

The Presbytery of Geneva studies ...

The Belhar Confession

Session Four

The Belhar Confession and the Book of Confessions

May 26, 2009

A Word of Introduction

The recent 218th General Assembly adopted the following motions:

1. Direct the Moderators of the 216th, 217th, and 218th General Assemblies (2004, 2006, and 2008)—in consultation with the Stated Clerk, the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC), the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, and the Office of Theology and Worship—to initiate the process described in G-18.0201b by appointing a committee, separate from any committee assigned to the Heidelberg Catechism, to consider amending the confessional documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to include the Belhar Confession in *The Book of Confessions* and to report to the 219th General Assembly (2010).
2. Urge all Presbyterians in congregations, middle governing bodies, and other entities related to the PC(USA) to engage in study, prayer, reflection, and discernment, of the Belhar Confession and the Report of the Task Force to Study Reparations, utilizing the following resources:
 - *A Study Guide of The Belhar Confession and Its Accompanying Letter*, Eunice T. McGarrahan. Published by the Office of Theology and Worship, General Assembly Council, PC(USA), 2008. Available online at: <http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/confession.htm>
 - *Report of the Task Force on Reparations* (216th General Assembly (2004)). *Minutes*, 2004, Part I, pp. 701–20. This report includes the full text of the Belhar Confession. Available online at <http://www.pcusa.org/reparations/>
 - *A Study Guide for the Report of the Task Force on Reparations*, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, 2008. Available online at <http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/>

The Belhar Confession has its roots in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. This “outcry of faith” and “call for faithfulness and repentance” was first drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) under the leadership of Allan Boesak. The DRMC took the lead in declaring that apartheid constituted a *status confessionis* in which the truth of the gospel was at stake.

The Dutch Reformed Mission Church formally adopted the Belhar Confession in 1986. It is now one of the “standards of unity” of the new Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA). Belhar’s theological confrontation of the sin of racism has made possible reconciliation among Reformed churches in Southern Africa and has aided the process of reconciliation within the nation of South Africa.

Belhar’s relevance is not confined to Southern Africa. It addresses three key issues of concern to all churches: unity of the church and unity among all people, reconciliation within church and society, and God’s justice. As one member of the URCSA has said, “We carry this confession on behalf of all the Reformed churches. We do not think of it as ours alone.”

The practice of apartheid began in the exclusionary practices of the church’s worship in South Africa. This injustice emerged from distorted understandings of the sacraments and the unity of the church. Baptismal unity was shattered at the Lord’s Table and racial injustice was the consequence.

To meet the call of the General Assembly, the Presbytery of Geneva will be using the above-named *Study Guide of the Belhar Confession* to shape our worship and theological reflection beginning in our November 2008 meeting and continuing throughout 2009.

1. Session One—Introduction: Setting the Stage (11/19/2008, HWS/Geneva)
2. Session Two—Apartheid and the Belhar Confession: It Happened in Church (1/24/2009, Arkport)
3. Session Three—What Does It Mean for a Church to Confess? (3/24/2009, Waterloo)
4. Session Four—The Belhar Confession and the Book of Confessions (5/26/2009, Palmyra Western)
5. Session Five—The “Liturgy” of Belhar and What That Means for the Unity of the Church (9/29/2009, Bellona)
6. Session Six—Belhar, the Unity We Seek, and the Mission of the Church (11/17/2009, Hector)

The Belhar Confession

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

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

We believe

- that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;
- 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;
- 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;
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another

and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;

- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;
- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church;

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

3. We believe

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

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

4. We believe

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged
- that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;

- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology

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

5. We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

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

Accompanying Letter

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 judgment, 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 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 risk 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 men 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 him before whom all is revealed. We do not make this confession from his throne and from on high, but before his throne and before men. We plead, therefore, that this confession would 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 which threatens the gospel itself in our church and our country. Our heartfelt longing is that no one will identify himself 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, honor, 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 his own eye. We know that the attitudes and conduct which 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 which 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 his Spirit. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation, and true peace to our country.

The Belhar Confession and the Book of Confessions

It is instructive to read the Belhar Confession and the Accompanying Letter and then to go back to the *Book of Confessions*, looking particularly at statements regarding the church, sacraments, and justice. *Belhar* is a good conversation partner with our confessions.

