

**The Belhar Confession and its influence on the
understanding of unity.
Historical lessons from the histories of the
DRMC and the DRCA: 1975-1994¹**

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Abstract

The Belhar Confession (Belhar) was adopted in 1986 as the fourth official confession of faith of the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and later the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). Much has been written about the origin, content and history of Belhar in relation to church historical developments during and after apartheid. This, coupled with the ongoing conversation about church reunification within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches and the apparent impact of Belhar on this process makes a conversation about this Confession both relevant and necessary.

This being said, it is of interest to note that theological conversations about Belhar do not specifically discuss its impact on the ecclesiology of the mentioned churches and specifically on that of the URCSA. This article will explore the apparent influence of Belhar on the ecclesiology of the mentioned church and specifically how this church understands its relation to other churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. This will be done by focusing specifically on the impact of this Confession's plea for unity as regards the ecclesiology of the DRMC, the DRCA and thus also the URCSA. A discussion will follow on how the mentioned impact affects the URCSA's understanding of church unity and the interrelatedness between churches.

Introduction

In the history of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches² (family of DRCs) the Belhar Confession (Belhar) has and will continue to be part of various conversations linked, among others, to the relation between the mentioned churches and their ongoing struggle to reunite. Timeous studies on this Confession continue the contextual conversation and contribute to growing insight into and a better understanding of Belhar and its theological impact on churches such as the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

It is interesting to note that the discussion about Belhar is mostly centred around its coming into being (historical background), the authors of the Confession and their impact on Belhar, its reception in the family of DRCs and the ongoing discussion about church reunification within the mentioned family of churches. For us to read, understand and value the impact of Belhar and to interpret it in the light of our current realities the mentioned discussions are extremely important and their value should not be underestimated. This being said it seems that the reception of Belhar and its impact on the family of DRCs has not yet lead to a variety of deep theological studies on the impact of this Confession on the ecclesiology of these churches.

This article attempts to be part of a growing discussion on the influence of Belhar on the ecclesiology of the URCSA. In beginning to understand the abovementioned one needs to take into account the history of the mentioned church and its developing theology, and this will be done briefly in the following sections. The influence of Belhar on the URCSA, an understanding of its relation to and relatedness with other churches within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches and specifically the conviction of the DRMC and the DRCA to unite will form the heart of this discussion. Due to its historical significance the period 1975-1994 forms the basis of the study.

A brief overview of the history of the URCSA with specific mention of the process of unification between the DRMC and the DRCA (1975-1994)

¹ The basis of this article is a paper delivered at the 2012 annual conference of the Church History Society of Southern Africa at the Joint Theological Conference, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

² Although it is contested within the very churches that constitute it, the term "family of Dutch Reformed Churches" expresses the relatedness of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), the Uniting Reformed Church in Africa (URCSA) and the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA).

The URCSA came into being on 14 April 1994 when the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) united on the basis of a new church order to form the URCSA (*Acta Synodi* 1994). The period of focus (1975-1994) is of significance for this article because this period saw the start of the unification process supported by a changing ecclesiology within the DRMC and the DRCA.

The momentum for this unification of the DRMC and the DRCA to form the URCSA can be found in the theological rejection of state and ecclesial apartheid by the 1975 General Synod of the DRCA and the 1978 Synod of the DRMC.³ At her General Synod in Worcester (1975) the DRCA set the tone for what was to follow in the other “mission churches” when this church took a stand against the Biblical sanctioning of apartheid. In the light of decisions taken at this very important synod a document, *The Bible and the relationships between races and people* was tabled (*Acta Synodi* 1994:157-205; 1975).⁴ Decisions taken at this General Synod of the DRCA paved the way for ensuing discussions on unity within the family of DRCs.

A similar position was adopted by the DRMC at her synod of 1978, which directly prompted the declaration of a *status confessionis* as well as a state of confession at her subsequent synod (1982) (*Acta Synodi* 1978:399-400, 559, 618-619). The DRMC took the decision that she cannot but condemn the theological justification for apartheid and thus strive for reunification with the other churches within the family of DRCs. However, the period following these and other watershed synodical decisions was characterised by a very slow movement toward this intended goal, as not much had changed the old ecclesial structures characterised by separation along racial lines (Van Rooi 2010:106-107).

