

The Reception of Belhar in the Dutch Reformed Church

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That day, I knew that things had not changed, and probably never would; that the tired and cynical members of our own delegation, who had seen this so often before, were right after all; that the deepest commitment of the nation-wide leadership of the DRC was, ultimately, when tested, their own people, to the *volk*, and not to us, their brothers and sisters in faith, or to theological convictions, or Reformed theology, not even the content of their own synodical documents. (Smit 2001, 122)

Abstract

This article asks anew the question of the reception of the Belhar Confession in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). In the first part, the question of reception is asked. It is argued that reception *inter alia* has to do with the receiving and acceptance of one another. In the second part, the question of receiving is asked in light of Richard Kearney's carnal hermeneutics. The third part focuses on Esselenpark. It is argued that although the reception of Belhar was not the main focus of Esselenpark, at least for a moment, the DRC was in a way able to begin to apprehend what it might mean to really receive and accept one another. The argument is not that the reception of the Belhar Confession is not of utmost importance for the DRC. The argument is also not that Esselenpark is the one and only moment that the DRC and URCSA did receive and accept one another. The article merely tries to make sense of how sense itself might allow the DRC, of which I am part, to really receive and accept Belhar.

Keywords: reception; Belhar Confession; Dutch Reformed Church (DRC); Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA)

Introduction

The above words of Smit (2001) were true for the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in 1990—there are, however, ways in which they are still true. This article attempts to take

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the words of Smit very seriously—to ask why it is that the church, of which I am part and which I embody, does not seem to be able to really make sense (meant ambiguously) of the text that has formed me in more ways than I will ever be able to imagine—Belhar.

There are, of course, different ways to answer the question about the reception of Belhar in the DRC. Durand in *A Moment of Truth* (1984b), Botha and Naudé's *Goeie Nuus om te Bely* (1998; 2010; 2011), Durand and Meiring's article in *Our Pilgrimage to Unity* (2007), and more recently, Vosloo in "The Reception of the Belhar Confession in the Dutch Reformed Church and Church Polity" (2014) asked about the reception of Belhar, particularly also in the DRC, albeit in different ways, asking why the Belhar Confession has *not* been received in the DRC,¹ that is, *still not*?²

To again answer the question of the reception of Belhar in the DRC, it will, of course, be important to ask anew what is meant by the "Dutch Reformed Church," "Belhar," and, in particular, "reception."

Reception?

In *Neither Calendar nor Clock* (2010), Naudé asks not only about the reception of Belhar in the DRC, and how they received or did not receive Belhar, but also how we really "receive." He asks about the meaning of really receiving.³

There are those, he agrees, who question the term "reception." For them, the term is too ambiguous. For Naudé, however, it is because of this ambiguity that he wants to ask about the meaning of reception.

It is for this reason that, in the Foreword, Smit (2010) relates these questions of reception to questions of authority, that is, *inter alia*, to the authority of tradition, rhetoric. Therefore, also the authority of those who speak on behalf of the traditions rhetorically—and the authority of the biblical traditions. What does "reception," "receive" and "accept" mean in the biblical traditions? What does it mean, for example,

1 Durand (1984b, 120) wrote that the DRC was not theologically strong enough, that is, the sterility of their particular theologies, with which they equipped themselves in terms of race relations, rendered them incapable of responding sensibly. In this regard, see also Botman (2001) and Nicol (2001) on the question as to whether there has been any change in the DRC.

2 "In a certain sense the family of Dutch Reformed churches is a microcosm of South African society, reflecting all the various group tensions: the fears of the whites and the anxieties of the blacks, the arrogance and embitterment, the mutual suspicion and mistrust, but also, somewhere inside, a hope for something better to follow, a deeper willingness to forgive and to respond to the signs of benevolence that are appearing. It is this last faintly flickering and sometimes sooty flame that must not die. It must keep on burning as never before, for the next few years may prove to be the turning point of the history of South Africa" (Durand 1984b, 126).