Belhar enriches the ecumenical creeds. We confess one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, but *Belhar* helps us develop those notes of the church in specific ways for the visible life of the church. The creeds do not have any description of the ministry of Jesus that models reconciliation or justice, but in affirming that Jesus is born of Mary and suffered under Pilate, the creeds hint at what *Belhar* claims. Naming Mary takes us to the *Magnificat* [Luke 1.46-55], reminding us of the great reversals that occur in the reign of God. Naming Pilate takes us to Christ's suffering and sacrificial love that demonstrates the cruciform shape of the Christian life.

The Reformation confessions speak a great deal about the nature of the church and sacraments, affirming the oneness of the church. The baptized are joined to Christ and all are welcome at his table. Nevertheless, to put it perhaps too simply, the question before them was how to explain a fragmented church and still affirm its unity. They believed that the full, undisrupted unity of the church was in the invisible church. Here we see a crack in the door, opening the way toward disregarding the visible unity of the church.

Even so, the beginning of *Belhar* draws heavily from the *Heidelberg Catechism*'s Question 54: "I believe that, from the beginning of the world, and from among the whole human race, the Son of God, by His Spirit and by His Word, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself, in the unity of the true faith, a congregation chosen for eternal life." In doing this, it seems as if the authors of *Belhar* are not only honoring their confessional heritage, they are saying that they are not making a new confession but calling the church to believe what it already confesses.

The *Barmen Declaration* is the model for *Belhar* in its use of an accompanying letter or explanation and the affirmation-rejection pattern of confession. *Barmen* and *Belhar* draw on the theology of Karl Barth, especially his theology of the word, incarnation, and witness. Both the *Confession of 1967* and *Belhar* have strong Christological emphases and both speak strongly of the church. *Belhar*,

however, speaks more to the unity of the church, not just as a mark of the church, but as essential to the realization of the reconciliation the church proclaims. As well, *Belhar* addresses a specific issue in its context. The *Confession of 1967* addresses a wide range of pressing problems in the North American context of the 1960s. These issues included war, confusion over sexuality, and technology, as well as racism. The *Brief Statement of Faith* in its narrative shape calls the church to the ministries of justice and reconciliation, but *Belhar* can strengthen the *Brief Statement* with its affirmations concerning the church, its unity, and its corporate witness.

As we in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) move forward in our study of the *Belhar Confession*, we need to ask ourselves several questions. How can *Belhar* help us approach issues of justice in our own context? How can *Belhar* help us converse with our own *Book of Confessions* in a way that helps them to be more constitutive of our life and mission together? Are we willing to learn not only from the content but also from the conduct of *Belhar*? Where do we have something to say to *Belhar*? These confessional statements bear witness to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. No one confession is complete. All need the witness of the others in order to more fully know and obey the will of the One whose name above all names we confess.

Service of Worship

Please turn off your cell phones during this worship service.

WORDS OF INTRODUCTION

Please arrange yourself in small groups for this worship service based on the pit value of the playing card you received at registration.

*You don't need anything but a chair,
this booklet, and possibly a cup of coffee. :-)*

In your small group, discuss:

1. What is your name?
2. Where is your church?
3. How have you seen the *Book of Confessions* used in your own congregation and/or in your own life?

SHARING THE PEACE OF GOD

The peace of the Lord be with you.

And also with you.

* CALL TO WORSHIP

Brief Statement of Faith, lines 1-6

In life and in death we belong to God.

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

* HYMN

(on next page)

“When We Are Living”

(Pues Si Vivimos)

Pues Si Vivimos When We Are Living

SOMOS DEL SEÑOR 10.10.10.10

stanza 1 trans. Elise S. Eslinger, 1983

anzas 2-4, Roberto Escamilla, 1983;

ans. George Lockwood, 1987

Spanish melody



- | | | | | | | |
|----|---------|---------|------------------|-----------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | Pues | si | vi - vi - mos | pa - ra | Él | vi - vi - mos |
| 2. | En | es - ta | vi - da, | fru - tos | he - mos | de dar |
| 3. | En | la | tris - te - za | y | en | el do - lor, |
| 4. | En | es - te | mun - do, | he - mos | de en - con - trar | |
| 1. | When | we | are liv - ing, | it | is | in Christ Je - sus, |
| 2. | Through | all | our liv - ing, | we | our | fruits must give. |
| 3. | Mid | times | of sor - row | and | in | times of pain, |
| 4. | A - | cross | this wide world, | we | shall | al - ways find |