As mentioned, at the 1982 synod of the DRMC, following the General Meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, this church declared a *status confessionis* against church-sanctioned apartheid calling apartheid a heresy and in contrast with what the Bible taught about justice, reconciliation and unity (*Acta Synodi* 1982:410-469, 590-591).⁵ Hereby a commission that had as instruction the drafting of a new confession was called into being. This commission drafted a confession that would be known as Belhar and would officially be accepted by the DRMC as her fourth official confession at the synod of 1986 (*Acta Synodi* 1986:891, 913-914).⁶

As mentioned, the process of church reunification – although slow – was always part and parcel of the abovementioned process. After 1986, negotiations between the DRMC and the DRCA gathered new momentum and on 9 September 1987 the first meeting took place between the dialogue commissions of the DRMC and the DRCA (*Acta Synodi* 1990:32). Hereafter things moved at a rapid pace, so much so that a concept church order for the uniting church was compiled by 1990 (*Acta Synodi* 1990:816). Hereafter revisions were made to the church orders of the DRMC and the DRCA in order for these churches to disband their synod and General Synod respectively and (re-)unite as a new church. After this process the road was clear for these churches to unite (*Acta Synodi* 1990:360). At her synod of 1990 the DRCA declared that it was indeed ready to adhere to the biblical calling to unite with the DRMC in the URCSA. In this regard the synod states the following:

(I)n gehoorsaamheid aan die bybelse opdrag omtrent die eenheid van die kerk en in gehoorsaamheid met die Gereformeerde opvatting dat die sigbare eenheid van die kerk gestalte moet vind in een kerkverband het die sinode van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika op sy vergadering gehou te Mitchells Plain op 1 Oktober 1990 besluit om te verenig in een nuwe kerkverband met die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika wat bekend sal staan as die Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika.⁷

³ For an overview of the most important decisions linked to the rejection of apartheid during the mentioned synods and the start of the unification process between the DRCA and the DRMC, see Nyatyowa, TS. 1999. *The unification process in the Family of Dutch Reformed Churches from 1975-1994: a critical evaluation*. Unpublished master's thesis: Bellville: University of the Western Cape. See also LB van Rooi, In Search of Ecclesial Autonomy. A Church Historical and Church Juridical Study of Developments in Church Polity in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) from 1881-1994, 2010, 106.

⁴ See in this regard *The Bible and the relationships between races and people*. A report by the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, 1975. The content of this report includes Scriptural studies on race and nation, ethical norms and human relations, human relations in the South African context, and the role of the church and the state with regard to human relations in South Africa. See *Acta Synodi*, DRCA, 1975.

⁵ See also GD Cloete and DJ Smit, DJ (eds). 1984. *A moment of truth. The confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1982*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁶ For a historical overview with regard to the Confession of Belhar see Johan Botha and Piet Naude (eds), *Op pad met Belhar: goeie nuus vir gister, vandag en more!* 1998. Pretoria: Van Schaik; Douglas Lawrie, *Die Belydenis van Belhar, 1986: 'n eenvoudige uitleg*. 1988. Belhar: NG Sendingkerk; GD Cloete and DJ Smit (eds), *A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church*, 1984. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

⁷ *Acta Synodi*, DRMC, 1990, 360.

On 14 April 1994 the URCSA came into being.⁸ This church had as confessional basis the Canons of Dordt, the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Confession of Belhar.⁹ It can indeed be said that the first church order of the URCSA was influenced by Belhar in the sense that it practically expresses this confession within the structures of this church. Dirkie Smit is of the opinion that the URCSA could not just adjust the church orders of the DRMC and the DRCA as these church orders envisioned a totally different church vision imbedded in the historical realities of the mentioned churches (Smit 2002:357-371). As such the new church order had to express the ecclesiological identity of the new church (Van Rooi 2007:808).

As will be indicated in the following section, the abovementioned process saw the end of a history where the DRMC and the DRCA were regarded as “daughter churches”, inferior in every way in relation to the Dutch Reformed Church as the so-called “mother church”. In a very real sense this process brought about growing theological differences between the churches within the family of DRCs and, as will be noted, it saw a new understanding of being church in relation to other churches emerge within the ranks of the DRMC, the DRCA and eventually also the URCSA.