3 See also Naudé and Smit (2000) who argue that "reception" might be one of the most important challenges, not only for *oikoumene*, but also for South Africa. They not only discuss reception by looking at the history of reception and describing reception processes. They also discuss the difficulties with processes of reception, providing a framework for making sense of reception today.

to accept one another like we have been accepted? (Smit 2010, xiii). For Naudé (2015, 14), this is the point of reception, namely to accept one another:

If we understand the term in a general sense, pointing to the diverse ways in which Christians, congregations and churches are called, and challenged, *to accept one another*, to learn to live with one another, then the discussions concerning “reception” serve as a very useful reminder to South African churches of a serious challenge we face today ... we can no longer ignore this challenge, and in the process ignore one another. We must learn to receive one another.

What does the reception of Belhar in the DRC mean if it is at least *also* a question of receiving and accepting one another?

Receiving?

There are many ways to answer the question of what it means to receive and accept one another.

In an article in a *Festschrift* for J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, Smit (2017, 273) refers to a lecture he was asked for by Van Huyssteen on why they had to confess.⁴ The background to the lecture was the Belhar Confession.⁵ For him, besides the *status confessionis*,⁶ it had to do with a society defined by “alienation, distrust and bitterness, but also exclusion, marginalisation, oppression and injustice,” a society where human beings were “deliberately and forcefully further estranged from one another, after centuries of colonisation, inequality, cultural differences and conflict.” This, *inter alia*, was why they had to confess (Smit 2017, 273). In his article, he asks how available literature assists in reflecting on living together in a society such as ours;⁷ in short, assists us in living with strangers.⁸

In many ways, Kearney has also asked the question of living with strangers. Of course, also his answer to the question of what it means to receive and accept one another might

4 In this regard, see also Durand (1984a).

5 For a history of URCSA between 1950–2001, see Adonis (2002; 2017). For a history of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church between 1976–1986, see Botha (2013). For a history of the Belhar Confession itself, see Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2017) and Boesak (2017).

6 In this regard, see Smit (1984a).

7 See Van der Westhuizen (2017).

8 It is interesting to note that the Belhar Confession also directly refers to “strangers,” which is so important for answering the question of living together today. Belhar confesses “that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows.”

be answered in different ways,⁹ one of which is to look at what he refers to as “carnal hermeneutics.”

In his article “The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics,” published in a collection of articles entitled *Carnal Hermeneutics*, Kearney (2015b) asks how we read between the lines of skin and flesh. “Before words, we are flesh, flesh becoming words for the rest of our lives ... Life is hermeneutic through and through. It goes all the way up and all the way down. From head to foot and back again” (Kearney 2015b, 15). Flesh matters, life matters, whatever there is from head to foot matters, and not only to oneself.

How do we interpret and how are we interpreted with and through our flesh, with and through our fleshly *senses*? For Kearney, our deepest way of making sense *is* through our senses, through sight, sound, smell, taste—and, for him, in particular, through touch. In fact, hermeneutics begins *there*.

Kearney acknowledges that philosophy and, more particularly, phenomenology have done much to make sense of the senses, of sensing, to make sense of a hermeneutics of flesh. Yet, he argues, with the hermeneutic turn, flesh was lost to the text: “The journey from flesh to text often forgot a return ticket” (Kearney 2015b, 16). The flesh as site of meaning was lost. As if flesh and text could be separated. For him, the project of carnal hermeneutics, therefore, lies in ways of undertaking the return journey.

In short, carnal hermeneutics covers a wide spectrum of sense, both sacred and profane, as it ranges up and down—in ascending and descending spirals—from the most elevated ... to the lowest ... While hands reach up, feet reach down. But the point is that no matter how high or low experience goes, it still makes sense. Flesh sounds, filters, scents. Between the extremes of hyper rationalism at one end, and blind irrationalism at the other, we find the all too human path of carnal hermeneutics. A middle way. A road less travelled philosophically to be sure. But one that needs to be taken again and again. (Kearney 2015b, 18)

Although Kearney, in his article on carnal hermeneutics, reflects on what he refers to as a “hermeneutics of the flesh from Husserl to Ricoeur,” this article will be restricted to his preliminary reflections on Aristotle, and how carnal hermeneutics assists in answering the question of what it means to receive and accept one another.