- | | | | | | | |
|----------|------------|---------------|------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Y | si | mo - ri - mos | pa - ra | Él | mo - ri - mos. | |
| Las | o - bras | bue - nas | son | pa - ra | o - fren - dar. | |
| En | la | be - lle - za | y | en | el a - mor, | |
| Gen - te | que | llo - ra | y | sin | con - so - lar. | |
| And | when | we're | dy - ing, | it | is | in the Lord. |
| Good | works | of | ser - vice | are | for | of - fer - ing. |
| When | sens - ing | beau - ty | or | in | love's | em - brace, |
| Those | who | are | cry - ing | with | no | peace of mind, |



- | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|------|-------------------|------------|-------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------|------|-------|
| Sea | que | vi - va - mos | o | que | mu - ra - mos, | | | | |
| Ya | sea | que | de - mos | o | que | re - ci - ba - mos | | | |
| Sea | que | su - fra - mos | o | que | go - ce - mos | | | | |
| Sea | que | a - yu - de - mos | o | que | a - li - men - te - mos | | | | |
| Both | in | our | liv - ing | and | in | our | dy - ing, | | |
| When | we | are | giv - ing, | or | when | re - ceiv - ing, | | | |
| Wheth - er | we | suf - fer, | or | sing | re - joic - ing, | | | | |
| But | when | we | help | them, | or | when | we | feed | them, |



- | | | | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----|-----------|----|------|
| So - mos | del | Se - ñor, | so - mos | del | Se - ñor. | | |
| We | be - long | to | God. | we | be - long | to | God. |

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**Startle us, O God, with your truth
and open our minds to your Spirit
that we may be one with Christ our Lord,
and serve as faithful disciples,
through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

CONFESSION OF SIN

Brief Statement of Faith, lines 33-40

We rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.

**Ignoring God's commandments,
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.**

We deserve God's condemnation.

Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

In your small group, discuss:

When things are not right in the church, in faith or in practice, there is an impulse to write new statements. We want a new policy or a new confession. But have we lived up to what we have already written?

The Confession of 1967 addresses four specific social issues concerning which our society needed to find reconciliation at the time:

- a. racism (9.44)
- b. warfare (9.45)
- c. poverty (9.46)
- d. sexual confusion (9.47)

The *Theological Declaration of Barmen* addresses six evangelical truths which it must address:

- e. Christians owe their obedience to Christ above all else (8.10-12);
- f. Christ is lord over our whole lives (8.13-15);
- g. the church is solely the property of Christ in its faith and obedience, in its message and form (8.16-18);
- h. leaders in the church exercise merely ecclesiastical power, not temporal power (8.19-21);
- i. The roles of both church and state are given by God for the ordering of human life and should not be confused, one with

the other (8.22-.24)

- j. Christ has commissioned the church to proclaim only God's Word, not human words (8.25-.27)

(You can find these passages at the back of this booklet.)

Where do you think we have failed our confessions?

SILENT CONFESSION

*During this time of silent reflection,
confess before God your own failures,
asking God to renew your will to do what you believe.*

CORPORATE CONFESSION

BCW, 54

**Eternal God, our judge and redeemer,
we confess that we have tried to hide from you,
for we have done wrong.
We have lived for ourselves,
and apart from you.
We have turned from our neighbors,
and refused to bear the burdens of others.
We have ignored the pain of the world,
and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed.
In your great mercy forgive our sins
and free us from selfishness,
that we may choose your will
and obey your commandments;
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS Brief Statement of Faith, lines 77-80

With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

*** HYMN**
(on next page)

“From All That Dwell Below the Skies (Psalm 117)”

From All That Dwell Below the Skies

LASST UNS ERFREUEN LM with alleluias

Isaac Watts, 1719

Geistliche Kirchengesang, 1623; alt.
Harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906

Unison

1. From all that dwell be - low the skies Let the Cro - a - tor's praise a -
2. In ev - ery land be - gin the song, To ev - ery land the strains be -
3. E - ter - nal are Thy mer - cies, Lord, E - ter - nal truth at - tends Thy

Harmony *Unison*

rise: Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Let the Re - deem - er's
long: Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! In cheer - ful sound all
word: Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Thy praise shall sound from

Harmony

name be sung Through ev - ery land, in ev - ery tongue.
voic - es raise And fill the world with joy - ful praise. Al - le - lu - ia!
shore to shore, Till suns shall rise and set no more.

