Koopman, NN
University of Stellenbosch

Reconciliation and the Confession of Belhar (1986). Some challenges for the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

ABSTRACT

With an appeal to the Confession of Belhar this paper argues that for reconciliation to be actualised in all walks of life, unity and justice are important. Reconciliation refers to a life of embrace of the other, and to the expiation of the stumbling-blocks to that embrace, namely sin. Justice both as juridical, forensic justice and compassionate, sacrificial justice, opens the door to a life of embrace. Unity as living in proximity, as a life of sympathy and solidarity across all types of boundaries that flows from interpathy and empathy, enhances a life of reconciliation in the so-called private and public spheres of life. Based on this analysis some suggestions are made to enhance reconciliation within and through the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). Reconciliation within URCSA, in the so-called Dutch Reformed Church Family and in society receives attention.

1. INTRODUCTION

'Dominee, now you must tell me what God is saying about this?' This was the question posed to the young Allan Boesak, when he was a pastor in the congregation of Paarl, South Africa, in the late 1960s. The challenge was posed by an old woman who related to him how her furniture and other possessions were forcefully removed from their family home. In terms of the Group Areas Act in apartheid-South Africa they had to vacate their home that was now in an area that was declared white, in order to be resettled in a Coloured area.

The apartheid system was indeed a challenge to the faith of South African Christians. Hence the question: 'What is God saying about this?' This question reflected faith that was threatened and challenged, faith in crisis. Little more than a decade after this event, an ad hoc committee of the 1982 Synod of the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) was mandated to write a draft confession after the DRMC declared a *status confessionis* in the context of the theological legitimation of apartheid by most white Reformed Christians. When the committee embarked on writing the draft, its members agreed that their task entailed articulating the faith that already lived in the heart of members of the DRMC. They did not have to look for new theological formulations. They (merely) had to give voice and word to the threatened and challenged faith of Boesak's congregant.

This threatened faith, that was finally articulated in and officially adopted in 1986 as the Confession of Belhar,[1] was also protesting faith, in the sense of *pro testari*, i.e. faith that testifies

1 See *The Confession of Behar 1986*. Belhar: LUS Publishers.

to, faith that bears witness to God and to the reality that He desires and brings, a reality that was in contradiction to the apartheid reality. In the apartheid context where it was proclaimed that the powers of the apartheid regime reigned supreme and that we should pay allegiance to them, the faith expressed in Belhar protested (cf. conclusion of the Belhar Confession): Jesus is Lord. To Him we show loyalty and obedience. In a context where people were dehumanised in such a way that they started to doubt whether God was still alive, whether He was present in their midst and involved in their lives, the faith that Belhar confessed declared that the Triune God was real, alive, and present, and that He called, gathered and cared for his church (cf. introduction of Belhar). And in three articles it was confessed that separating, dividing and alienating the diversity of people in South African churches and society, was not God's solution for South Africa, because God is the God who brings unity amongst his diversity of people (cf. article 1 of Belhar); in a context where the pseudo-gospel that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was not strong enough to reconcile people was proclaimed, the faith of Belhar protested: God is the God who reconciles humans with Himself, humans with each other and with the rest of creation (cf. article 2 of Belhar); and, in a context of injustice that wanted people to doubt whether they are fully human and whether they are fully children of God, the faith of Belhar stated that God is the God of justice who identifies in a special way with the suffering, the poor and the wronged in a situation of injustice.

This Confession teaches some important lessons regarding reconciliation.

2. RECONCILIATION

The reconciliation that is confessed in Belhar reflects the two dimensions of reconciliation in Paulinic thought. Reconciliation as *hilasmos* has to do with the expiation of wrongs and stumbling-blocks to atonement (at-one-ment). Reconciliation as *katalassoo* refers to harmony in the relationship with the other. The reconciliation of Belhar has in mind the embrace that Miroslav Volf[2] refers to: the embrace of different races, tribes, nationalities, socio-economic groups, genders, sexual orientations, age groups, "normal" and disabled people. The reconciliation of Belhar pleads for the removal of stumbling-blocks in the way of peaceful living, in the way of the embrace. Reconciliation therefore implies opposition to injustices like racism, tribalism, xenophobia, classism, misogyny, homophobia, ageism and handicappism.