In light of Aristotle, Kearney argues that, contrary to the argument that touch is the lowest of the senses because it is unmediated, these so-called lower senses such as touch

9 It would, for example, be possible to ask how Kearney’s *On Stories* (2002) allows for making sense of narrative, which is so important for receiving and accepting one another. It would also be possible to ask about his philosophy that deals with strangers in, for example, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (2003), “Welcoming the Stranger” (2011) and, with Semonovitch’s, “At the Threshold: Foreigners, Strangers, Others” (2011). For Kearney’s own story, and the importance of the theme of strangers in his story, see Kearney (2018) and Sands (2018).

are also mediated. In terms of touch, flesh is the medium. Touch is not unmediated, but mediation through the flesh.

Thus, there is more *to touch*, more to touch mediated by the flesh, than we think. To touch and be touchable is to be flesh among other flesh. In terms of touch, flesh is the medium that allows for discernment between one's own flesh and the flesh of others.

In touch, we are both touching and touched at the same time, but we do not dissolve into sensuous sameness. Proximity is not immediacy. Difference is preserved. And this breakthrough insight means that flesh always harbors a certain distance or interval through which touch navigates. Touch is not fusion but mediation through flesh.

To touch, to be touchable, thus, is also *to be out of touch*.

While I may seem to be immediately present to what I touch and to be immediately touched by what I touch—unlike sight, where I am not necessarily seen by what I see, or hearing, where I am not necessarily heard by what I hear, etc.—there is always something mediate in the immediate, something “far” in the “near.” (Kearney 2015b, 20)

He means that there is always sensing in the sense; there is always a making sense of and a receiving sense from what is not my own flesh. Flesh thus mediates what is different; it mediates between what is my flesh and what is not my own flesh. This is the beginning of hermeneutics. For him, since all of the senses involve touch, and since all touch does involve mediation, all senses have to do with hermeneutics, that is, with prefiguring, refiguring, and configuring (Kearney 2015b, 21). This is the case, whether we are aware thereof or not.

For Kearney, this means that to be out of touch in touching and being touched *is* to be able *to be in touch*, for touch is the sense that allows one to be sensitive to what is not one's own flesh. According to Kearney, to be in touch, to be sensitive is to see, hear, smell and taste differently. Touch has to do with all the senses.

To be in touch is also *to be touched*. Touch is what touches one. To touch is to be touched by what is not one's own flesh. And to be touched by what is not one's own flesh is to be vulnerable, to be sensitive to the vulnerability of what is not one's own flesh.

Flesh is a surface that is always deep. And precisely because it mediates between a self carnally located “here” and an other located “there,” it is, at bottom, what allows for empathy ... The capacity to feel with others in and through distance ... As the “medium” which enables us to feel with others, flesh filters what is strange and alien ... we do not feel what is the same as us but only what is different ... Touch is touched by what it touches, and can even touch itself touching.

At Esselenpark?

To answer the question of what it means to receive and accept one another in light of these introductory remarks on carnal hermeneutics, it might be interesting to ask whether there were moments when the DRC really received and accepted Belhar.

Esselenpark was a moment of touch, of being out of, and therein in touch, of being touched. The argument is that, while the reception of Belhar was not the main focus of Esselenpark, although it was declared that Belhar or the reception thereof should not be a stumbling block, at least for *a* moment, the DRC was, in a way, able to begin to apprehend what it might mean to really receive and accept one another.¹⁰

With this I am in *no* way arguing that the reception of the Belhar Confession is not of *utmost* importance. Neither am I arguing that Esselenpark is the one and only moment when we did receive and accept one another. I am merely trying to make sense of how sense itself might allow the DRC, of which I am part, to really receive and accept it, to really make sense of Belhar.

Between 20 and 22 June 2006, leaders *and* members of URCSA and the DRC met for the first time to discuss the reunification process of the family of Dutch Reformed churches. Of course, they had met beforehand to decide on and plan this meeting.