Unison

Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!

Music: From the *English Hymnal*, 1906. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.Reprinted under [OneLicense.net](https://www.onelicense.net) #A-715492

HEARING THE WORD

Amos 5.21-24

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

In your small group, discuss:

Our *Book of Confessions* is our interpretation of and response to the Word of God. The authors of the *Belhar Confession* understood that the gospel made certain claims for justice. Although they were subject to injustices perpetrated by other Christians, they were also convinced of the reconciling power of the gospel.

Read the prefaces to The Barmen Declaration, The Confession of 1967, and the Belhar Confession.

1. How do the authors of Barmen make their case to the church? What are its similarities and differences with Belhar?
2. How do the authors of the letters express the gospel toward those in the church with whom they are in conflict?
3. How do you think The Confession of 1967 addresses the issues that Dr. King raises in his letter? Where do you think the church fulfilled its confession? Where do you think it failed?
4. In what ways do you think that the Belhar Confession might enhance our own confessions and the work of the church toward racial reconciliation?

* HYMN

“Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation”

Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation

WESTMINSTER ABBEY 8.7.8.7.8.7

7th century, Latin

Trans. John Mason Neale, 1851; alt. 1861, 1972

Henry Purcell (1659-1695), adapt.



1. Christ is made the sure foun-da-tion, Christ the head and cor - ner - stone,
2. To this tem - ple, where we call You, Come, O Lord of Hosts, to - day;
3. Here be - stow on all Your ser - vants What they ask of You to gain,
4. Laud and hon - or to the Fa - ther, Laud and hon - or to the Son,



Cho - sen of the Lord and pre-cious, Bind - ing all the church in one;
With Your wont - ed lov - ing-kind-ness Hear Your peo - ple as they pray,
What they gain from You for - ev - er With the bless - ed to re - tain,
Laud and hon - or to the Spir - it, Ev - er three and ev - er one;



Ho - ly Zi - on's help for - ev - er, And our con - fi - dence a - lone.
And Your full - est ben - e - dic-tion Shed with-in its walls al - way.
And here - af - ter in Your glo - ry Ev - er-more with You to reign.
One in might and one in glo - ry While un - end - ing a - ges run.



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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

*Please share your joys and concerns
with your brothers and sisters in your small group.*

CONCLUDING COLLECT (unison) BCW, 811 [a prayer from Zaire]

O God, you are the giver of life.

We pray for the church in the whole world.

Sanctify her life, renew her worship,

give power to her witnessing,

restore her unity.

**Give strength to those who are searching together
for that kind of obedience which creates unity.**

**Heal the divisions separating your children one from another,
so that they will make fast, with bonds of peace,
the unity which the Spirit gives. Amen.**

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

GREAT THANKSGIVING (E)

BCW, 142 ff; alt.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Blessed are you, strong and faithful God. All your works, the height and the depth, echo the silent music of your praise. In the beginning your Word summoned light, night withdrew, and creation dawned. As ages passed unseen, waters gathered on the face of the earth and life appeared. When the times at last had ripened and the earth grown full in abundance, you created in your image man and woman, the stewards of all creation. You gave us breath and speech, that all the living might find a voice to sing your praise, and to celebrate the creation you call good.

So now, with all the powers of heaven and earth,
we sing the ageless hymn of your glory:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

All holy God, how wonderful is the work of your hands! When sin had scarred the world, you entered into covenant to renew the whole creation.

As a mother tenderly gathers her children, as a father joyfully welcomes his own, you embraced a people as your own and filled them with longing for a peace that would last and for a justice that would never fail.

Through countless generations your people hungered for the bread of freedom. From them you raised up Jesus, your Son, the living bread, in whom ancient hungers are satisfied.

He healed the sick, though he himself would suffer;
he offered life to sinners, though death would hunt him down.
But with a love stronger than death,
he opened wide his arms and surrendered his spirit.

Gracious God, as we offer you our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, we commemorate Jesus, your Son. Death could not bind him, for you raised him up in the Spirit of holiness and exalted him as Lord of creation.

Great is the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.**

Eternal God, let your Holy Spirit move in power over us and over these earthly gifts of bread and wine, that they may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ, and that we may become one in him. May his coming in glory find us ever watchful in prayer, strong in truth and love, and faithful in the breaking of the bread.

