


The Confession of Belhar in pastoral care and counselling

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Dates:

Received: 23 May 2024

Accepted: 16 July 2024

Published: 27 Sept. 2024

How to cite this article:

Landman, C., 2024, 'The Confession of Belhar in pastoral care and counselling', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(1), a9932. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9932>

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The Confession of Belhar was accepted as official confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church by its General Synod on 26 September 1986. During the apartheid regime in South Africa, it confesses its belief in God who serves the poor and the downtrodden, and defines the church as taking a stance against injustice. This article explores the values expressed in the Confession of Belhar to be applied in pastoral care and counselling context. The study aimed to determine whether the values of the Confession of Belhar can transcend the boundaries of 'church' and how pastoral care supports people towards healing and healthy religious discourses. The research population are people who: firstly, visited a state hospital in a previously black township for primary care and referred to the author for counselling; and secondly, those who received counselling and pastoral care in black and brown townships where the author has been a tent-maker minister of the Word in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. Upon analysis, five harmful religious discourses that prevent healing were identified: (1) God is punishing me; (2) Is Christ really stronger than evil forces? (3) I am alone and afraid; (4) I have no access to spiritual gifts or any opportunities; and (5) no reconciliation or peace is possible in my situation.

Contribution: This article describes the Belhar Confession in surpassing its aim of unity, reconciliation and justice in that it supports pastoral counselling by assisting people to deconstruct harmful religious discourses of pain and helplessness to alternative discourses of health and healing.

Keywords: Confession of Belhar; Belhar Confession; confession and pastoral care; pastoral care and counselling; fear; healing; Reformed Mission Church; Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; alternative discourses; reconciliation; images of God.

Introduction

Lily is a young woman in her mid-thirties. She suffers from full-blown AIDS. She has oozing sores all over her body, even around her eyes and in her mouth. Her boyfriend chased her out of the house when she became visibly ill. Among the sores she bears the signs of his beatings. She and her three children between the ages of 10 and 15 then moved in with her father. Her father lives in a zozo, a structure of two metres by four metres built from corrugated iron, in the back of the church yard where he stays for free to look after the church property. Soon she could not walk anymore, and her young daughter had to wash and clean her. She is in immense pain and discomfort. Once her father called for the ambulance of the community's state hospital, but it did not turn up. A family member, who has a car, then took her to the hospital. The hospital tried its best to assist her, but eventually had to send her home.

Lily's biggest pain is her belief that God is punishing her for her lifestyle which appears to have been reckless. She has been dependent on one man after the other, whoever could assist in supporting her and her children financially. She is afraid to die and has no mental peace, feeling isolated from humanity.

Can the Confession of Belhar¹ help Lilly? Or rather, can the pastor draw resources from the Confession of Belhar to assist Lilly in her physical and mental struggles? And will the community and/or congregation be addressed by the Confession² to form a community of care around her?

Aim

The aim of this article is to identify expressions of pastoral care in the Confession of Belhar that can be applied in counselling and serve as discourses alternative to the religious discourses that keep poor, lonely, sick and wounded people captive in mental misery.

1.Confession of Belhar and the Belhar Confession will be used interchangeably in this article.

2.Confession of Belhar and the Belhar Confession also referred to as the 'Confession' or 'Belhar' in this article.

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Background

In 1982, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), following the World Council of Churches, declared a *status confessionis* regarding *apartheid* in South Africa. At this stage, the DRMC was regarded as the coloured 'daughter church' of the white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). The political situation in South Africa deteriorated even faster after the Soweto uprisings in 1975, and the Synod of the DRC strongly felt to express itself against the racism of the 'mother church' (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2017:17–18). It was at the 1982 Synod that Prof. Gustav Bam – a Practical Theologian – emphasised that a Confession is required to accompany the *status confessionis*. The Synod appointed its Moderator and Assessor, Rev. Isak Mentor and Dr Allan Boesak, to draw up the Confession with three academics from the University of Western Cape, a university which was designated during *apartheid* as a university for 'Coloureds' and where the ministry students of the DRMC were trained. These academics were Profs. Dirkie Smit, Jaap Durand and Gustav Bam (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2017:19).

