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Editor
Odair Pedroso Mateus

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150, route de Ferney, PO Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
www.warc.ch

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Editorial

Practising the Accra Confession

The shocking figures continue. “The 225 greatest fortunes in the world represent a total of over a trillion Euros, or the equivalent of the earnings of the poorest 47 per cent of the world’s population (2.5 billion human beings!). Today there are individuals who are richer than many states: the sum total of the wealth of the 15 richest people in the world is greater than the GNP of all the sub-Saharan African countries.”¹

Struck by the presentation *Shocking Figures* and challenged by biblical and theological imperatives not to remain silent in this time of injustices, over 375 WARC General Council delegates representing 164 member churches from around the world confessed their faith against systemic injustice in the economy and the earth. They further committed themselves to challenge the world order, as a matter of faith, and to change it to God’s economy in the service of life for all.

There is a fundamental difference between an ethical and a confessional approach to the poverty of the members of the same body of Christ. In the ethical sense, the problem of your neighbour’s poverty is his own problem, but in the confessional sense, it is not only his own problem, but also my problem, because the whole body suffers together when one of its members suffers.

Member churches have begun a process of reflecting on the 2004 Accra Confession and developing strategies of implementing it. The good news is that some member churches in the North took the Accra Confession seriously and reflected on what the Accra Confession means to them and what kind of action is needed.

To assist member churches as well as other people in their reflection on the Accra Confession, the Geneva office of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches organized two small consultations in February and June 2005 in Frankfurt, Germany and Matanzas, Cuba respectively.

¹ Ignacio Ramonet, *Wars of the 21st Century*, New York, Ocean Press, 2004, p. 6.

A number of papers on the Accra Confession from various perspectives were prepared. Ulrich Möller reflected on the ecclesiological implications of the Accra Confession. Ofelia Ortega explored the biblical paradigm that inspires our covenant with God and our neighbour focusing on Genesis 4 and 9. René Krüger raised the question of the hermeneutics of the South with regard to globalization and challenged us to opt for life. Peter Bukowski reflected on the question of the homiletic implementation of the Accra Declaration and Gretel van Wieren on spirituality, worship and the Accra Confession. Omega Bula's work was on the pedagogical implications of the Accra Confession and Prince Dibeela critically reviewed globalization from a Southern African perspective. Ulrich Duchrow reflected on the significance of the Christian social and political witness in the light of the Accra Confession and Helis Barraza Díaz on the Accra Confession and the question of liberty. After all, our struggle should focus on the search for and practice of alternatives.

The participants in the Matanzas consultation agreed to produce a joint paper called "Alternatives are possible!" which contains some encouraging developments of such alternatives. This will help member churches to explore alternatives in their own context. My paper, "A journey for life: From Debrecen to Accra and beyond", will be helpful for understanding the whole process of WARC's engagement in the struggle for justice in the economy and the earth.

However, many other aspects from which the Accra Confession needs to be reflected upon remain missing here, for instance, the gender perspective, the ecological perspective, the interfaith perspective, etc. We hope that this gap, together with the local perspective which is crucial, will be filled by member churches through their own process of reflection.

Like the Russian Orthodox philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, who said that bread for myself is a material matter, but bread for my neighbour is a spiritual matter, the Accra Confession is a spiritual statement of Reformed Christians in the face of global injustice in the economy and the destruction of God's creation. It is our prayer that the Accra Confession will contribute to sow in our spirituality a small mustard seed of faith which can move the giant mountain.

Seong-Won Park
Guest Co-editor

Covenanting for justice: the Accra Confession

Ours is a “scandalous world” in which “the annual income of the richest 1% is equal to that of the poorest 57%, and 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition”. The policy of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and the drive for profit of transnational corporations “have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment”. This crisis “is directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization”, an ideology that makes the false claim “that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance, which amounts to idolatry”. The integrity of our faith is therefore at stake. This document, stemming from the WARC 2004 general council section on Covenant, includes the Accra Confession. It is being republished to facilitate the reading of the articles on the Accra Confession.

Introduction

1. In response to the urgent call of the Southern African constituency which met in Kitwe in 1995 and in recognition of the increasing urgency of global economic injustice and ecological destruction, the 23rd general council (Debrecen, Hungary, 1997) invited the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to enter into a process of “recognition, education, and confession (*processus confessionis*)”. The churches reflected on the text of Isaiah 58.6 “...break the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free”, as they heard the cries of brothers and sisters around the world and witnessed God’s gift of creation under threat.

2. Since then, nine member churches have committed themselves to a faith stance; some are in the process of

covenanting; and others have studied the issues and come to a recognition of the depth of the crisis. Further, in partnership with the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and regional ecumenical organizations, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches has engaged in consultations in all regions of the world, from Seoul/Bangkok (1999) to Stony Point (2004). Additional consultations took place with churches from the South in Buenos Aires (2003) and with churches from South and North in London Colney (2004).