Then, at last, all peoples will be free, all divisions healed, and with your whole creation, we will sing your praise, through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, almighty God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sin,
as we forgive those who sin against us;
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

COMMUNION OF THE PEOPLE

*Communion will be celebrated by intinction today.
Please send one person from each small group to the table
to receive both bread and a cup to share with your group,
then share communion in your small group by intinction.
We will have both red wine and white grape juice available.*

*** PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION (unison)**

**Gracious God,
you have made us one with all your people
in heaven and on earth.
You have fed us with the bread of life,
and renewed us for your service.
Help us who have shared Christ's body
and received his cup,
to be his faithful disciples
so that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and our love be your love
reaching out into the life of the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*** HYMN
(on next page)**

“How Clear Is Our Vocation, Lord”

How Clear Is Our Vocation, Lord

REPTON 8.68.8.6.6

Ed Pratt Green, 1981

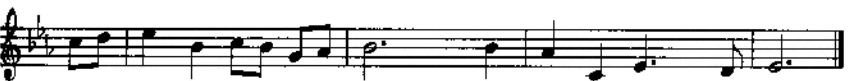
C. Hubert H. Parry, 1888



1. How clear is our vo - ca - tion, Lord, When once we heed Your call:
2. But if, for - get - ful, we should find Your yoke is hard to bear,
3. We mark Your saints, how they be - came In hin - dranc - es more sure,
4. In what You give us, Lord, to do, To - geth - er or a - lone,



To live ac - cord - ing to Your word, And dai - ly learn, re - freshed, re - stored,
If world - ly pres - sures fray the mind And love it - self can - not un - wind
Whose joy - ful vir - tues put to shame The cas - ual way we wear Your name,
In old rou - tines or ven - tures new, May we not cease to look to You—



That You are Lord of all	And will not let us fall.
Its tan - gled skein of care:	Our in - ward life re - pair.
And by our faults ob - scure	Your power to cleanse and cure.
The cross You hung up - on—	All You en - deav - ored done.



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We believe 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.

**We believe that we share one faith,
have one calling,
are of one soul and one mind;
have one God and Father,
are filled with one Spirit,
are baptized with one baptism,
eat of one bread and drink of one cup,
confess one name,
are obedient to one Lord,
work for one cause,
and share one hope.**

We believe that we 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.

**We believe that we need one another and upbuild one another,
admonishing and comforting one another;
that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness;
pray together;
together serve God in this world;
and together fight against all
which may threaten or hinder this unity.**

We believe that this unity can be established
only in freedom and not under constraint;
that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions,
as well as the various languages and cultures,
are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ,
opportunities for mutual service and enrichment
within the one visible people of God.

**We believe that true faith in Jesus Christ
is the only condition for membership of this church.**

Thus we boldly proclaim;

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

*** BENEDICTION**

The Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934)

Preface (8.01-.04)

I. An Appeal to the Evangelical Congregations and Christians in Germany

The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church met in Barmen, May 29–31, 1934. Here representatives from all the German Confessional churches met with one accord in a confession of the one Lord of the one, holy, apostolic church. In fidelity to their Confession of Faith, members of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches sought a common message for the need and temptation of the church in our day. With gratitude to God they are convinced that they have been given a common word to utter. It was not their intention to found a new church or to form a union. For nothing was farther from their minds than the abolition of the confessional status of our churches. Their intention was, rather, to withstand in faith and unanimity the destruction of the Confession of Faith, and thus of the Evangelical Church in Germany. In opposition to attempts to establish the unity of the German Evangelical Church by means of false doctrine, by the use of force and insincere practices, the Confessional Synod insists that the unity of the Evangelical churches in Germany can come only from the Word of God in faith through the Holy Spirit. Thus alone is the church renewed.

Therefore the Confessional Synod calls upon the congregations to range themselves behind it in prayer, and steadfastly to gather around those pastors and teachers who are loyal to the Confessions.

Be not deceived by loose talk, as if we meant to oppose the unity of the German nation! Do not listen to the seducers who pervert our intentions, as if we wanted to break up the unity of the German Evangelical Church or to forsake the Confessions of the Fathers!