The relational history of the DRC, the DRMC and the DRCA

In his historical study commemorating the centennial of the DRMC (1881-1981) Botha divides the history of this church into three periods, namely 1881-1916 (the period of full subordination to the “mother church”), 1916-1958 (the period of limited autonomy under the constitution), and 1958-1975 (the period of growth from the constitution to the Deed of Agreement) (Kriel 1981:158-164).¹⁰ By doing this Botha wants to point out that there was indeed a development from full subordination to what he determines to be ecclesial autonomy within this period. In this regard he states that the day the Deed of Agreement between the DRC and the DRMC was signed, i.e. the day that saw the end of the last tenets of the old constitution(s), can indeed be commemorated as the day of *kerkregtelike selfverwesenliking* (church juridical self-realisation) (Kriel 1981:163).

Although it is doubtful whether the DRMC did indeed reach church juridical self-realisation as understood by Botha and Kriel in the abovementioned study, the growing development of autonomy and equalising relations between the DRMC and the DRC is of significance. And this is crucial to understand in any discussion about the ecclesiology of the churches within the family of DRCs and specifically the URCSA and its relation with the other churches within the family. The abovementioned periods point toward a growing autonomy of the DRMC from a position of subordination to a position where this church started to understand and develop its own structure, ecclesial identity and theological expressions/arguments as it became growingly imbedded in the context of South(-ern) Africa.

To a large degree the same can be said of the churches that in 1963 constituted the DRCA. Perhaps the documents that, at a church juridical level, impacted the most on the relation between the DRC and its so-called “daughter churches” are the constitutions (*Acta Synodi* 1880:7-8).¹¹ The basis for all the constitutions for the various “daughter churches” can be found in the 1880 Constitution for the DRMC and as such this Constitution has received the attention of a number of South African church historians. Regarding the impact of the constitutions on the DRMC and the DRCA Smit notes that through these documents the DRC had a right of veto over the “younger churches” and that, through strong paternalistic governance, the DRC wanted to guide the mentioned churches to maturity (Smit 1974:349).¹² In his exposition and academic biography for GBA Gerdener, Van der Watt points out that through the history of the DRC it is clear that this church exercised strict supervision over the different “mission churches”. He notes that Gerdener voiced critique at the 1951 Missionary Conference in Wellington, South Africa, specifically with regard to the apparent position of the

⁸ JC Adonis. ‘Bevryding tot eenwording en getuienis. Die geskiedenis van die Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika 1950-2001.’ In P Coertzen (ed), *350 Years Reformed. 1652-2002, 2002, 22-23*. For a concise version of the discussion regarding the name of the new church see Loff, *Bevryding tot Eenwording*, 1998, 271-272.

⁹ See in this regard the *Church Order and Regulations of the URCSA*, 1994.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Plaatjies-Van Huffel is of the opinion that there were four stages relating to church juridical developments in the DRMC’s striving toward canonical self-realisation. In this regard she notes that ‘(D)rie fases kan in die NGSK se strewes na kerkregtelike selfverwesenliking onderskei word, naamlik Ondergesiktheid aan die NGK (1881-1915), Bepaalde outonomie onder die Grondwet (1915-1956), en Kerkregtelike selfverwesenliking (1956-198)’. See Plaatjies-Van Huffel, *Die Doleansiekerkreg en die kerkreg en kerkregering van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerke en die Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika*, 2008, 250-251. Interestingly enough Plaatjies-Van Huffel later notes that ‘(D)ie tydperk 1982-1994 was volle kerkregtelike outonomie in die NGSK bereik’. See Plaatjies-Van Huffel, *Die Doleansiekerkreg*, 2008, 298.

¹¹ Van Rooi notes that ‘(t)his constitution defined the structure and inner workings of the particular church and could well be seen as the document through which these churches were governed’. For an overview of the content and structure of the various constitutions see Van Rooi, *In Search of Ecclesial Autonomy*, 2010, 63-79.

¹² ‘Die ‘Moeder’-kerk het deur grondwette wat hy aan die Jongere Kerk gegee het en deur ‘n vetoreg op besluite van die vergadering van die Jongere Kerk, die “onvolwasse” kind wou lei tot wasdom. Die Jongere Kerke het hierdie paternalisme ook so aanvaar.’ One cannot fully understand the history of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches without taking the socio-political context of the broader South Africa into account. Due to its immense significance and impact on the social context of South Africa one should further take into account historical developments of the African continent over the years focused on in this study. See Van Rooi, *In Search of Ecclesial Autonomy*, 2010.