In a letter dated 17 July 2006, Johan Botha, then minister in synodical service, provides an important personal perspective on both Esselenpark and what led to it. According to him, none of the attendees could have planned what had already happened at the meeting prior to Esselenpark. The Lord's hand, he states, was surely at the meeting and they were honoured to be able to see him [sic] at work in this manner. It was, in many ways, the vulnerability and fragility that struck him, and that gave off.

The Lord's hand was so very clearly leading the meeting and we were privileged to see him at work among, and with us! Their availability to serve, their humbleness and their ability to learn struck us and positively rubbed off on us [*Die Here se hand was baie duidelik by die vergadering aan die stuur en ons was bevoorreg om Hom só onder en met ons te sien werk! Hulle dienende beskikbaarheid, nederigheid én leerbaarheid het deurgaans opgeval én dit het ook positief afgegee op ons ander*].

At first, both URCSA and the DRC met from early 19 June to late 20 June to discuss their own synodical agendas. Although they were together in the same hall, they were separated by a thin dividing wall. They were thus back to back on the second floor of the *Junction*, which literally means binding site, conjunction, to combine, point of connection, crossroad, combination.

Du Toit (2006) describes how they, as DRC on one side of the wall, were deeply touched by what they heard from URCSA, on the other side, singing: "Lord, visit us, send your

10 See in this regard Jackson (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2006e, 2006f, 2006g).

Holy Spirit.” He particularly refers to their being touched by being exposed to the deep, distressing context of the inner city of Johannesburg. Accompanied, *inter alia*, by the police, they felt within a few hours the desperate, despairing conditions of hundreds in a building in the centre of the city.

We were taken into a block of flats by flashlight and up slippery steps where there had not been running water or sanitation facilities for years. In this 14-storey building, the lift was out of order, mainly because the shaft was filled up to the third floor with human faeces thrown in from above—the stench was unbearable. A contemporary shanty town one on top of the other in a concrete structure [*Ons word in woonstelgeboue met flitslig teen glibberige trappe opgeneem waar daar al vir jare nie meer lopende water of sanitêre geriewe is nie. Die hyser van ’n 14-verdiepinggebou is onbruikbaar, hoofsaaklik omdat die hyser-skag tot op die derde verdieping gevul is met menslike uitskeiding van bo-af ingegooi—die stank daarvan verstikkend om ons. ’n Hedendaagse plakkerskamp op mekaar gestapel in beton-struktuur*].

He refers to Hannes Koornhof’s prayer at the end of their being exposed at Hillbrow police station where prayers were said for all those involved. They all felt that they did not have a prayer to pray.

Lord, to merely pray for them is so ... meagre. One almost feels guilty about it [Here, om maar net vir hulle te bid, is so ... effentjies. ’n Mens voel amper skuldig daaroor].

Those of the DRC sensed that this was the context of those on the other side of the wall. URCSA was situated in contexts like *these*. They had to bring the gospel, the good news, to *those* people, people for whom, he writes, Belhar was a hopeful cry from the heart of God. For many, this was still their hope, that they have brothers and sisters who will cry out with them, and who will, in the name of the Lord, stretch out their hands to them.

For some believers, it is still the only source of comfort that their brothers and sisters, who were born and live in better conditions, will also embrace this confession, notice their fate, and stretch out their hand of love to them in the name of the Lord: because, “I was hungry, thirsty, without clothes, and ill—and you gave me food, clothes and took care of Me in distress.” Indeed, the Confession of Belhar expresses our shared history. The name of the DRC is, after all, written on the reverse side of Belhar. [*Vir sommige gelowiges is dit nog die enigste bron van troos, dat hulle broers en susters het, wie onder beter omstandighede gebore is en lewe, maar wat ook hierdie belydenis sal omarm, en hulle lot sal raaksien en daadwerklik in die Naam van die Here ’n hand van liefde na hulle sal uitsteek: want, ‘Ek was honger, dors, sonder klere, siek—en julle het vir My kos gegee, klere, en My versorg in nood.’ Trouens, die Belydenis van Belhar verwoord tog ons gedeelde geskiedenis. Die naam van die NG Kerk is immers geskrywe op die keersy van Belhar.*]

The wall between them was taken away on Tuesday, 20 June. For Du Toit (2006), one thing was already clear then; from now on they would be together.