Belhar's thinking about reconciliation is informed by the teaching of the long Christian tradition on reconciliation. Reconciliation, therefore, is viewed as the redemptive work by the Triune God which is done for us in Jesus Christ (cf. Anselm's objective theory of atonement); reconciliation refers to the transformation that the love of the Triune God brings about in our lives (cf. Abelard's subjective theory of atonement); and reconciliation refers to the victory of Christ over the cosmic powers of evil and our consequent liberation from them (cf. Irenaeus' theory of atonement). South African theologian, John de Gruchy,[3] is of opinion that the last-mentioned theory helps us to understand the social and cosmic dimensions of reconciliation.

Another remark of importance regarding Belhar's understanding of reconciliation is the fact that reconciliation has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Belhar confirms, as suggested by the above-mentioned theories of atonement, that God reconciles us with Himself, but that He also

2 See M Volf, *Exclusion and embrace. A theological exploration of identity, otherness and reconciliation* (1996) Nashville: Abingdon Press, p. 171

3 See J de Gruchy, *Reconciliation. Restoring justice* (2002). London: SCM Press, p. 58.

reconciles us with each other. Donald Shriver aptly describes the horizontal (personal and even political) dimension of reconciliation. According to him reconciliation and forgiveness imply the honest and truthful facing of past evils, opposition to revenge, empathy for victims and perpetrators of evil, and the commitment of victims to resume life alongside evildoers.[4]

Reconciliation according to Belhar aims at embrace through the expiation of wrongs and stumbling-blocks to that embrace. Against this background it would be difficult not to see the close relationship between reconciliation and justice.

3. RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

The justice that is confessed in Belhar is rightly described as compassionate justice. In line with the biblical use of these concepts, both the sacrificial and forensic dimensions of justice are being referred to.

Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ God declares us just. People who are justified by the grace of God are participating in the quest for justice in the world. Justified people, people who are made right by the Triune God, i.e. right humans, seek human rights in our broken world. For Christopher Marshall[5] justification by faith is an expression of restorative justice.

The notion of sacrifice has a second dimension. It also indicates that justice cannot be reached in this world when the willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the other is not present. A third aspect of the sacrificial dimension of justice is the fact that justice does not seek revenge, but it is merciful. It seeks the healing and restoration of both perpetrators and victims. In fact it seeks the healing of all broken relationships. Therefore this justice is called restorative justice. Marshall's analysis of the use of justice in the New Testament enables him to refer to justice as restorative or covenant justice. This covenantal justice goes beyond retribution and punishment and seeks, like reconciliation, the healing of relationships. Like reconciliation, restorative and covenantal justice seeks embrace. It seeks the renewal of the covenant between God and humans, between humans themselves and between humans and the rest of creation.[6]

The above brief outline hopefully demonstrates the close resemblance between justice and reconciliation. Although the two concepts are not identical, it is clear that, when we view justice as compassionate, covenantal and restorative justice (i.e. justice that seeks reparation and restitution through forensic means, and justice that seeks, through the grace of God, in a merciful way and in the willingness to sacrifice the healing of relationships and the renewal of the covenant between God and his people and among people themselves), that justice and reconciliation are both at the service of the dawning of embrace or, in the words of Nicholas Wolterstorff,[7] the dawning of shalom. The portrayal of justice and reconciliation as concepts that are in conflict with each other might be made less severe, if not non-existent, when the expiation character of reconciliation and the compassion and healing character of justice, which are clearly articulated in Belhar, receive more attention.