3. Gathered in Accra, Ghana, for the general council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, we visited the slave dungeons of Elmina and Cape Coast where millions of Africans were commodified, sold and subjected to the horrors of repression and death. The cries of “never again” are

put to the lie by the ongoing realities of human trafficking and the oppression of the global economic system.

4. Today we come to take a decision of faith commitment.

Reading the signs of the times

5. We have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Romans 8.22). We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation.

6. The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted. The root causes of massive threats to life are above all the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death.

7. We live in a scandalous world that denies God's call to life for all. The annual income of the richest 1% is equal to that of the poorest 57%, and 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition. The debt of poor countries continues to increase despite paying back their original borrowing many times over. Resource-driven wars claim the lives of millions, while millions more die of preventable diseases. The HIV and AIDS global pandemic afflicts life in all parts of the world, affecting the poorest where generic drugs are not available. The majority of those in poverty are women and children and the number of people living in absolute

poverty on less than one US dollar per day continues to increase.

8. The policy of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and the drive for profit of transnational corporations have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment. In 1989, one species disappeared each day, and by 2000 it was one every hour. Climate change, the depletion of fish stocks, deforestation, soil erosion, and threats to fresh water are among the devastating consequences. Communities are disrupted, livelihoods are lost, coastal regions and Pacific islands are threatened with inundation, and storms increase. High levels of radioactivity threaten health and ecology. Life forms and cultural knowledge are being patented for financial gain.

9. This crisis is directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization, which is based on the following beliefs:

- unrestrained competition, consumerism, and the unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth is the best for the whole world;
- the ownership of private property has no social obligation;
- capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and national resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes, and the unrestricted movement of capital will achieve wealth for all;

- social obligations, protection of the poor and the weak, trade unions, and relationships between people, are subordinate to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.

10. This is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance, which amounts to idolatry.

11. We recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire. In using the term “empire” we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.

12. In classical liberal economics, the state exists to protect private property and contracts in the competitive market. Through the struggles of the labour movement, states began to regulate markets and provide for the welfare of people. Since the 1980s, through the transnationalization of capital, neoliberalism has set out to dismantle the welfare functions of the state. Under neoliberalism the purpose of the economy

is to increase profits and return for the owners of production and financial capital, while excluding the majority of the people and treating nature as a commodity.

13. As markets have become global, so have the political and legal institutions which protect them. The government of the United States of America and its allies, together with international finance and trade institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization) use political, economic, or military alliances to protect and advance the interest of capital owners.

14. We see the dramatic convergence of the economic crisis with the integration of economic globalization and geopolitics backed by neoliberal ideology. This is a global system that defends and protects the interests of the powerful. It affects and captivates us all. Further, in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus has told us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Lk 16.13).

Confession of faith in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction

15. Faith commitment may be expressed in various ways according to regional and theological traditions: as confession, as confessing together, as faith stance, as being faithful to the covenant of God. We choose confession, not meaning a classical doctrinal

confession, because the World Alliance of Reformed Churches cannot make such a confession, but to show the necessity and urgency of an active response to the challenges of our time and the call of Debrecen. We invite member churches to receive and respond to our common witness.

16. Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the general council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization and therefore **we confess** before God and one another.

17. **We believe** in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. We live under the promise that Jesus Christ came so that all might have life in fullness (Jn 10.10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit we open ourselves to the reality of our world.

18. **We believe** that God is sovereign over all creation. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24.1).

19. **Therefore, we reject** the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from

the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political, and military empire which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule.

20. **We believe** that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Gen 9.8-12). God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the market place (Is 55.1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners, and calls us to put justice for the "least of these" (Mt 25.40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hos 2.18ff).

21. **Therefore we reject** the culture of rampant consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the neoliberal global market system, or any other system, which claims there is no alternative.

22. **We believe** that any economy of the household of life, given to us by God's covenant to sustain life, is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and wellbeing of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are called to choose God over Mammon and that confessing our faith is an act of obedience.

23. **Therefore we reject** the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God's creation.

24. **We believe** that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation, and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged, and the abused (Psalm 146.7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation.

25. **Therefore we reject** any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation, and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching which justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

26. **We believe** that God calls us to stand with those who are victims of injustice. We know what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, love kindness, and walk in God's way (Micah 6.8). We are called to stand against any form of injustice in the economy and the destruction of the environment, "so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5.24).

27. **Therefore we reject** any theology that claims that God is only with the rich and that poverty is the fault of the poor. We reject any form of injustice which destroys right relations - gender, race, class, disability, or caste. We reject any theology which affirms that human interests dominate nature.

28. **We believe** that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (Jn 10.10). Jesus

brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Lk 4.18); he supports and protects the downtrodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.