One thing is already certain: We have begun to walk together on a path of no return. [Een ding is nou alreeds duidelik: ons het saam begin loop op 'n pad waarop ons nie weer terug sal kan draai nie].

In the hall, they were given a number and assigned into groups of five or six around 12 tables. There, Botha writes, they really got to know one another, and from there onwards, people in the groups would also be able to introduce them to others whom they might not know.

That night, Thias Kgatla and Coenie Burger, as chairmen of the URCSA and DRC general synods, convened. Both highlighted that the DRC and URCSA should be together. Both also mentioned important stumbling blocks that they were to talk to one another about. According to Botha, both made it very clear that URCSA and the DRC would have to stretch out hands to one another.

Their presentations clearly indicated that we would have to stretch out our hands deliberately and purposefully, trust one another, have to make room for one another, and, with one another, have to seek the outcomes of difficult issues that would allow us to proceed in unity [*Dit was uit hulle voordragte duidelik dat ons vir mekaar doelbewus en doelgerig sou moes handgee, dat ons mekaar sou moes vertrou, dat ons vir mekaar sou moes ruimte maak en dat ons saam met mekaar die uitkomst met baie moeilike sake moes soek wat ons in eenheid sal kan laat voortgaan*].

They were all deeply touched by moments of confession between Burger, Kgatla and Allan Boesak.

When the ... brothers embraced one another, one could have heard a pin drop [*Toe die ... broers mekaar omhels het, kon jy 'n speld hoor val*]. (Durand and Meiring 2007, 56)

At a synod meeting and later in *Die Kerkbode*, Allan Boesak considered these moments.

It would have been a normal gathering between the churches, except for the fact that the delegations would this time be larger ... Then Coenie Burger spoke. Unexpectedly he wandered off his text, and spoke from the heart to us. He asked for forgiveness for apartheid and the role of the DRC therein, and not for the first time. I heard it four years ago as well, but I wasn't ready to really hear it. My heart was too raw, too in pain, too angry and bitter, and I did not want to hear. But then God spoke to me. I knew it was a second time and I dared not close my heart again. I had to part with my own agendas, prejudices, and the baggage I carried. Before I knew what I was doing, I stood up and not only took Coenie's words to heart unconditionally, but also confessed that I through the years said and did things that hurt members of the DRC. And like Coenie for us, also I could ask for forgiveness. At that moment I could see that the people in front of me were touched, convinced, and changed. I knew, like all those in front of me, that this we couldn't have planned, or managed or controlled. The Holy Spirit of God was at work. And only when in reconciliation we saw one another's hearts, could we talk about church reunification. But we would talk about it differently, with humility, drive and openness we have not experienced before. This was in Esselenpark, and it is still what

our hearts are convinced of [*Dit sou 'n heel gewone vergadering tussen ons twee kerke wees, behalwe dat ons afvaardigings hierdie keer groter was ... Toe praat Coenie Burger. Onverwags wyk hy van sy teks af en praat uit sy hart met ons. Hy vra vergifnis vir apartheid en vir die rol van die NG Kerk daarin, en nie vir die eerste keer nie. Ek het hom vier jaar gelede dit ook hoor sê, maar toe was ek nie gereed om te hoor nie. My hart was te rou ... ek was te kwaad, te bitter, en ek wou nie hoor nie. Maar daai aand praat God met my. Ek het geweet dit is 'n tweede keer, en ek durf nie nou my hart sluit nie. Ek moes afskeid neem van my eie agendas, vooroordele en die bagasie wat ek met my saamgedra het. Voor ek wis wat ek doen, staan ek op en neem nie net Coenie se woorde onvoorwaardelik aan nie, maar kon ook bely dat ek deur die jare baie dinge gesê en gedoen het wat NG Kerk-lidmate diep seer gemaak het. En soos Coenie vir ons, kon ook ek vir hulle om vergifnis vra. Op daardie oomblik kon ek voor my oë sien hoe mense aangegryp, oortuig en verander word. En ek het geweet, net soos elke ander mens in die vertrek, dat hier iets gebeur wat ons nie kon voorberei, bestuur of beheer nie. Die Heilige Gees van God was aan die werk. En eers toe ons in versoening mekaar se harte gesien het, kon ons oor kerkhereniging praat. Maar toe heeltemal anders, met 'n nederigheid en gedreweheid en openheid wat ons nog nooit met mekaar ervaar het nie. Dit was in Esselenpark, en is nou nog die oortuiging van ons harte*]. (Boesak 2006, 7)