DRC criticising the constitutions, the position of the white office bearers, a specific understanding of guardianship as implemented by the DRC, and also at an administrative level.¹³

Despite the relational history that the churches within the family of DRCs developed over a period of more than 100 years, it can be argued that the central tenets of the different (and amended) constitutions stayed intact in the Deeds of Agreement (Deeds) between the DRC and its various “daughter churches”.¹⁴ As was the case with the different constitutions the Deeds in a very real sense determined the relation between the DRC and the DRMC and DRCA.¹⁵ The Deeds in turn gave way for the development of church orders that in essence could not and did not perform the classic role ascribed to these reformed church juridical documents (Jonker 1962:8-18).

It can thus be concluded that the relational history of the DRCs is characterised by paternalistic tenets that had as outcome a “mother/daughter” relationship. The strong church juridical and governing hold of the DRC over its “daughter churches” is an outflow of an ecclesiology characterised by mission theologies linked strongly with striving toward autonomy and dependence on the one hand, and guiding the “younger churches” toward autonomy to the point that the “younger churches” theologially disrupted this relation. This disruption is based on a theological understanding of being church and specifically also in church unity. As will be indicated in the following section, Belhar had an enormous impact on the mentioned theological understanding of being church.

Belhar and an understanding of being church: The search for unification between the DRMC and the DRCA

Johan Botha is of the opinion that Belhar did not only influence the vision of the URCSA, but that it also impacts on the church’s existence as organism and institution (Botha 2010:81). He even goes a step further when he states the following:

Eintlik het die VGKSA hierdie belydenis (Belhar) geword en probeer ons dit prakties beoefen en uitleef. 'n Mens moet dus goed verstaan dat die VGKSA nie slegs Belhar as 'n belydenisskrif hét nie, maar dat die kerk self nou die belydenis is. Die ontvangs is, soos die ekumente sê, die “resepsie” van die VGKSA hou daarom vanselfsprekend die resepsie van Belhar in. Wie nou met die VGKSA wil verenig ontvang Belhar as deel van ons geloofsgrond en van ons lewenswysie (Botha 2010:81-82).

Although one can indeed challenge the assumption that a church can *become* a confession just as one can challenge growing assumptions that a confession is ‘owned’ by a particular church, Botha’s point is clear: Belhar impacts on the essence of the URCSA and is thus directly linked to its identity.

Discussions on and studies of Belhar have focused on the three central themes of this confession, namely unity, justice and reconciliation. The ecclesiological identity of the URCSA has largely been influenced by nuanced discussions (including synodical discussions) on these three themes in the light of Scripture and as an answer to the calling of the church in society. To best understand this, one must take into account that Belhar did not just come into being, but that it was born as an expression of how the DRMC and the DRCA theologially understood themselves in relation to the socio-political context of the time. As such it grew from the church and continues to express the theological sentiments of the URCSA. Belhar was thus also influenced by other theological expressions in the DRMC and the DRCA such as, among others, the mentioned synodical document *The Bible and the relationships between races and people*, the report of the DRCA and the *Theological Declaration of the Broederkring*.¹⁶

One of the more direct and tangible expressions of this ecclesiology is found in a growing sense of relatedness and drive toward unity/reunification between churches within the family of DRCs and here specifically the DRMC and the DRCA. For Belhar relatedness between churches should be expressed in

¹³ In this regard Van der Watt quotes Gerdener saying: ‘(Hy) [Gerdener] onderskei vier kanale waardeur die Ned. Geref. Kerk sy voogdyskap reserveer. a) Deur die grondwette word 'n soort vetoreg verskans, veral oor leer, kerkregering, reg om wette te maak en administrasie van eiendom. b) Deur sy blanke ampsdraers verseker hy ook toesig oor die Jongkerk. Dit word versterk deurdat die opleiding van die inheemse leraars die verantwoordelikheid van die Moederkerk bly en deurdat die Jongkerk se reg by die beroeping van inheemse leraars beperk word. c) 'n Derde kanaal waardeur die Moederkerk sy “voogdyskap” verskans, is deur die vetoreg wat die verteenwoordigers van die Ned. Geref. Kerk op kerklike vergaderings van die Jongkerk het. Inheemse leraars mag self nie leiding neem in sekere kerkvergaderings van sy kerk nie. d) 'n Vierde kanaal waardeur die toesig behou word, is op administratiewe gebied – die besitreg van geboue en beskikking oor fondse.’ See in this regard, Gideon van der Watt, *GBA Gerdener*, 1990, 103.