Most of these men were specialists in Dogmatics, that is in Systematic Theology, while there was an exception in Gustav Bam who was specialising in pastoral care. This may account for the fact that the Belhar Confession was aimed at making a strong dogmatic statement, but to also a lesser extent, used pastorally caring language, the latter being underrepresented in studies on the Confession.

At the next General Synod of the DRMC, in 1986, the Belhar Confession was formally accepted. With the unification between the DRMC and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) in 1994, it became one of the standards of unity of the newly formed Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

Literature review and unique contribution

It was not only the 'authors' of the Confession of Belhar that were, except for Gustav Bam, experts in Dogmatics, those who have been writing academic interpretations of the Confession also focussed on the (soundness of the) doctrine contained in the Confession. The role of the Confession in pastoral care and counselling has, however, received little attention.

The ground-breaking book on the Belhar Confession, edited by Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Leepo Modise and entitled *Belhar Confession: The Embracing Confession of Faith for Church and Society*, published in 2017, however, does contain three articles that hint on the Confession as a source for pastoral care.

Firstly, Eugene Baron in his article 'Belhar as a therapeutic resource to the Dutch Reformed Church family' (Baron cited in Plaatjies-Van Huffel & Modise 2017:185–198) argues that Belhar saying 'no' to *apartheid* is a way to search for meaning

in the pain of the past, as well as to find a basis for the healing of memories (Baron in Plaatjies-Van Huffel & Modise eds. 2017:193). Therefore, in terms of Victor Frankl's notion that 'the overriding and primary motive of human motivation is the will to meaning' (Baron in Plaatjies-Van Huffel & Modise eds. 2017:187), Belhar is a therapeutic document for those in the DRC family who suffer from a painful past, reaching out to a meaningful future.

Secondly, Gordon Dames, in an article entitled *The relevance of pedagogical narrative maps: The Confession of Belhar as a practical theological narrative searching for a pedagogic-therapeutic methodology*, postulates that the Confession of Belhar enables believers to liberate themselves from structuralist religious beliefs that keep them captive in hate, disunity and injustice, while the Confession empowers believers to author alternative stories based on its values of unity, reconciliation and justice (Dames in Plaatjies-Van Huffel & Modise eds. 2017:387–406).

The third article is that of Llewellyn MacMaster, *Standing where God stands (outside the gate, with Christ): The Belhar Confession as a call for public pastoral care* (Plaatjies-Van Huffel & Modise eds. 2017:273–294). MacMaster points to the pastoral qualities of the three foundational values of the Belhar Confession, namely unity, reconciliation and justice, and points to their contribution to the healing of society.

The contribution of the present article is to indicate that the Belhar Confession has the healing of society at heart, and that the Confession in its statements goes even beyond unity, reconciliation and justice, presenting church and society with pastoral values and insights that can be used to deconstruct religious discourses that keep believers captured in pain and helplessness, and thicken their alternative stories of health and healing.

Research population and counselling model

In 2000, the author started on a journey with pastoral counselling, firstly by enrolling for a course (Landman 2009). This course required practical work in Narrative Counselling. For 7 years, once a week on Wednesdays, the author engaged in a therapeutic journey with patients referred to her by doctors at a state hospital. About a thousand of these journeys have been recorded in her book *Township Spiritualities and Counseling* (Landman 2009). Secondly, the author has engaged in pastoral counselling with congregants as an ordained minister of the Word of the URCSA, serving various 'township'³ congregations since 2008.

The research population consists of people who: firstly, visited a state hospital in a previously black township for

3. Townships refer to peri-urban settlements established in terms of the *Group Areas Act (Act 41 of 1950)* where people were relocated 'to live in designated areas according to race'. 'In the townships, religion has been reclaimed by people in search of the healing of their bodies and circumstances. This has given birth to religious discourses on healing which are unique to these areas, and largely foreign to the 'outside world'' (Landman 2009:2).

primary care and were referred to the author for counselling; and secondly, those who were counselled and pastorally cared for by the author in black and brown townships where the author has been a tent-maker minister of the Word in the URCSA. All participants have indicated that they considered their faith as a support system for healing.

