

## OVERTURE

The consistory of Providence Reformed Church overtures the Classis of South Grand Rapids to overture the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes and the General Synod that the Confession of Belhar not be accepted as a confession on the same level with the three forms of unity (i.e. Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt) in the Reformed Church in America. We make this overture for the following reasons:

1. We reject the premise that the Confession of Belhar is needed because “the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake.”<sup>1</sup> We believe that the three forms of unity address the issues raised in the Confession of Belhar with scriptural accuracy and sufficiently. For instance, Heidelberg Catechism. “Question 107. But is it enough that we do not kill any man in the manner mentioned above? Answer. No: for when God forbids envy, hatred, and anger, he commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves; to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness, towards him, and prevent his hurt as much as in us lies' and that we do good, even to our enemies.” and “Question 111. But what doth God require in this commandment? Answer. That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others.”<sup>2</sup> Or, the (Belgic) Confession of Faith, article 27. “Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and disbursed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit.”<sup>3</sup>
2. The Confession of Belhar is inconsistent with the three forms of unity in its treatment of unity, reconciliation, and righteousness. The Confession of Belhar speaks of unity, but not of order and discipline. The (Belgic) Confession of Faith speaks of both unity and discipline, articles 27 and 32. The Confession of Belhar speaks of reconciliation among people, but doesn't speak about the personal forgiveness of our debts (sins) before God, as the Heidelberg Catechism does in Lord's Day 51. The Confession of Belhar speaks of righteousness in church and societal structures, but does not speak of the righteousness in Christ for sinners. The (Belgic) Confession of Faith, article 22. Adopting the Confession of Belhar opens the door to doctrinal imbalance and failures in practice. For example, since the Confession of Belhar states that “birth or any other human factor may not restrict the membership of the church”<sup>4</sup>, does this imply, that homosexual behaviour, a “human factor”, may not be disciplined for the sake of unity? At first glance, the three forms of unity and the Confession of Belhar might be considered complementary, but, in fact, they lead to contradictions.
3. Accepting the Confession of Belhar will alter the unity and cohesion that we have experienced around the three forms of unity since 1628. One pastor of the RCA has written, that the RCA “. . . could change neither its Confession (the Doctrinal Standards) nor its Liturgy, without changing itself.”<sup>5</sup> Many members have joined the RCA, agreeing with the current doctrinal standards. Some may not be able to accept the Confession of Belhar with a clear conscience. It is wiser to accept the Confession of Belhar at a level for instruction, (as we accept other church confessions, i.e. Westminster Confessions) and continue with the doctrinal standards in their current form.

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<sup>1</sup> *Accompanying Letter to the Confession of Belhar*. RCA web site. [www.rca.org/Belhar](http://www.rca.org/Belhar)

<sup>2</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*. Copyright 1912. The United Presbyterian Board of Publication.

<sup>3</sup> *The (Belgic) Confession of Faith*. Copyright 1912. The United Presbyterian Board of Publication.

<sup>4</sup> *The Confession of Belhar*. RCA web site. [www.rca.org/Belhar](http://www.rca.org/Belhar)

<sup>5</sup> Daniel J. Meeter, *Meeting Each Other in Doctrine, Liturgy, and Government* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 39.