29. **Therefore we reject** any church practice or teaching which excludes the poor and care for creation, in its mission; giving comfort to those who come to "steal, kill and destroy" (Jn 10.10) rather than following the "Good Shepherd" who has come for life for all (Jn 10.11).

30. **We believe** that God calls men, women and children from every place together, rich and poor, to uphold the unity of the church and its mission, so that the reconciliation to which Christ calls can become visible.

31. **Therefore we reject** any attempt in the life of the church to separate justice and unity.

32. **We believe** that we are called in the Spirit to account for the hope that is within us through Jesus Christ, and believe that justice shall prevail and peace shall reign.

33. **We commit ourselves** to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God.

34. **We humbly confess** this hope, knowing that we, too, stand under the judgement of God's justice.

- We acknowledge the complicity and guilt of those who consciously or unconsciously benefit from the current neoliberal economic global system; we recognize that this includes both churches and members of our own Reformed family

and therefore we call for confession of sin.

- We acknowledge that we have become captivated by the culture of consumerism, and the competitive greed and selfishness of the current economic system. This has all too often permeated our very spirituality.

- We confess our sin in misusing creation and failing to play our role as stewards and companions of nature.

- We confess our sin that our disunity within the Reformed family has impaired our ability to serve God's mission in fullness.

35. **We believe**, in obedience to Jesus Christ, that the church is called to confess, witness and act, even though the authorities and human law might forbid them, and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Acts 4.18ff). Jesus is Lord.

36. **We join in praise** to God, Creator, Redeemer, Spirit, who has "brought down the mighty from their thrones, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands" (Lk 1.52f).

Covenanting for justice

37. By confessing our faith together, we covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings.

38. On this common journey, some churches have already expressed their commitment in a confession of faith. We

urge them to continue to translate this confession into concrete actions both regionally and locally. Other churches have already begun to engage in this process, including taking actions and we urge them to engage further, through education, confession and action. To those other churches, which are still in the process of recognition, we urge them on the basis of our mutual covenanting accountability, to deepen their education and move forward towards confession.

39. The general council calls upon member churches, on the basis of this covenanting relationship, to undertake the difficult and prophetic task of interpreting this confession to their local congregations.

40. The general council urges member churches to implement this confession by following up the Public Issues Committee's recommendations on economic justice and ecological issues.

41. The general council commits the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements and people's movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation and calls upon our member churches to do the same.

42. Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing, and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live (Deut 30.19).

A journey for life: From Debrecen to Accra and beyond

Seong-Won Park

In 1997 the World Alliance called its member churches to a process of recognition, education, and confession in matters of economic injustice and environmental destruction. Seven years later, Reformed Christians gathered in Accra (Ghana) adopted the Accra Confession. Park uses the language of the 1997 call to offer an overview of what WARC, its member churches and sister ecumenical organizations have done in connection with that appeal, concluding his article with practical suggestions on the reception of the Accra Confession. A South Korean theologian, he is the executive secretary of the WARC Department of Cooperation and Witness.

The issue of economic globalization was one of the major themes of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), which met in August 2004 in Accra, Ghana. The General Council responded in confession form to the challenge of neoliberal economic globalization, with the statement “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth,” now known as the Accra Confession.

The General Council in Accra, then, was a culminating point of the *processus confessionis* begun by the 23rd General Council in Debrecen seven years earlier. The *processus confessionis* has been an attempt by the Alliance to honour the Debrecen General Council’s call for “a committed process of progressive recognition, education

and confession within all WARC member churches at all levels regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction.”

Why has the World Alliance of Reformed Churches begun to confront the challenges of economic globalization as a matter of faith? Why has the Debrecen General Council initiated the process of confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction? What are the responses of the member churches to the Debrecen call? What is the Reformed teaching on justice in the economy and the earth? What is the major conflict between the Reformed teaching on economy and current neoliberal economic globalization? The Accra Confession was a worldwide Reformed community’s response to all these questions.

Initiation of a confessing movement: Debrecen-1997 and afterward

After the demise of the socialist bloc, the World Alliance started a process of reflection on faith and economy. A series of regional consultations was organized in Manila (the Philippines), Kitwe (Zambia), San José (Costa Rica), and Geneva (Switzerland). The participants in the Kitwe consultation suggested that the Alliance consider a declaration of *status confessionis* on economic injustice and ecological destruction. What became clear through the regional consultations and the debate in Debrecen was that economic injustice and ecological destruction are not merely ethical or moral questions, but a matter of faith - a question of confession.

However, the Debrecen General Council realized the need for careful reflection. Instead of a quick move to *status confessionis*, it decided to launch a confessing movement by calling all WARC member churches at all levels to be engaged in "a committed process of progressive recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) ... regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction." Later the process acquired a more comprehensive name, "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth." The Debrecen formula was welcomed by the ecumenical family as a wise decision. Even though the Debrecen General Council did not declare *status confessionis* as such, it was clear

that it was taking a confessional approach in some form.