Following are the five religious discourses that hold counselees captive in mental misery that will be dealt with, formulated from the author's experience of journeying with counselees. The author will search for words or phrases of pastoral care in the Belhar Confession to deconstruct these harmful discourses into discourses of healing. The author will provide an example from the aforementioned 'research population' – that is, patients from a state hospital as well as various congregants – for each of the discourses, presenting how the pastoral insights of the Belhar Confession are valuable and practical to rescope unhealthy religious discourses into healthy ones.

Narrative Therapy is a well-recognised method of counselling among pastoral workers in South Africa. It was developed in the 1980s by David Epston and Michael White at the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, Australia. Primary sources that describe this therapeutic journey are Alice Morgan (2000) as well as Michael White and David Epston (1989). The author applies Narrative Therapy as a journey in four phases: (1) the counsellor facilitates the mapping of the counsellee's problem-saturated story, listening for expressions of a story alternative to the problem; (2) the counsellee is assisted in externalising the problem, thus not internalising guilt and helplessness; (3) the counsellee is empowered against the externalised problem, using the skills already exposed during the mapping story; and (4) the counsellor and counsellee become the co-authors of an alternative story that is thick and bedded in a support system (Landman 2009:4–23).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa for researching their documents (mainly the Confession of Belhar and a variety of Acta of the General Synod) and referring to ecclesiastical contents and members. Permission was granted by URCSA's Support Ministry for Communication, Publications and Archives (SMCPA) and signed by the Chair of the SMCPA.

At the time of some of the studies, ethical clearance for the stories told was not required from the university. Ethical standards were, however, complied with in terms of anonymity and confidentiality, firstly, in that vital statistics of the stories have been changed for publication here so that the counsellee(s) would not be identified. Secondly, the stories of congregants were also altered to protect them from being identified. The stories of congregants are rather stories compiled by the author as typical stories, representing many others in the same position.

Names and other identifiers of participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Identifiers such as age and race have also been omitted. The names of participants used in this article are all pseudonyms.

Religious discourses that capture counselees

In narrative therapeutic language, 'discourse' refers to a grand or dominant narrative that captures the lives of people, such as societal structures and beliefs (White & Epston 1989). A religious discourse, for instance, would be 'God has made men to rule over women'. Whether this is 'true' or not, or universally accepted, it is rather a 'truth' or discourses claimed by the majority of a community. Beliefs that a society regards as indeed 'true', become a discourse that regulates and rules the lives of that community of believers (White & Epston 1990:20).

The author as a (pastoral) narrative counsellor has co-journeyed with a variety of religious believers during more than two decades. Based on her experiences, shared observations and compassionate co-journeying with believers, and analysing the information gathered, the following five discourses as religious beliefs are identified:

1. God is punishing me.
2. Is Christ really stronger than other forces?
3. I am left alone and afraid.
4. I have no access to spiritual gifts or any opportunities.
5. No reconciliation or peace is possible in my case.

Alternative discourses of pastoral care and counselling from the Confession of Belhar

The main body of this article consists of exploring the Belhar Confession as an intertext providing words of pastoral care. These are words through which the five aforementioned discourses of fear for God can be deconstructed.

Discourse 1: God is punishing me

One Sunday morning from 05:10 onwards Yolanda was repeatedly raped by three men on her way to work. When she came for counselling, she expressed her fear that God was punishing her through this, since on a Sunday morning she was on her way to work and not to church. She is a member of URCSA. During counselling she moved away from her view of God punishing her to God being on her side and making her an agent against rape.

However, the people around her remained stuck in the idea that God is punishing her. At church, they said it appeared as if the rape did not bother or affect her so much, and seems that she accepted the rape as God's punishment and confess her sins. Outside the church, people told her that her God has forsaken her and that she should go and see a traditional healer. Also, her boyfriend left her because 'God obviously has something against' (see also Landman 2009:47–49).