---

4 See D Shriver, *An ethic for enemies. Forgiveness in politics* (1995). Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, p. 67. For a helpful church-historical analysis of the public character of forgiveness, see D Shriver, *An ethic for enemies*, p. 45-62. A new book by Shriver on reconciliation in the public sphere has been published recently, namely *Honest patriots: Loving a country enough to remember its misdeeds* (2005). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

5 See C Marshall *Beyond retribution. A New Testament vision for justice, crime and punishment* (2001). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 59.

6 See C Marshall, *Beyond retribution*, pp. 35-93.

7 See N Wolterstorff, *Until peace and justice embrace* (1983). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 70.

4. RECONCILIATION AND UNITY

The confession regarding unity in Belhar sheds light on our understanding of both justice and reconciliation. One of the authors of Belhar, Dirkie Smit,[8] two decades ago expressed the importance of unity for justice and reconciliation. According to Smit this article helps churches to discover and confess that their continued disunity presents a stumbling-block in the quest for justice. This disunity implies the separation of people between people from different socio-economic groups, with different levels of privilege, training, skills, participation and influence in society. Disunity constitutes the perpetuation of classism and the refusal to be involved with less privileged brothers and sisters. Smit is of opinion that these socio-economic factors were the real cause of the original church divisions. The theological rationale for separate churches was developed only later. He writes remarkably about the way in which the situation of separate churches and disunity prevents Christians from showing justice and compassion towards each other. "Christians are denied the opportunity to get to know each other and to love and serve each other. Consequently it becomes more difficult – and mostly almost impossible – to know and to carry each other's burdens."[9]

Where people from diverse and even antagonistic backgrounds (race, class, gender sexual orientation, nationality, etc.) live in closer proximity, where they are exposed more to each other, where they share in each other's daily plights, joys and sorrows, they start to develop sympathy, empathy and interpathy. David Augsberger[10] provides a helpful definition of sympathy, empathy and interpathy.

> "Sympathy is a spontaneous affective reaction to another's feelings experienced on the basis of perceived similarity between observer and observed. Empathy is an intentional affective response to another's feelings experienced on the basis of perceived differences between the observer and observed. Interpathy is an intentional cognitive and affective envisioning of another's thoughts and feelings from another culture, worldview and epistemology."

The existence of unified living which makes room for the nurturing of this threefold pathos, paves the way for expiation and for living peacefully with the other.

In the past decade and a half the World Council of Churches gave much attention to the interrelatedness of unity and justice issues. During 1992-1996 Faith and Order (Unit I) and Justice, Peace and Creation (Unit III) conducted a study on ecclesiology and ethics. The aim was to do away with the very long separation between various ecclesiological and unity themes as dealt with by the Faith and Order Movement, on the one hand, and ethical and justice issues as dealt with by the Life and Work Movement, on the other hand.[11] This Ecclesiology and Ethics programme

---

8 See DJ Smit "…op 'n besondere wyse die God van die noodlydende, die arme en die veronregte …", in GD Cloete en DJ Smit (reds), *'n Oomblik van Waarheid* (1982), Kaapstad: Tafelberg Uitgewers, pp. 60-62.

9 See DJ Smit ibid, 62.

10 See D Augsberger, *Pastoral counselling across* cultures (datum?). Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, p. 31.

11 Thomas Best, executive secretary for Faith and Order in the WCC programme unit on Unity and Renewal and Martin Robra, executive secretary in the WCC programme unit on Justice, Peace and Creation describe the aim of the ecclesiology and ethics process as follows: "In basic terms, it sought to explore the link between what the church is and what the church does. It explored the ethical dimension not as a separate 'department' of the church's life, but as integrally related to its worship, its confession of faith,

organised three consultations that produced three reports, namely the Costly Unity (1993 – Rønde, Denmark), Costly Commitment (1994 – Tantur, Israel) and Costly Obedience (1995 – Johannesburg, South Africa) Reports.[12] These studies confirmed that the focus on justice issues cannot be separated from the attention to church unity issues, like unity in confession, ministry, baptism, Eucharist and other doctrinal issues. These discussions sought a new *koinonia*, i.e. a unity in doctrine, life and witness. The theme of moral formation was central in these debates. The vision carried by the famous formulation of Stanley Hauerwas, namely that the church does not *have* a social ethic, but *is* a social ethic plays an important role in this discourse. The church with its