¹⁴ For a good overview of the Deeds of Agreement see Brooks, J.W. 1982. ‘n Teologiese-Missiologiese beoordeling van die Aktes van Ooreenkoms tussen die Ned. Geref. Kerkverbande in Suid-Afrika. Unpublished MTh Thesis. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

¹⁵ See Van Rooi, *In Search of Ecclesial Autonomy*, 2010, 86-97.

¹⁶ See the *Theological Declaration of the Broederkring* in Christoff Pauw, *Anti-apartheid theology in the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches. A depth-hermeneutical analysis*, published doctoral dissertation, Amsterdam: Free University of Amsterdam, 2007, 180-181.

structural unity – a unity that is not predetermined by socio-cultural and political factors.¹⁷ Or as its article on unity states:

We believe in one holy, universal Christian Church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family... that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe... that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups are sins, which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything that 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, practise 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 ...¹⁸

A discussion on ecclesial autonomy as an expression of interrelatedness between churches is of value. Due to the history of the family of DRCs and specifically the DRMC and DRCA's striving to reach ecclesial autonomy, a discussion on this topic in the light of the unification of the mentioned churches to form the URCSA is necessary as important lessons can be learned. This understanding of relatedness is built on an understanding of the ecclesial autonomy that every church possesses and that is inherently part of a gathering of believers. As such it is also inherent to the structures of a constituted church and thus it should find particular expression in ecclesial structures (Van Rooi 2010:200).¹⁹

The proposed interpretation and understanding of ecclesial autonomy leaves no room for an inadequate interpretation of autonomy where churches' relations are hindered and where autonomy points to separateness, "unrelatedness" or independence (Van Rooi 2010:200-201). The history of the church and here specifically the history of the family of DRCs indicates that such an understanding of autonomy leads to a splintering in churches. Just as there can be no distinction between "older" and "younger" churches or "missional" or "mission" churches, there is also no foundation for a distinction between "autonomous" and "semi-autonomous" churches (Van Rooi 2010:200-201). Bosch agrees with this when he states the following: (*B)elangriker as die kerke se onafhanklikheid is dus die verhouding van wedersydse afhanklikheid van verskillende dele van die één Liggaam van mekaar...* (Bosch 1962:485). As such, ecclesial autonomy brings about a sense of deep relatedness or mutual interdependence expressed in unity/unification between churches.

In a historical sense the DRMC and the DRCA understood this reality and have in the formation of the URCSA realised that they are interdependent of each other. But these churches went further in expressing this relatedness as they continued their journey on a road leading toward structural unity as confessed in Belhar, i.e. that they need each other as part of the church's witness and that this relation can only be expressed in unification/unity. As such they express Christ's Lordship and witness to the unity of Christ. This church vision finds particular expression in the church order of the URCSA.²⁰

The ecclesial identity of the URCSA attempts to express Scripture and Confession (Belhar) that belongs to the essence of this church. This, of course, has direct implications for the compilation of new church orders and for the process of church reunification in the family of DRCs (Van Rooi 2007:809).

The impact of Belhar on the ecclesiology of the DRMC, the DRMCA and thus also the URCSA as highlighted in this section points toward a specific understanding of the interrelatedness between churches that share the Confession. This interrelatedness in the history of the DRMC and the DRCA found particular expression in unification and seeks further unity with the other churches within the family of DRCs. From the onset of this process of unification it was clear that this unity is not complete until such time as the family of DRCs is structurally united as *one* church.²¹

¹⁷ Margit Ernst notes that '(R)eformed confessions confess the one church, the one Lord, the one Hope - in short: the unity of the church. And furthermore, they call the members of their church to make the given unity of the church visible on earth.' See Margit Ernst, 'We Believe the One Holy and Catholic Church...: Reformed Identity and the Unity of the Church', In Alston and Welker (eds), *Reformed Theology, Identity and Ecumenicity*, 2003. As such a confession can and perhaps should have as outcome the establishment of a faith community or the unification between congregations/churches in a bigger structure. As such confession has to do with visible unity. It remains to be seen whether this will ring true in the context of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. See Van Rooi, *In Search of Ecclesial Autonomy*, 2010, 188.