With the historical decision in Debrecen a confessing journey was begun, with the steps of recognition, education and confession. A taskforce was composed to accompany the process, and various ideas were brainstormed. The first action was taken by the Presbyterian Church of Korea, because Korea as well as Thailand, Indonesia and other Asian countries had faced an unprecedented economic crisis. At its General Assembly in 1988, the Presbyterian Church of Korea issued "A Statement of Faith by the Church for Surmounting the Current Economic Crisis." In the following year, the Presbyterian Church of Venezuela issued a "Declaration of Faith regarding Economic Injustice and Ecological Destruction." The victims were quick to recognize the issues, learn what to do as a church and make a faith response. Since that time, a number of member churches have tackled the economy and the earth as their important issues.

Altogether, more than 80 member churches have been working on the issues of economic injustice and ecological destruction in various ways. For instance, the Reformed Alliance in Germany launched the "Anti-Mammon Programme." The Reformed Church Bern-Jura, Switzerland, and the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches have organized a series of seminars on various economic issues and produced many helpful publications. The United Church of Canada launched a

moderator's website consultation and produced a guidebook entitled "To Seek Justice and Resist Evil, Towards a Global Economy for All God's People." The Reformed Church of France also produced a helpful booklet on globalization. All these materials are useful for recognition and education. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands focuses on climate change as an ecological concern related to the economic issue. A church in Minahasa, Indonesia has already initiated a movement for a more participatory model of economic activities, for instance by promoting direct trade between local producers and clients.

Some churches have already taken confessing actions. Besides the two churches that issued a declaration of faith, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Portugal issued a statement in 2000, the Waldensian Church, Italy in 2001, the Reformed Churches in Argentina in 2003, and in 2003 the United Church of Christ in the USA issued a pronouncement on the economic issue. Some churches in the North have begun to respond to messages coming from member churches in the South. For instance, the United Reformed Church in the UK asked all councils and appropriate committees of the church to reflect on the "Buenos Aires Faith Stance on the Global Crisis of Life" as a matter of priority. What is clear is that this is increasingly becoming one of the major witness and faith issues of today.

Encouraging developments have taken place in ecumenical communities. At its 8th

General Assembly in Harare in 1998, the World Council of Churches (WCC) raised the same question: How do we live our faith in the context of globalization? The WCC Assembly recommended that the challenge of globalization should become a central emphasis of the work of the World Council of Churches. The Assembly welcomed the WARC Debrecen action and encouraged its member churches to join the *processus confessionis* movement initiated by WARC.

In 2000, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) started a process of engaging its member churches to reflect on what it means to be in communion in the face of globalization. A call to participate in transforming economic globalization was made at the 10th Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. The Assembly recognized that economic globalization is reshaping our world, as key economic policies abdicate all decisions to the market without consideration of the human, social, ecological and spiritual consequences. "Economic practices that undermine the wellbeing of the neighbour (especially the most vulnerable) must be rejected and replaced," the Assembly said. It called neoliberal economic globalization a false ideology, saying,

This false ideology is grounded in the assumption that the market, built on private property, unrestrained competition and the centrality of contracts, is the absolute law governing human life, society, and the natural environment. This is idolatry and leads to the systematic exclusion of those

who own no property, the destruction of cultural diversity, the dismantling of fragile democracies and the destruction of the earth.

Amazingly, the LWF came to the same conclusion as the participants of the Kitwe consultation and the WARC Debrecen Council, by “reading the signs of the times”.

Since 1999, the WCC, the LWF and WARC, together with the member churches in the regions, as well as regional bodies such as CEC, CCA, CLAI and PCC, have organized various regional consultations in Bangkok and Seoul (1999), Budapest (2001), Soesterberg (2002), Fiji (2002), and Buenos Aires (2003), and joined the North American consultation in New York (2004) in order to analyse the consequences of economic globalization and to discuss how the churches can respond to this challenge. Apart from their common journey, the three organizations have carried out a variety of programmes on human rights and trade, including an encounter with the World Bank and the IMF. Kairos Europa has been a faithful partner in this struggle.

As we can see from global civil movements such as the World Social Forum, and numerous movements at the local level, resistance against the neoliberal model of economy is growing by the day.

Recognition: What have we perceived as the fundamental problem?

In the confessing journey with our member churches, ecumenical sisters and

brothers, and the global civil society movement, we have found many negative aspects of economic globalization. The problems of social exclusion, widening gaps between the rich and the poor, damage to the earth, political corruption, colonization of consciousness, life under threat, upside-down values and mammonism were pointed out by the Debrecen General Council as such negative consequences. Today we see a convergence of geopolitical hegemonic domination, militarism and economic globalization in the form of Empire, driving the whole global society into insecurity and fear in the name of the “war on terror.” If I may summarize these negative consequences in theological terms, there are three areas of imminent crisis:

Life is at stake Economy is basically the access to livelihood. Under the current system many people are denied access to their livelihood. The life of human beings and the rest of nature and the earth is under serious threat. If the current economic model is continued, the life of the human community and the planet itself will fall into serious crisis. That is the urgent background against which the WARC Buenos Aires forum issued “A Faith Stance on the Global Crisis of Life.”