its witness and service in the world. It explored how the churches practice 'moral formation', or training in ethical decision-making and discernment, through their teaching and church life. By linking the nature and unity of the church with the churches' common calling to ethical reflection and action, it aimed to heal divisions between the movements of Faith and Order and Life and Work. And, perhaps most audacious of all, it tried to integrate distinct languages and discourses, especially those of theology and ecclesiology on the one hand, and contemporary Christian ethical reflection on the other." See T Best and M Robra (eds), *Ecclesiology and Ethics. Ecumenical ethical engagement, moral formation and the nature of the church* (1997). Geneva: Word Council of Churches Publications, pp. vii -viii. Besides this introduction to the work of The Ecclesiology and Ethics programme, also see AM Aagaard, "Ethics on the Joint Working Group Agenda," in: *The Ecumenical Review* vol 48 no 2, April 1996, pp. 139-142. For a detailed outline of the genesis of this process since its inception at a joint meeting of the WCC unit commissions at Evian in 1992, through its approval and encouragement by various WCC central committees, to its final report to the central committee in 1996, as well as for an account of its place both within the WCC and the wider ecumenical movement, see T Best and W Granberg-Michaelson (eds), *Costly unity: koinonia and justice, peace and creation* (1993). Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications; See also T Nest and M Robra, *Costly commitment: Ecclesiology and ethics* (1995). Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications. For a very informative outline of the process as well as a South African perspective on it, see DJ Smit, "Living unity? On the ecumenical movement and globalization" in: *Reformed World* 53, pp. 192 – 209.

12 Best and Robra (*Ecclesiology and ethics*, x-xi) describe the thrust of these reports as follows: Rønde took *koinonia* on the one hand, and justice, peace and the integrity of creation on the other, as points of departure for the discussion. It confirmed that the church does not only *have*, but *is* a social ethic, a *koinonia* ethic. The ethical dimension is confirmed as a datum of ecclesiology. Therefore ethical discussion is also to take place in theological and ecclesiological circles. Moreover, the notions of covenant and conciliarity which had been approached from mainly an ethical perspective in the JPIC process, was now discussed from an ecclesiological perspective as well. The idea of the church as moral community that did receive some attention in the JPIC process was now introduced as a crucial theme in ecclesiological reflection. Tantur's discussions took place against the background of reactions to Rønde, e.g. the Fifth World Conference of Faith and Order at Santiago de Compostela. Rønde identified ecumenical ethical reflection as intrinsic to the church. The theme of covenant was brought into close relationship with Eucharist and ethical engagement. The term *koinonia* was used to describe the relationship between the church and social action groups who adhere to Jesus Christ. The term 'community' was employed to describe the relationship of the church with groups who do not have a Christian motivation, but who embody prophetic signs of the reign of God. The church as moral community, Tantur stated, is involved in moral formation, i.e. the process of Christian training in discernment and ethical decision making through the whole life of the church, including formal instruction and worship. Johannesburg elaborated on the theme of moral formation. It warned against the moral malformation that takes place, even in the church, through the systems and structures of the world that impose its values and priorities upon us. In this context a key task of Christian moral formation today is to recover and strengthen Christian identity. Worship, and specifically baptism and Eucharist, are identified as contexts of formation. A final section of the Johannesburg report experimented with the idea of the ecumenical movement as a moral community. This community is formed by the gospel that resonates across the divisions of confession, space and time. The flourishing *koinoinia* of this community is marked by its growing agreement in matters of faith and church life, and by its common ethical commitments.

doctrine and witness constitute a social ethic. Doctrine, witness and ethics cannot be separated. Moral formation entails that the church as *koinonia* of doctrine, life and witness impact on the formation of people and societies that reflect the values of the reign of God and that conform to the Person of Christ.