Try the spirits whether they are of God! Prove also the words of the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church to see whether they agree with Holy Scripture and with the Confessions of the Fathers. If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation

keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth and that we in faith experience what he himself has said: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Therefore, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Six Evangelical Truths (8.09-.26)

In view of the errors of the "German Christians" of the present Reich Church government which are devastating the church and are also thereby breaking up the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess the following evangelical truths:

1. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6.) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. . . . I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved." (John 10:1, 9.)

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

2. "Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption." (I Cor. 1:30.)

As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

3. "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him

who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body [is] joined and knit together.” (Eph. 4:15–16.)

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.

4. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” (Matt. 20:25, 26.)

The various offices in the church do not establish a dominion of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, apart from this ministry, could and were permitted to give to itself, or allow to be given to it, special leaders vested with ruling powers.

5. “Fear God. Honor the emperor.” (I Peter 2:17.)

Scripture tells us that, in the as yet unredeemed world in which the church also exists, the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace. [It fulfills this task] by means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgment and human ability. The church acknowledges the benefit of this divine appointment in gratitude and reverence before him. It calls to mind the Kingdom of God, God’s commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God upholds all things.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the church’s vocation as well.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State.

6. “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matt. 28:20.) “The word of God is not fettered.” (II Tim. 2:9.)

The church’s commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ’s stead, and therefore in the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and Sacrament.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.

The Confession of 1967 (9.43-.47)

Preface (9.01-.06)

The church confesses its faith when it bears a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ.

In every age, the church has expressed its witness in words and deeds as the need of the time required. The earliest examples of confession are found within the Scriptures. Confessional statements have taken such varied forms as hymns, liturgical formulas, doctrinal definitions, catechisms, theological systems in summary, and declarations of purpose against threatening evil.

Confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. No one type of confession is exclusively valid, no one statement is irreformable. Obedience to Jesus Christ alone identifies the one universal church and supplies the continuity of its tradition. This obedience is the ground of the church's duty and freedom to reform itself in life and doctrine as new occasions, in God's providence, may demand.

The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America acknowledges itself aided in understanding the gospel by the testimony of the church from earlier ages and from many lands. More especially it is guided by the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds from the time of the early church; the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Second Helvetic Confession from the era of the Reformation; the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism from the seventeenth century; and the Theological Declaration of Barmen from the twentieth century.

The purpose of the Confession of 1967 is to call the church to that unity in confession and mission which is required of disciples today. This Confession is not a "system of doctrine," nor does it include all the traditional topics of theology. For example, the Trinity and the Person of Christ are not redefined, but are recognized and reaffirmed as forming the basis and determining the structure of the Christian faith.

God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of the gospel in any age. Our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ. Accordingly, this Confession of 1967 is built upon that theme.

Reconciliation in Society (9.43-.47)

In each time and place, there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations. The following are particularly urgent at the present time.

a. God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess.

b. God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of the peace, justice, and freedom among nations which all powers of government are called to serve and defend. The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. This search requires that the nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding. Reconciliation among nations becomes peculiarly urgent as countries develop nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, diverting their manpower and resources from constructive uses and risking the annihilation of mankind. Although nations may serve God's purposes in history, the church which identifies the sovereignty of any one nation or any one way of life with the cause of God denies the Lordship of Christ and betrays its calling.

c. The reconciliation of man through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples. The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations. The church calls every man to use his abilities, his possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to him by God for the maintenance of his family and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise men's hopes for better conditions and provide them with opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.

d. The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created mankind. Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man's alienation from God, his neighbor, and himself. Man's perennial confusion about the meaning of sex has been aggravated in our day by the availability of new means for birth control and the treatment of infection, by the pressures of urbanization, by the exploitation of sexual symbols in mass communication, and by world overpopulation. The church, as the household of God, is called to lead men out of this alienation into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time.

Assignment for the next meeting of Presbytery—September 29, 2009

1. Read:

- Session Five of the Study Guide: “The ‘Liturgy’ of Belhar and What That Means for the Unity of the Church”
- Read the entire Belhar Confession and the Accompanying Letter
- Read Appendix 2: A Story of Worship and Justice in One Congregation

These texts are available online at

<http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/confession.htm>

- Read a recent copy of your congregation’s worship bulletin

2. Think about this:

- What does our worship call you to proclaim?
- What is it calling you to do?

3. Checking in: At this point in your study, what are your thoughts and/or resolutions concerning

- the nature of the unity the church has been given?
- how that unity provides a foundation for justice?
- the mission of the church?

