our judgement, the present church and political situation in our country and particularly within the Dutch Reformed Church family calls for such a decision. Accordingly, we make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. Along with many, we confess our guilt, in that we have not always witnessed clearly enough in our situation and so are jointly responsible for the way in which those things which were experienced as sin and confessed to be so or should have been experienced as and confessed to be sin have grown in time to seem self-evidently right and to be ideologies foreign to the scriptures. As a result many have been given the impression that the gospel was not really at stake. We make this confession because we are convinced that all sorts of theological arguments have contributed to so disproportionate an emphasis on some aspects of the truth that it has in effect become a lie.

2. We are aware that the only authority for such a confession and the only grounds on which it may be made are the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. Being fully aware of the risks involved in taking this step, we are nevertheless convinced that we have no alternative. Furthermore, we are aware that no other motives or convictions, however valid they may be, would give us the right to confess in this way. An act of confession may only be made by the Church for the sake of its purity and credibility and that of its message. As solemnly as we are able, we hereby declare before everyone that our only motive lies in our fear that the truth and power of the gospel itself is threatened in this situation. We do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any theologies or achieve any ulterior purposes. Yet, having said this, we know that our deepest intentions may only be judged at their true value by God before whom all is revealed. We do not make this confession from God's throne and from on high, but before God's throne and before other human beings. We plead therefore, that this Confession should not be misused by anyone with ulterior motives and also that it should not be resisted to serve such motives. Our earnest desire is to lay no false stumbling blocks in the way, but to point to the true stumbling block Jesus Christ the rock.

3. This confession is not aimed at specific people or groups of people or a church or churches. We proclaim it against a false doctrine, against an ideological distortion that threatens the gospel itself in our church

and our country. Our heartfelt longing is that no-one will identify themselves with this objectionable doctrine and that all who have been wholly or partially blinded by it will turn themselves away from it. We are deeply aware of the deceiving nature of such a false doctrine and know that many who have been conditioned by it have to a greater or lesser extent learnt to take a half-truth for the whole. For this reason we do not doubt the Christian faith of many such people, their sincerity, honour, integrity and good intentions, and their in many ways estimable practice and conduct. However, it is precisely because we know the power of deception that we know we are not liberated by the seriousness, sincerity or intensity of our certainties, but only by the truth in the Son. Our church and our land have an intense need of such liberation. Therefore it is that we speak pleadingly rather than accusingly. We plead for reconciliation, that true reconciliation which follows on conversion and change of attitudes and structures. And while we do so we are aware that an act of confession is a two-edged sword, that none of us can throw the first stone, and none is without a beam in their own eye. We know that the attitudes and conduct that work against the gospel are present in all of us and will continue to be so. Therefore this Confession must be seen as a call to a continuous process of soul-searching together, a joint wrestling with the issues, and a readiness to repent in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in a broken world. It is certainly not intended as an act of self-justification and intolerance, for that would disqualify us in the very act of preaching to others.

4. Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling-blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. We know that such an act of confession and process of reconciliation will necessarily involve much pain and sadness. It demands the pain of repentance, remorse and confession; the pain of individual and collective renewal and a changed way of life. It places us on a road whose end we can neither foresee nor manipulate to our own desire. On this road we shall unavoidably suffer intense growing pains while we struggle to conquer alienation, bitterness, irreconciliation and fear. We shall have to come to know and encounter both ourselves and others in new ways. We are only too well aware that this confession calls for the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society that have developed over many years. However, we confess that for the sake of the gospel, we have no other choice. We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed Church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together, and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice. Accordingly, our prayer is that the pain and sadness we speak of will be pain and sadness that lead to salvation. We believe that this is possible in the power of our Lord and by God's Spirit. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation and true peace to our country.



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