With reference to the South African situation John de Gruchy,[13] who was a participant in the ecclesiology and ethics discussions, has pleaded for unity on two levels: 1) Structural unity (in confession, ministry, ordination, local structures, practices, etc.) will enhance the quest for reconciliation and justice. 2) Unity born of moral and not merely pragmatic convictions in the struggle against the various legacies of apartheid is also crucial for the quest for reconciliation (breakdown of racism, classism, sexism, etc.) and justice (especially economic justice).

Both Smit's comments on the significance of unity for reconciliation and justice, and the ecclesiology and ethics debate in the world ecumene, confirm the importance of unity for justice and reconciliation. A note of clarification needs to be made here: the quest for structural unity and proximity is indeed important in order to achieve the threefold pathos of interpathy, empathy and sympathy which is at the service of justice and reconciliation. Structural unity, however, is not enough. Even within unified structures we need to create spaces where this threefold pathos is developed amongst people from a diversity of backgrounds. The final part of the article will pay attention to this dimension.

5. SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

a) The Confession of Belhar poses challenges to churches in a society where, despite the very good progress, a lot nevertheless remain to be done regarding unity, justice and reconciliation. These challenges are posed first of all to URCSA, but also to other churches in and outside South Africa.

To progress towards a life where the diversity of South Africans embraces one another, we need to remove obstacles to the embrace, and seek compassionate justice. In bringing people closer together and helping them to develop the threefold pathos of sympathy, empathy and interpathy, we move closer to this wonderful goal.

b) At its most recent meeting the General Synod of URCSA emphasised the importance of encounters of open and frank discussion between people and structures of the so-called Dutch Reformed Church family:

> "The General Synod initiates discussions with the DRC (bilaterally) and the DRCA (bilaterally) to consider the possibility of a 'Truth and Reconciliation' type of process, chaired by a 'neutral' chairperson of a committee, to attempt to achieve reconciliation and out of court settlements in all the areas where tension has developed between the DRCA, DRC and URCSA."

One would love to interpret this mandate very widely as a plea by the synod for the creation of spaces where members and structures of the so-called DRC family, from a diversity of backgrounds, finding themselves in a situation of estrangement and enmity, can tell their stories, listen to the truth about each other, develop the threefold pathos of interpathy, empathy and

13 See J De Gruchy, "Church unity and democratic transformation. Perspectives on Ecclesiology and ethics in South Africa." In *Ecumenical Review* no 1, 1997, pp. 356-365.

sympathy, confess guilt and pain, give and receive forgiveness, show remorse and contrition, and commit themselves to restitution, reparation, restoration and healing.

All church practices, like worship services, prayer meetings, church meetings and administration, catechesis, deaconal activities and public witness are supposed to be at the service of the development of this threefold pathos. However, we have come to learn that the creation of spaces where people from different (even conflicting) backgrounds can share their stories of pain and guilt, hope and joy, does not take place automatically and spontaneously. We need planned and structured spaces for these quality interactions.[14] Current church practices (worship services, meetings, ministries for women, men and youth, joint deaconal, public witness catechesis activities), of course, can be structured in such a way that they serve this purpose. Besides these avenues we, however, need to create, in an almost artificial way, extra spaces to address this challenge. To normalise our abnormal situation of division, alienation and injustice we have to adopt abnormal measures!

c) In recent years I have been involved in a series of close, open and constructive encounters with a group of congregants of the white Dutch Reformed Congregation Stellenbosch. These people, many of whom are influential in policy formulation, in amongst others, the business sector, invited me to lead open discussions on two themes, namely racism and affirmative action. They also asked that I engage with them openly on these issues, together with Christians from Coloured and black communities. We have discovered in these groups that open and frank discussions from heart to heart about these issues pave the way for the development of sympathy, empathy and interpathy. These spaces for constructive and honest encounters are also created in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch, where, students of URCSA and the DRC, amongst others, receive their theological training.