Can Belhar assist in shifting the discourse of 'God is punishing me' and empower Yolanda to formulate an alternative story?

Speaking again from experience, the author asserts that believers traditionally entertain God images of two kinds. In the first place, transcendental God images place God and humans on the opposite sides of the divine-human binary. Binary images of God experience God as absent and not caring (apathetic), punishing (retributive), controlling or purifying people through punishment. In the second place, believers with immanent God images internalise God as compassionate and co-suffering (Landman & Pieterse 2019:1).

The God images in the Belhar Confession are both transcendental and immanent. The potential immanence of God is clear from the Confession's call on the church to 'stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged' (Article 5:n.p.). However, the transcendental God who intervenes with divine authority to heal and bring about justice is also confessed in Article 5:

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 ...

Important for Yolanda and her healing, is that the God of the Belhar Confession is not a punishing God who wants to purify the already downtrodden through further punishment. The God of the Belhar Confession co-suffers with the destitute and the marginalised and restores their dignity. It is this God that calls upon believers to become agents for justice and healing. With this God, the discourse of rape as God's punishment can be deconstructed, and Yolanda's alternative story of agency can be strengthened towards healing.

Through this process, Yolanda can move forward from a discourse of God is punishing and shift her view to an alternative belief and impact her story to a God that cares.

Discourse 2: Is Christ really stronger than other forces?

Radikobo is a young professional in his thirties. He is also a member of URCSA. His wife collapsed and he brought her to the hospital, where she died. The doctors could not tell him the cause of death.

Radikobo came for counselling and expressed his conviction that somebody, who was jealous of the good relationship between him and his wife, had a 'sangoma' (traditional healer) put a spell on him, so that his wife died. Since the doctors could not give him a physical reason why his wife died, and URCSA could not give him a spiritual one, Radikobo believes it must be the 'sangoma'.

Can Belhar assist Radikobo to address his fears and uncertainty about the power of God and whether other sources are not stronger than God? Can Radikobo be empowered to formulate an alternative story?

The counsellor did not try to convince Radikobo that the 'sangoma's' curse did not exist and respected his belief in a traditional spell. However, since Radikobo expressed his commitment to Christian belief, the counsellor assisted him to acknowledge that Christ's voice was stronger than that of the 'sangoma', and that victory lies in that direction. However, Radikobo eventually chose to find comfort both in the victorious Christ and in the Christ offering compassion as opposed to the 'sangoma's' power which he experienced as hard and ruthless.

In this and similar cases where believers choose to make a choice for the Christian God, but find it difficult to experience that this God is in control, the Confession of Belhar assists in strengthening the alternative story of Christ as Conqueror (Belhar Article 3) and Jesus as Lord (Belhar Article 60). The Confession of Belhar, indeed, abounds with triumphant images of the conquering transcendent God, as declared in Article 2 that, we believe:

- 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.

However, the image of God, as showing God's strength through Jesus Christ, is not a display of the power of a war god, but one that conquers through love and compassion. Presenting God as the one who 'protects and cares' as God introduced in the first sentence of the Belhar Confession (Article 1), made Radikobo to believe that his wife's death was not because of the powerlessness of God vis-à-vis the 'sangoma', neither can her death be contributed to viciousness of a punishing God, but that her death should also be seen within the protection and care God has for Radikobo.

In co-journeying with the pastor, Radikobo could be introduced to a God that is caring and loving. He does not conquer by fear and war. If you choose and decide to accept him as a triumphant and conquering transcendent God, you will experience his power. Radikobo was empowered to address his fears and uncertainty about the power of God and deconstructed his story to an alternative story of a 'Christ who conquers through love'.

Discourse 3: I am alone and afraid

Deborah is a domestic worker who retired at 60. All four of her children have become professional people which had demanded immense sacrifice from Deborah. Eventually all four of her children came home with full-blown AIDS. She cared for them until their deaths. Not knowing how to protect herself, e.g. with gloves, she also contracted HIV. The National Strategic Plan for HIV only covers people between

15 and 49. She is low on the HIV programme of the clinic. When the Church Council visited her, there was fear for death in her eyes and flies were sitting on her. When the pastor came for counselling, she told the pastor that the worst part of it was the isolation and shame, with people avoiding her, even in public. Shop owners try to protect their merchandise from her, and even in church she sits alone in a pew so that she does not go to church anymore.