Community is at stake The modern market and globalization undermine community. Neoliberal globalization, based on the absolutization of individual freedom and private property, has a different vision than that of the *oikoumene*. The WCC Assembly in Harare recognized that the

vision behind globalization competes with the vision of the Christian commitment to the *oikoumene* and stated that “the logic of globalization needs to be challenged by an alternative way of life of community in diversity.” The World Alliance of Reformed Churches noted that neoliberal economic globalization has an “exclusionary nature” that cannot be accepted by Christian faith. Calvin himself developed many economic regulations in order to protect community.

Our salvation is at stake The participants of the Kitwe consultation stated, “Today, the global market economy has been sacralized and elevated to an imperial throne. (...) it has become the creator of human beings. Thereby it usurps the sovereignty of God, claiming a freedom that belongs to God alone.” Luther promoted the freedom to serve one’s neighbours in love, not the freedom to seek one’s self-interest. Whatever you have which is not needed for your life already belongs to the poor. The church where the poor are excluded is not the church.

Economy should be designed to serve Life, Community and Salvation for All. The Chinese concept of Economy (*Kyung Sei Jei Min*) reflects this very vision. “*Kyung Sei Jei Min*,” from which the term “*Kyung Jei*” (economy) comes, means “To save people by regulating the world”. Enabling the life of people is the main purpose of the Asian concept of economy.

I think that economy should be like the flow of water. Water never flows up; it always flows from a higher level down to a lower.

Water permeates into every corner of the space, even into the very hidden spaces at the lowest level. In such a way, water provides a substantial element of life. One of the obvious illustrations of this phenomenon can be found in the relationship between the tree and water. The top does not contain all the water, but lets the water flow to the roots, and in such a way not only does the whole tree become healthy, but the top also can flourish. In the neoliberal economy, unfortunately, the flow of wealth is from the poor to the rich.

Education: Learning from the Reformed theology of economy

Reformed theology teaches quite a different type of economic thought vis-à-vis the neoliberal model of economic globalization. While it is commonly believed that Calvin is the founder of capitalism, this is not true. That belief is due to Max Weber’s research on the work ethics of the Puritans, rather than to Calvin himself.

Calvin’s economy was a community economy - an economy in solidarity with the poor. The primary stimulus encouraging Calvin to develop a theology of economy was his concern over the potential breakdown of the Body of Christ due to increasing economic disparity between those who had begun to accumulate capital and those whose lives had become subordinated to loans from the rich. In order to keep the community, the Body of Christ, whole, to protect the vulnerable from the economic violence of the rich, to protect

the rich from being led into the temptation of exploiting the poor, to build up economic ethics on the basis of love and grace, and to guide people not to serve Mammon but to serve God, who is the giver of life, Calvin developed a theology of economy. Calvin's economic thought can be summarized in the following affirmations:

- Material goods and money are instruments of God's grace. God has provided material goods for life.

- Money may become mammon unless it is under God's control.

- Human economic activity needs regulation, because of the depravity of human nature.

- Economy should be life-enhancing and life-centred.

- Reformed theology promotes a "Solidarity Economy" between the haves and the have-nots.

- Reformed theology advocates a "Poor-Friendly Economy."

- Grace and love should be the spiritual basis of economic activity.

If we evaluate current neoliberal economy, we find that its vision is exactly opposite to God's economy as understood by Calvin.

- While God's economy is inclusive, neoliberal economy is exclusive.

- While God's economy is a protective economy for the poor, neoliberal economy is an exploitative economy of the poor.

- While in God's economy, wealth flows from the rich to the poor, in the neoliberal economy, it flows from the poor to the rich.

- While the economic index of God's economy is the poor, the neoliberal economic index is the rich.

- While God's economy is based on God's love and grace, neoliberal economy is based on greed and profit making.

- While God's economy is an economy of solidarity, neoliberal economy is an economy based on limitless competition.

The vision of the economy of a caring God, the prophetic critique, the social and legal regulation of the economy, and resistance against injustices are various forms of the basic biblical view that the mandate of economy is life in fullness for all people and communities. The current global economic power does not aim at the preservation of life, the restoration of human dignity, the building of the common good or stewardship of creation. There is a fundamental theological conflict with the neoliberal ideology.