With regard to racism, we need to develop sympathy, empathy and interpathy. We need to understand and feel together that racism is an ideology, i.e. a mostly subconscious picture of reality which teaches that some races are superior to others with regard to intellect, morality, religion, culture, language, skin colour, hair texture, face structure, nose shape etc., and which creates societal structures that embody this picture of superiority and inferiority. We need to remind each other that for long some had tried to give theological legitimation to this distorted picture of racial relations. We need to remind each other that, because societal structures and until recently religion strengthen this picture, attitude, mindset and prejudice of superiority and inferiority, these prejudices came to function on a subconscious, subtle and not always recognisable level in all of us.[15] We therefore need to confess the extent to which we all are guilty with regard to racial

14 For some important perspectives on the importance of storytelling-sessions for reconciliation and justice, see CH Thesnaar, *Die proses van heling en versoening: 'n pastoral-hermeneutiese ondersoek van die dinamika tussen slagoffer en oortreder binne'n post-WVK periode* (2001). Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Stellenbosch. See also SF Du Toit, *Learning to live together: practices of social reconciliation* (2003). Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

15 URCSA theologian, Jaap Durand, describes racism in the same way: "Racism is not a sin exclusive to Afrikaners, or to white people for that matter. It lurks in the hearts of all of us. We have to do battle constantly against it in the power of the Spirit. But to do battle we have to recognize the many faces of racism. Like all sin, racism has a devious nature masquerading under so many disguises. And that is precisely the reason why it is so difficult to eradicate it, not only in the private life of individual church members, but also in the public life of the church itself." See J Durand, "Church unity and the Reformed churches in Southern Africa." In: P Réamonn (ed) *Farewell to apartheid? Church relations in South Africa* (1994). Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, p. 65.

prejudice. We are all to a greater and smaller extent contaminated by this picture with its related structures and legitimising religious authorisation. Subconsciously white people think they are superior to other groups; and Coloureds and Indians that they are superior to black people; and Coloureds often have to deal with the accusation that they are the most inferior ones (does not religion and culture teach that hybrids are inferior beings?); and sadly, blacks, Coloureds and Indians came to believe in their inferiority in terms of this internalised picture. We only need to listen to the language that people use to recognise this subconscious prejudices with which we function. Terminology like non-white, and otherly-coloured ("anderskleurige") – which for most people including black people, Coloureds and Indians – mean colours that are other than white, reflect how white is still used as the norm for description and categorisation.

This picture of inferiority with its corresponding social structures and legitimising religious or cultural bases does not only apply to racism, but also to other forms of alienation and division, e.g. classism, sexism, xenophobia, ageism and handicappism. The creation of spaces for storytelling and eventual healing with regard to these forms of alienation and injustice also deserves serious attention.

During storytelling-sessions in the ward meetings of Stellenbosch DRC and the Faculty of Theology, we develop interpathy, i.e. we share emotionally and cognitively in the joys and pains of people from different cultural groups. We also develop empathy, i.e. we start to live in each other's skins and learn to look through each other's eyes, hear with each other's ears, and feel with each other's hearts. This interpathy and empathy help people from different and conflicting groups to live with sympathy, i.e. to feel with each other as if they are close and related groups, in fact as if they are from the same group, as if they are family! In the space of this threefold pathos people interpret their different stories from the past in a common manner. And the door is open to deal constructively with these stories, to embark on the road of reparation, restoration and healing. Restoration with regard not only to racial prejudices, but also racial structures, which are structures of injustice, commences. Affirmative action initiatives are discussed within this framework.