Can the Belhar Confession assist Deborah to overcome her fears and feelings of loneliness and isolation?

The Belhar Confession is clear on confessing that the church – which is a much broader reference than to URCSA only – should be a community of care. Article 3 urges that belief in the (immanent) God:

[M]ust 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 ... (n.p.)

Article 5 expresses this in even stronger terms and includes reminding the church to care (with the immanent God) especially for people who have been wronged by (e.g., health) systems.

Article 3 furthermore strongly confesses its belief that people should deal with one another within the inclusive message of the gospel, and that relationships between people should not be dictated by 'prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief'.

During counselling, Deborah shifted the discourse of isolation to one that confirms her Christian right and privilege to be cared for and loved, based on the dignity given to her by God and God's instruction to the church to care for those in emotional and physical need.

The women in the congregation, inspired by Belhar, then started attending to her, visiting her, trying to secure antiretrovirals for her. They underwent counselling training and expanded their visits to other people in the community who were isolated because of being infected by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). This not only thickened Deborah's story but embodied the values of the Confession of Belhar in the broader community (Article 2 of Belhar):

[T]hat Christ's work of reconciliation manifests in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another. This process also assisted Deborah to be able to move from feelings of being alone, isolated and afraid and embrace an alternative discourse and experience 'the congregation as a community of care'. (n.p.)

Discourse 4: I have no access to spiritual gifts or opportunities

Lesedi (28) does everything with passion and zeal, thereby becoming a threat to people. She lost her job because of 'insubordination'. She was a member of URCSA, like her mother, but she then joined an independent church that, at several

occasions, tried to drive the 'demon of insubordination' out of her, turning her into an invisible person. At home Lesedi would practice many of the rituals of this church, like throwing salt and oil in the corners of the kitchen. This freaked her mother out and at one of their fights, the mother bit Lesedi and hit her with cooking utensils. Lesedi went to live in a shelter and came to the hospital for wound care and counselling. During counselling, she was asked what she thought she could do about her situation. She answered: I can only pray. (Landman 2009:63–65)

Form experience, the author can point to the fact that counsellees trapped in unhealthy religious discourses know no other way of 'getting out of the situation' than to pray. Narrative counselling addresses the issue of 'getting out of the situation' by identifying the captivating discourse, deconstructing it, moving towards an alternative discourse, strengthened by, for instance, a change of lifestyle. 'Only prayer can help' may be a discourse in itself, that needs to be deconstructed. Narrative therapy does not offer quick fixes, but by deconstructing harmful discourses, the counsellee and/or believer can be empowered by healthy discourses that are endemic to the believer's special spiritual gifts and opportunities.

By co-journeying with the counsellee, the counsellor acts as a deconstructionist. Thereby, his or her position in this relationship acts from the premise that lives, lived experiences, and people's stories are shaped by three factors (Carr 2001:21; White 1991:27):

- The meaning people give to their experiences or the stories they tell themselves about themselves;
- The language practices that people are recruited into along with the type of words they use to story their lives; and
- The situation people occupy in social structures in which they participate, and the power relations entailed by these.

In this regard by applying Narrative Therapy, the counsellor and counsellee co-construct stories 'in a context of consensual meaning-making and transformation', which leads to a better understanding of their experiences and discovery of alternative, healthier truths (White & Epsom 1990:12). The believer might not have been able to acknowledge his or her unique gifts and opportunities before, but these can be uncovered in the counselling process.

The Confession of Belhar in Article 3 acknowledges 'the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities ... (and) opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God'. Although this refers to people acknowledging each other's spiritual gifts and granting each other opportunities to exercise them, this can also empower the individual to explore his or her spiritual gifts and opportunities practically to undermine a harmful situation in which the believer is captured. The Belhar Confession does not opt for the pietistic position of 'prayer only'. It empowers believers to act with their spiritual gifts to bring about change where there is misery and injustice.