Confessing

Member churches' faith stance on the global crisis of life When the Debrecen General Council encouraged member churches to start the confessing journey with "recognition," we were encouraged not only to clarify the system of injustice, but also to read the signs of the times with prophetic imagination. What are the signs of the times today? As Jesus was confronted with the worldview of the empire in his time, we today are likewise confronted with the worldview of empire.

Our minds and hearts are under the

threat of mammonism; all of life is under severe threat; and our communities are facing breakdown. As Moses faced the cries and groans of the slaves, and the Apostle Paul heard the groaning of all creatures, the church today listens to the lamentations of God's people throughout the globe and the whole of suffering creation.

The participants of the WARC member churches from the South who met in Buenos Aires in April 2003 expressed their clear "Faith Stance on the Global Crisis of Life." They took a faith stance, because the present moment in the world's history, as *kairos*, challenges them to decisive action: the whole of creation faces a crisis of life and immense suffering. They discovered the dramatic convergence of the sufferings and crises of both people and nature in the countries of the South. They took the faith stance because they recognized this crisis of the entire creation. They took the faith stance because the very integrity of our faith is in question.

According to this faith stance, "neoliberal ideology uses a theological and ideological framework to justify its presumed messianic role by claiming economic sovereignty, absolute power and authority beyond any regulation, the right to act above national and international law, the right to act beyond ethical and moral rules. ... Neoliberal ideology claims absolute power over and against the sovereignty of God and gospel claims." Therefore, they said, "it is critical, for the integrity of our faith, that we take a faith stance."

Can we share this faith stance? Can churches in the North share the sense of urgency, and the lamentations of people in the South, as well as many in the North? Our friends from the South have made many efforts, but the situation is not going to be changed unless the North moves. Can the churches in the North affirm that we are members of the same Body of Christ? Do we feel pain when not just one but many members of this same Body are suffering? If not, our ecclesial relationship could be in question. What does it mean to be a covenanting community of faith, in the present context of economic globalization, which is extremely exclusive? These were the critical questions in view of the Accra General Council.

What we mean by confessing faith with regard to economy "Confessing" is not meant to differentiate confessing people from others. It is a faith stance to affirm who our true God is and to whom we belong. When the Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the Roman emperor, Jesus - referring to a Roman coin - answered, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:17-22). This is not meant to designate two separate realms of obligation, but is a confessing challenge: To whom do you belong? to clarify who is the Lord.

The Bangalore Executive Committee suggested renaming the *processus confessionis*. The new name is "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and

the Earth". Some people worry that with the new name, the significance of confessing may be weakened. But the new name does not mean the focus has been changed; it may become more inclusive. It includes both confession against untruth and commitment to work together for truth. The connotations of "confession" may differ according to church traditions. Primarily, however, confession is a language of resistance against untruth and of the affirmation of truth.

- Confessing is the resistance of saying no to the idolatrous powers that claim ultimate authority.

- Confessing is the denunciation of powers that are evil and demonic.

- Confessing is the firm belief in God who is sovereign over life on earth, in God who promises the new garden of life in the new heaven and the new earth. That is to say, confessing is the visioning of this new life.

- Confessing is the foundation of all imaginations about a new future.

- Confessing is the celebration of the feast of life in times of *kairos*.

- Confessing is the taking of a stance on a definite alternative, even if it is not perfect and ultimate.

- Confessing is participation in the movement of resistance in solidarity with the people.

- Confessing is a humble posture, being open completely to all persons of deep religious or philosophical commitment.

Covenant is a word that means binding together for the truth and entering into an alternative vision. If the process from

Debrecen to Accra is described as a confessing process with resistance against injustices and commitment to justice, then the process from Accra and beyond should be a covenanting process of working together for justice and truth. In Accra, a theological vision for God's political vision on economy and the earth was spelled out as a vision for life in fullness.

Compare the language of "covenant" with the neoliberal language: covenant vs. contract, covenant vs. competition, covenant vs. privatization and covenant vs. untouchable freedom of the individual. Theologically speaking, covenant is an ecclesial form of solidarity. In his book *The Covenanted Self* Walter Brueggemann emphasizes "othering" as an important concept in a covenant relationship. In covenant, God "othered" him/herself into us. In covenant, we "other" ourselves into God. In the covenant God has made with the whole of creation, all creatures should "other" themselves into each other.

One important notion in talking about covenant is that divine covenants have always been made for the sake of bettering the worst situation of the partner. God's covenant with Noah, his descendants and every living creature was made when the earth was completely devastated by floods. It was when Abraham was landless and had lost his hope for descendants - a time of economic hopelessness - that God made a covenant with him. Jesus' covenant was made when we had no hope of salvation. Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and

the Earth should be done not for the sake of those who are okay, but for the poorest members of the Body of Christ who are caught in hopeless situations. They are the reason why the economy should be friendly to the poor rather than to the rich.

The Buenos Aires participants used the language “Faith Stance,” which contains the concept of *status confessionis* - a confessing-resistance against injustice, the act of covenanting with God altogether.