The fragility and vulnerability between them and the open acceptance of one another characterised the remainder of their being together, at least according to Botha (2006). The next day, they walked with one another with those on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). They walked in pairs of two and made sense of the text, heart to heart. In this way, Botha writes, “on the wide open spaces surrounding the ‘Junction,’ the Spirit of God came to stand between them and opened them towards one another [*Só, op die wye gronde al om die “Junction,” het die Here se Gees self in ons kruispunte tussen ons kom loop en ons ... genadiglik na mekaar toe laat oopgaan*]. (Botha 2006)

On 21 June, they talked to one another about local models that might further being a uniting church; the building of trust; how they might truly meet one another on difficult matters; the court case of the DRCA and URCSA; the particular challenges of leadership; a positive contribution of church law; and about what a united church might be like. Botha (2006) writes that, after a day of thinking and talking, they were touched by the fact that they thought and talked *together*. But also, about their commitment to one another.

Many asked: Why now? Why *only* now?

According to Botha, (2006), the answer to the question was that they, now, were *sensitive* with and towards one another.

Whatever was not possible earlier, is now possible, because we can now stand next to each other as more fragile ... and more vulnerable [*En wat nie vroeër moontlik was nie, kan juis nou gebeur omdat ons sagter ... en broser by mekaar kon kon staan*].

On 22 June, after their second Emmaus walk, a *Verbondsvrbintenis*, translated as *Covenanting for the Reunification of the Family of the DR Churches*, was approved. Although the role of Belhar would still have to be clarified, the touching message of Belhar already characterised their being together at Esselenpark. Their challenge, Botha (2006) writes, was clearly the ongoing reception of the message of Belhar, and to mediate the message of Belhar to, and within the DR family.

This was followed by the celebration of Holy Communion together. During the liturgy, *inter alia*, after confessing their role in their pasts and presents, they, in a new commitment to one another, walked around, embracing one another, singing: “I love you with the love of the Lord.” In addition to this, they spontaneously washed one another’s feet at the tables, at which they then also shared with, for and in the body of Christ.

As an afterword to the letter, Botha (2006) writes:

I am deeply grateful that the *Lord* gave to us all ... a shared sense of direction about church unification at Esselenpark. We ... were allowed together, through the Word and the Spirit, to see (with new eyes) one another differently, to listen (with new ears) to one another differently, to talk to differently to one another (with new speech), with the Spirit of God between us. The difference with Esselenpark was that these decisions, decisions that were not new, were not taken on our own ... The difference was that at Esselenpark’s *Junction* we were together, we reflected together, we decided together. This togetherness will be of utmost importance when we deal with church unification [*Ek is diep dankbaar dat die Here self vir ons almal ... met die gesamentlike koersaanduiding oor kerkhereniging by Esselenpark “’n groot hupstoot” gegee het. Ons ... is daar saam deur sy Woord en Gees in staat gestel om anders (met nuwe oë) na mekaar te kyk, anders (met nuwe ore) na mekaar te luister en anders (met nuwe woorde) met mekaar te praat, met die Here se Gees tussen ons ... Die groot verskil is dat ons nou oor die mees fundamentele sake by Esselenpark se “Junction” sáám gekom het, sáám besin het en sáám besluit het ... En dít is wat ons op al die ander vlakke van ons kerkwees met die saak van kerkhereniging verder behoort te doen*].