This engagement with each other asks that we take risks. American ethicist, Sharon Welch, challenges white people to engage in an ethic of risk. An ethic of risk, according to Welch entails that those who have benefited from an unjust system are called upon: not to be oblivious about the nature of their exploitation of oppressed people, but to acknowledge the exploitation of oppressed people and to repent and convert;[16] to be aware of the fact that their ancestors who were well educated, well-mannered, loving and kind people participated in a mechanism of oppression;[17] to overcome the inability to hear and tolerate the rage of oppressed people; to let go of the upper-class certainty of the right to control others and of the arrogant assumption of the universal validity of upper-class morality;[18] to acknowledge the equality in dignity of oppressed people and to be open to developing a new identity in the light of the legacy of oppression without being afraid that this change implies loss and self-destruction;[19] to share in the 'dangerous memory' of oppressed people that it had been people of dignity and self-respect who had been oppressed;[20] to be freed from despair in the discovering of injustices by participating in the heritage of courage and wisdom of oppressed people.[21]

16 See S Welsh, *A Feminine ethic of risk* (1990). Minneapolis: Fortress, p. 55.
17 See ibid 55-56.
18 See ibid 56.
19 See ibid 59-60.
20 See ibid 63.
21 See ibid 64.

For oppressed people this ethic of risk and responsibility would entail that we risk trusting each other. In the years of the struggle against apartheid we were taught to function with an ideology of suspicion. The new journey of South Africans implies that we embark on a journey of suspicion and trust simultaneously. For the sake of restorative justice and reconciliation we need to look at policies and practices with suspicion, but for the same noble sake we also need to risk trusting those who oppressed us in the past. We need to, as Shriver puts it, resume life alongside former evildoers. In the tense and uncomfortable space of both suspicion and trust, we find healing.

d) URCSA needs to develop these spaces in order to strengthen our internal unity[22], justice and reconciliation. Shortly before the establishment of URCSA dr Beyers Naudé[23] listed various challenges for URCSA. One challenge that he emphasised was that members of URCSA from different ethnic backgrounds be brought in contact on congregational level:

> "The policy of apartheid has so estranged, disturbed and disrupted normal communication between Christians of different languages, ethnic, racial and social groups, that deliberate efforts will have to be taken to assist our people, especially at congregational level, to learn again how to communicate positively and creatively between themselves, especially where there is a possibility of serious conflict, arising from the overemphasis of ethnic, racial and cultural differences which apartheid has deliberately provoked and encouraged."

At the beginning of the second decade of URCSA's existence, this challenge still deserves serious attention. The 2005 URCSA synodical decision on encounter groups confirm this plea.

URCSA also need to develop these spaces in our external quests for unity, justice and reconciliation with other churches of the so-called DRC family. Structural unification, and the quest to achieve it, will enhance the creation of these spaces of storytelling, restoration and healing. Although the decision of the recent URCSA general synod first of all refers to the healing of relations amongst URCSA members and members of the section of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa who did not participate in the formation of URCSA in 1994, this mandate, I believe, paves the way for storytelling-initiatives on a broader range of issues.

e) These storytelling-sessions help with the breakdown of wrong prejudices. It lays the foundation for joint work on reparation and healing. Former estranged people can now work jointly for social justice. Poverty and economic inequality, for instance, can be addressed through measures like diaconate, quests to fulfil so-called second and third dimension human rights as well as the willingness to sacrifice for the sake of healing. Coupled to the work for the structural unification of the members of the DRC family, joint study groups of these churches on various themes related to social justice, can be created. These churches might even increase their work on joint public

22 Durand emphasises that the unification of the DRCA and the DRMC is not the end of the road. The decisive act of unifying is, according to him, the start of the process to grow ever closer together. Only after structural unity can the problems of practical and attitudinal nature be addressed jointly. See J Durand, "Church unity and the Reformed Churches in Southern Africa." In: P Réamonn (ed) *Farewell to apartheid?* p. 66. The fact that the name of URCSA is not the "United" but "Uniting" church confirms this view. After structural unification the strengthening of our internal unity entails the process of growing closer, developing the threefold pathos referred to in this article, and seeking justice and reconciliation. The name "Uniting" also refers to the related external unification process with other members of the so-called DRC Family.