We have talked many theological languages. But what is most important - more than all those arguments - lies elsewhere. The doctrinal question of whether or not we can proclaim *status confessionis* is not the real issue. The real issue is whether the world, the people and God’s creation can be saved in this *kairotic* time of global crisis of life. We are called to a mission for life.

The Accra Confession Many people and churches, including our sister ecumenical organizations, were curious to see whether WARC would reach a confession. Many member churches were also curious to know how the 24th General Council would conclude the confessing process. Some churches were concerned about the possible disunity of the Reformed family if the Alliance decided on a *status confessionis*, in effect making a statement against neoliberal economic globalization as a matter of doctrine.

The churches from the South, in particular, challenged the Alliance, asking how long it would wait to make a confession

of faith against economic injustice and ecological destruction. Even though their concerns differed as to what form the Alliance’s response to global economic injustice would take, the churches were already in consensus that the current dominant economic structure is unjust and needs changing.

Based on the consensus about the problematic nature of today’s global economy, the General Council easily reached a decision to respond in a confessional manner, even though some of the delegates were in favour of a declaration or a statement.

However, the General Council hesitated to go for a *status confessionis*. It did not want to divide the Reformed family along confessional lines on this issue. What was of importance was that the Reformed family took a faith stance against economic injustice. The General Council also avoided making any confession in the traditional sense. Instead, the path that it followed was to confess the necessity and urgency to respond actively to the economic injustices of our time.

“Faith commitment may be expressed in various ways according to regional and theological traditions: as confession, as confessing together, as faith stance, as being faithful to the covenant of God, “ the Accra Confession states.

“We choose confession, not meaning a classical doctrinal confession, because the World Alliance of Reformed Churches cannot make such a confession, but to show the

necessity and urgency of an active response to the challenges of our time and the call of Debrecen. We invite member churches to receive and respond to our common witness.”

Let me share with you what I see as the most significant features of the Accra Confession.

First, the Accra Confession took seriously the question of life as a confessional subject. Usually dogmatic or ecclesiological issues are taken as the main themes in a confession, but the Accra Confession makes justice for life a confessional subject.

Second, the Accra Confession demonstrated solidarity between justice and unity. Unity is concerned with togetherness, however divisive the issues confronting the confessing body may be. Justice addresses the urgency of the issue, however important the unity of the church may be. In the Accra Confession there was a kind of solidarity between unity and justice, even though there was not a full consensus in the analysis of the situation.

Third, the Accra Confession advanced the process of building the mutual, ecumenical commitment to justice initiated by the World Council of Churches’ Commission on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, even though this was a confession by the Reformed family alone.

Fourth, the voices of the churches in the South were clear and brave. In the international community, in venues such as the United Nations, there have long been cries for justice in the economy, but these

voices have not been given enough attention. The voices of the South were heard with respect at the Accra General Council.

Action: What to do with the Accra Confession

What is expected to happen in the post-Accra period? The member churches and others who are committed to the Accra Confession may consider the following steps:

1. The member churches and others committed to the Accra Confession ought to interpret it in the light of their theological imperatives and church traditions. They may ask: How can we adopt or receive it as our confession? On what theological basis can we take it as our confession? What kind of missiological implications does it have? How should we respond to this confession in terms of our ministry, our proclamation of the gospel, worship, Christian education, social outreach? What kind of transformation of the global economic system do we hope will happen? For this, how do we expect the global economic agencies and responsible countries to act? In order to assist the member churches in this process of reflection, the WARC office will organize a small group meeting to assist the member churches’ interpretation process, if they so wish.

2. A member church or churches in the same region may organize a workshop or meeting to prepare easy-to-understand educational materials such as theological interpretation, Bible study, liturgical

materials, presentations such as *Shocking Figures*, etc., for congregational use; and to develop strategies for the action plan.

3. Area councils may develop a covenanting proposal and establish a process for this with partners in the region or other parts of the world.

4. Individuals, groups, churches or area councils can collect models for alternatives to neoliberal economic globalization, like the churches in El Salvador have done, or the churches in Cameroon intend to do. As a part of WARC's plan with regard to this

concrete action, a small group of experts could visit the favourite and most workable alternative model, for more in-depth study and the development of a model that may be widely shared and applied in contextually appropriate ways.

5. We can strengthen ecumenical cooperation by getting involved with the WCC's AGAPE process, related programmes of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), or the Council for World Mission's programme of mission enablers training.

6. We can work with civil movements, locally and globally.

You will find at
www.warc.ch/dt

Extensive historical and bibliographic information about theological studies and ecumenical dialogues sponsored by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

The Accra Confession and its ecclesiological implications

Ulrich Möller

How should WARC member churches relate to a confession of faith produced in the context of a WARC General Council? The purpose of this article is to spell out the theological significance of the Accra Confession for the WARC member churches and to assist them as they seek to respond to it in their local situations. A member of the Reformed Alliance in Germany, Möller is one of the officers (Oberkirchenrat) of the Protestant Church in Westphalia. He wrote "Confessing our faith in the context of economic injustice" [Reformed World, 46(3), Sept. 1996].