In light of Kearney’s carnal hermeneutics, it is clear that touch played a crucial role at Esselenpark. This is evident, for example, in the confessions, in being on the way with one another, in eating and drinking with one another, in Holy Communion with one another, and so forth.

Their flesh *inter alia* mediating, embodying whiteness, apartheid, blackness, struggle. The embodiment thereof mediated and embodied to other flesh. Flesh among flesh. Touching, being touchable, also being out of touch. But, in this being out of touch, being able to at least begin to learn what receiving and accepting one another might mean. In this learning to be in touch, they were able to learn what it might mean to be truly touched.

Preliminary Conclusion

In 2015, the DRC had to decide *yes* or *no* on Belhar. They decided *no*, but even if they decided *yes*, they would not have been able to begin to apprehend what it might mean to really receive and accept. The DRC was so removed that they were not able to touch and be touchable; they were not even able to know that they were out of touch—were not able to know what it might have meant to be in touch. They were not touched.

Durand (1984b) writes how the DRC, not able to really hear or feel or understand, lacked sensitivity, that is, lacked *sense*.

Apartheid structured South Africa ... in such a way that (we) are wholly isolated from one another ... Consequently the DRC could not really hear or feel or understand what the ... black churches had to go through under apartheid. (Durand 1984b, 118)¹¹

This, I argue, was and still is the case. For the DRC, Belhar was and is, in many ways, still only a text. And the text is removed from flesh. For them, it was not flesh that moved to text. In short, the DRC will not be able to at least begin to make sense of Belhar, if they remove text from flesh, from the flesh that moved to text.¹² Belhar is full of flesh!¹³

To confess Belhar is not merely to confess a contribution to a theological debate, Belhar is a cry from the flesh in full flesh.

We believe that God ... is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged ... and that God calls the church to follow him [sic] in this ... the church must therefore stand by people *in* any form of suffering and need ... the church as the possession of God must stand *where* the Lord stands.¹⁴

To conclude: It is interesting to note how most, if not all of the reflections prior to and after Esselenpark referred to the Holy Spirit.

There was a new spirit of reconciliation, solidarity and a willingness to reach out to one another. We experienced that we were all more humble, more willing to listen to one another and more eager to help one another. To us, it was as if the Lord himself was present, as if his Spirit led the meeting [*Daar was 'n nuwe gees van versoening, samehorigheid en 'n bereidheid om na mekaar uit te reik. Ons het ervaar dat almal nederiger is, meer bereid om na mekaar te luister en meer gretig om mekaar te help. Vir*

11 See also the argument of Naudé (2010) who refers to the different locations of the DRC family.

12 It is interesting to note that they have done this since 1990 (or even 1988). They accepted Belhar or even the content of Belhar, without Belhar's flesh. In no way do I argue that the text is not important in itself. For a perspective on the reading of Belhar as a historical text, see Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2013).

13 See, for example, Smit (2002) who directly links *belydenis* and *beliggaming*, that is, to confess and to embody. See also Kritzinger (2017).

14 In this regard, see Smit (1984b); Koopman (2002).

ons het dit gevoel of die Here self teenwoordig was, asof sy Gees die vergadering gelei het. (Durand and Meiring 2007, 56)

Botha (2007, 28) also highlights this:

The Spirit helped us all forget our differences ... At Esselenpark, the Lord walked among us; He gave his Spirit to us graciously [*Die Gees het ons almal gehelp om ons skanse teenoor mekaar te laat sak ... Daar by Esselenpark het die Here tussen ons kom loop, het Hy [sic] sy Gees genadiglik aan ons gegee*].

It will be interesting to ask how the Spirit, also in light of Kearney's insights, is related to the flesh. To answer the question of the reception of Belhar in the DRC, that is, to ask the question of accepting and receiving one another, is first and foremost a question of, and for theology. It *is* a theological question.

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