¹⁸ See *Belhar*, <http://www.vgksa.org.za/documents/The%20Belhar%20Confession.pdf>

¹⁹ 'Because Christ gathers His church, the completeness of a church is found in this very relation with Christ. This does not deny the fact that a church undergoes certain patterns of growth and developments in structure, polity and financial liberty. However, these developments can never be measurements or indicators of ecclesial autonomy as they do imply the essence of being church. As such, ecclesial autonomy, as a theological construct, does not have the same meaning as completion in a juridical sense.' See Van Rooi, *In Search of Ecclesial Autonomy* (2010:200).

²⁰ 'Kerkordes in die gereformeerde tradisie vind beide gestalte binne die ekklesiologie van die betrokke kerk as wat dit die ekklesiologiese opbou en dus die aard van 'n kerk bepaal.' See Van Rooi, 'Bevry om te bely en te beliggaam', In the *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal (NGTT)*, Sept & Dec 2007, 801.

²¹ Own italicisation.

For the URCSA this unity is based on its interpretation of Scripture and thus on an ecclesiology that is influenced by Belhar. It is therefore also directly influenced by a particular understanding of justice and reconciliation.

The process, understanding and conviction of church reunification guided by the URCSA's ecclesiology influenced by Belhar is what liberated the DRMC and the DRCA from a history characterised by separation and unrelatedness. It is this ecclesiology that guided the mentioned churches to break with their relational history and strive toward not only stronger relations with each other and the other churches within the family of DRCs but toward structural church reunification and an expression of deep interdependence and relatedness in the URCSA.

Closing remarks

One should not underestimate the impact of Belhar on the ecclesiology of the formed DRMCA, on the DRCA and thus also on the URCSA. In a very real way this comes to expression in the structures, liturgy, church order, church polity, and the general theological accents of the URCSA.²² This outlook has as outflow a specific understanding of church unity and the interrelatedness between churches.

The theological rejection of both state and ecclesial apartheid went hand in hand with confessing the faith and striving toward church reunification in the family of DRCs. This understanding of being church – standing in a relation with other churches and expressing this relatedness in structural unity – is largely influenced by Belhar and thus impacts on the URCSA as well as the other churches within the family of DRCs.

The shift brought about by Belhar to the ecclesiology of the DRMC, the DRCA and thus also the URCSA does not undervalue the shared theological foundation of the churches within the family of DRCs – a foundation shared with the Reformed Church over all times and places. This is signified in the common Reformed confessions that form the confessional basis of all the churches within the family of DRCs. Or, as Botha and Naudé note, *histories deel ons meer as dit wat ons skei* (Botha 2010:152-155).

Although the process is slow and sometimes painful, the churches within the family of DRCs have committed themselves toward church reunification with the other churches within the family.²³ Secondary issues relating to the structure of this new church and its confessional basis, however, plague the reunification process.²⁴ Due to its ecclesiology the URCSA cannot but continue to strive to express its interrelatedness with the other churches within the family of DRCs through structural unity – a unity expressed in its understanding of being church.

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²² See in this regard, *Eenheid, Versoening, Geregtheid. Preke rondom die Belydenis van Belhar (1986)*. Reeks: Toegerus vir dienswerk TD2/2. 'n Publikasie van die N.G. Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika. 1988. Paarl: Paarl Drukkers.

²³ See in this regard the decisions taken at the recent Achterberg conferences between the DRC, the DRCA, the RCA and the URCSA, viewed 2 December 2013.

http://ngkok.co.za/achterberg2/Re-unification_Process_Achterberg_II.pdf

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²⁴ In 2008 the General Synod of the URCSA (2008) decided to call a moratorium on all unity discussions between this church and the other churches within the family of DRCs. See in this regard the pastoral letter of the URCSA General Synod sent to the ministers and congregations of this church. <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/VGKSA/News.asp>

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