Lesedi consequently travelled a road with the counsellor acknowledging that prayer is very important, but that she has access to other spiritual gifts as well, such as living her worthiness in God's eyes and extending compassion to others who suffer from practices and discourses on 'subordination'. With her confidence restored, she found a job and a place to live.

Lesedi then rejoined the URCSA, while also attending not the same but another independent church where she feels space is given for her spiritual gifts – thereby claiming an alternative discourse that 'all individuals have access to spiritual gifts and opportunities'.

Discourse 5: No reconciliation or peace is possible in my life

For all of their lives, Oom Koos, his wife, his children and grandchildren are, and have been committed members of the URCSA. However, his daughter Fransina is totally dependent on drugs and liquor. She is 27 years old and has two children from different men, and her children are being raised by Oom Koos and his wife. Fransina would disappear from time to time and come back pregnant. She would force her parents to give her money for an abortion pill which she buys from somebody on the corner of the street in mid-city. They have given her the money before because they are not able financially to raise another grandchild, but are now refusing to continue doing this because it is against their principles. Fransina comes and goes into the house, often drunk or drugged, and her children must be protected against her. On Fridays and Saturdays Oom Koos and his wife drive around in their car to drinking places and street parties to see if they can pick her up before she is thrown in jail again. When they are too late, they walk the legal route to get her released and home again, always taking her side in court and paying the legal fees. Oom Koos believes in reconciliation and peace. One day he will find that with his daughter. He will not give up.

Article 4 of the Belhar Confession professes strikingly on the possibility that evil can be conquered and people can be reconciled not only with one another but to a better life in society:

We believe,

[T]hat 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. (n.p.)

Fransina reacted negatively to the pastor's repeated invitations to attend counselling. Oom Koos and his wife then started to attend a support group created by the pastor for 'Parents with broken hearts' whose children are addicted to substances and/or engage in dangerous sexual behaviour. The group is based on the Belharic concept that God's Word and Spirit are lifegiving and can conquer pain and evil.

This empowers parents to shift the question, *What have I done to deserve this child?*, to a healthy discourse such as 'God's life-giving Spirit equips me to walk this road with my child' – and move towards an alternative discourse in believing that 'reconciliation and peace are possible even in the most difficult of circumstances'.

Conclusion

The Confession of Belhar uses words such as 'conquer', 'rule' and 'king' to empower believers towards action against harmful forces and iniquities. However, it is the 'Soft Power' discourse of Belhar that provides energy to believers to form alternative discourses of action and hope. In this regard the role of pastoral care, also as public role player as described and discussed in this article, where the pastor visited a state hospital in a previously black township for primary care, referred to her for counselling; as well as those counselled by the pastor in black and brown townships, being a tent-maker minister of the Word in the URCSA. In this regard, embracing the mission of the Belhar Confession as described by MacMaster (2017:290) (public pastoral care, albeit public or in the formal church setting) 'presents a holistic view of human beings in which the public and private aspects of their lives', and the pastor as counsellor becomes 'a public theologian and social critic who offers alternative visions of human worth and value'.

In this article, the author examines how, as a pastoral carer, accompanying participants through their life experiences, allows counselees to transition from negative religious narratives centred on fearing God to more hopeful narratives enriched by the principles of the Belhar Confession:

1. God who cares.
2. Christ who conquers through love.
3. The congregation as a community of care.
4. Individual and ecclesiastical spiritual gifts and opportunities.
5. The possibility of reconciliation and peace even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Through engagement and care, the author represented cases of how people in therapy moved problematic discourses to places of healing, and how the Confession of Belhar is supportive in deconstructing these harmful discourses and in enriching the counselees' alternative story.

The contribution of this study lies therein that it displays how the Belhar Confession has the healing of society at heart, and that the Confession in its statements goes even beyond unity, reconciliation and justice, presenting church and society with pastoral values and insights that can be used to deconstruct religious discourses that capture believers in pain and helplessness and thicken their alternative stories of health and healing.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

C.L. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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