23 See CFB Naudé, "Support in word and deed." Ln: P Réamonn (ed)

witness and jointly enter into appropriate partnerships with other institutions of civil society and even government to address the many immense challenges in South Africa.

6. CONCLUSION

For pluralistic societies like those in the Netherlands and South Africa, who struggle with reconciliatory living, Belhar does have some lessons. Reconciliation, justice and unity embrace each other. To embrace the other, we need to do expiation and seek justice that heals broken relationships and covenants together. This journey we cannot embark on without the nearness that helps to develop sympathy, empathy and interpathy. And when our faith is threatened and challenged by so many discouraging developments regarding reconciliation in different parts of the world (as are witnessed to at this conference), we are comforted to know that the work of reconciliation is not ours. It is the work of the One who calls, gathers and cares for us. And if it looks like reconciliation will not take place, we remember who is on the throne, who is Lord. In Him we put our hope. URCSA and her brothers and sisters elsewhere are called upon to respond with loyalty and obedience to the call to unity, reconciliation and justice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aagaard AM. 1997. "Ethics on the Joint Working Group Agenda." In: *The Ecumenical Review* vol 48, no 2.

Augsberger, D 1986. *Pastoral counselling across cultures.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.

Best, T and Granberg-Michaelson, W (eds). 1993. *Costly unity: koinonia and justice, peace and creation.* Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications.

Best, T and Robra, M. 1995. *Costly commitment: Ecclesiology and ethics*. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications.

Best, T and Robra, M (eds). 1997. *Ecclesiology and Ethics. Ecumenical ethical engagement, moral formation and the nature of the church*. Geneva: Word Council of Churches Publications.

De Gruchy, J. 1997. "Church unity and democratic transformation. Perspectives on Ecclesiology and ethics in South Africa." In: *Ecumenical Review* vol 48, no 1.

De Gruchy, J. 2002. *Reconciliation. Restoring justice*. London: SCM Press.

Durand, J. 1994. "Church unity and the Reformed Churches in Southern Africa." In: Réamonn, P (ed), *Farewell to apartheid? Church relations in South Africa*. Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Du Toit, SF. 2003. *Learning to live together: practices of social reconciliation*. Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

Marshall, C. 2001. Beyond retribution. A New Testament vision for justice, crime and punishment. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Naudé, CFB. 1994. "Support in word and deed." In: Réamonn, P (ed) *idem*. P Réamonn (ed) *Farewell to apartheid? Church relations in South Africa* (1994). Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Shriver, D. 1995. *An ethic for enemies. Forgiveness in politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Shriver, D. 2005. Honest patriots: Loving a country enough to remember its misdeeds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smit, DJ. 1982. "… op 'n besondere wyse die God van die noodlydende, die arme en die veronregte …" In: Cloete, GD and Smit, DJ (eds) *'n Oomblik van Waarheid.* Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers, 60 – 73.

Smit, DJ. 2003. Living unity? On the ecumenical movement and globalization, In: *Reformed World 53*, pp. 192 – 209.

Thesnaar, CH. 2001. *Die proses van heling en versoening: 'n pastoral-hermeneutiese ondersoek van die dinamika tussen slagoffer en oortreder binne 'n post-WVK periode*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Stellenbosch.

Volf, M. 1996. *Exclusion and embrace. A theological exploration of identity, otherness and reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
Welsh, S 1990. *A Feminine ethic of risk*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Wolterstorff, N 1983. *Until peace and justice embrace* (1983). Grand Rapids:Eerdmans.

OTHER DOCUMENTS

The Confession of Behar 1986. Belhar:LUS Publishers.

KEY WORDS
Reconciliation
Justice
Unity
Interpathy
Embrace

TREFWOORDE
Versoening
Geregtigheid
Eenheid
Interpatie
Omarming

Kontakbesonderhede
Prof NN Koopman
Fakulteit Teologie
Universiteit van Stellenbosch
Privaatsak X1
MATIEKAND
7602
Tel (021) 8082452/ 072 262 9813
e-posadres: nkoopman@sun.ac.za