The 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Accra, 30 July to 12 August 2004, responded to the call of the 23rd General Council in Debrecen "for a committed process of progressive recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) with all WARC member churches at all levels regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction."¹

The Debrecen call was associated with the task to "work towards the formulation of a confession of (...) beliefs about economic life which would express justice in the whole household of God and reflect priority for the poor, and support an ecologically sustainable future."² The General Council declared that the cries of the people who suffer and the groaning of creation due to the increasing destruction of the environment constituted a call for

the Reformed churches to make "a **confession of faith** which rejects and struggles against these injustices, while affirming our faith in the Triune God who in Christ offers a new creation."³ It expressly declared "*this affirmation of life, commitment to resistance, and struggle for transformation to be an integral part of Reformed faith and confession today.*"⁴ There was no doubt about the binding nature of this process: "By committing themselves to a process of confessing, our churches are challenged to come to a common confession."⁵

In Accra, the WARC General Council went through intensive and somewhat controversial debates before making its nearly unanimous decision to adopt the document titled *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*. The entire document is also known as the Accra

Confession. What does *covenanting* mean in this context?

The core part of this covenanting document is called *Confession of Faith in the Face of Economic Injustice and Ecological Destruction*. What does *confession of faith* mean in the Accra document? What are its ecclesiological implications?

The purpose of this text is to assist our WARC member churches with regard to the ecclesiological implications of the Accra Confession. I have written it on behalf of the small WARC group mandated with producing a comprehensive document to enable member churches and people concerned to have a deeper understanding of the significance and implications of the Accra Confession. It aims to assist our churches in their process of reflection, and to provoke theological dialogue among member churches at the local level and from the global perspective. I will focus on three main issues:

1.Relations between *Reading the Signs of the Times* (§5-14) and *Confession of Faith* (§15-36);

2.The understanding of *Confession* in §15-36 and its ecclesiological implications;

3.The understanding of *Covenanting for Justice* (§37-42) and its ecclesiological implications.

Each of these three parts goes along with questions we would like you as WARC member churches to reflect on and answer from the perspective of your specific church context. We hope that these questions may

assist your church, local congregations and church members to interpret the Accra Confession within your own context.

At the same time, we ask you to share within the WARC family: where do you see your church - with its own engagement in the process of recognition, education, confession and action - covenanting for justice? What are the next steps you are aiming at? Where do you need assistance within the WARC family?

We encourage your church to share its insights and questions with the WARC office in Geneva, WARC representatives within your region, or other member churches engaged in the Covenanting for Justice process.

1.Relations between “Reading the Signs of the Times” (§5-24) and “Confession of Faith” (§15-36)

Analysis of the present situation under “Reading the Signs of the Times” does not start from a neutral point of view, but is “challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself” (§5). From this perspective global challenges and developments are analysed and interpreted as a global crisis of life and “a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all” (§7). Details may be disputed, but the basic challenge is obvious: the present accumulation of wealth for the benefit of the few cannot be globalized because of the limitation of natural resources; and it is accompanied by the intolerable marginalization of large parts of

the world's population. While recognizing the complexity of the situation, the churches must have a clear perspective, as "seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people" (§11).

From this perspective the "root causes of massive threats to life" are interpreted first of all as the products of an unjust economic system defended and protected by cultural, political and military power, led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests (§6+11). Resistance against the present structures of global economy is necessary, because the present integration of economic globalization and geopolitics backed by neoliberal ideology defends and protects the interests of the powerful at the expense of the poor and is responsible for preventable human suffering (§14). "Reading the Signs of the Times" therefore culminates in the ecclesiological challenge of §14:

...in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus told us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Lk 16:13).

The main point of ecclesiological importance is not whether in *all* aspects of economic and political analysis there is a consensus in "Reading the Signs of the Times." In Accra this certainly was not the case.⁶ But in Accra there was a consensus that the currently globally dominating neoliberal economic structure is unjust and responsible for preventable human suffering

(§14) and that Christian faith must resist against the flagrant injustice of the continuously widening gap between the rich and the poor, and against the fact that the lifestyle of today's rich and powerful will destroy the life opportunities of the generations to come. Together with the affirmation rooted in our Reformed tradition "that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians" (§16), this was solid enough ground for the General Council in Accra to affirm:

We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization and therefore we confess before God and one another. (§16)

Questions to WARC member churches with regard to §5-14:

1. Does your church need more clarification on matters dealt with under "Reading the Signs of the Times" in order to agree to the given analysis and interpretation? If so, in which regard?
2. If your church in general shares the given analysis and interpretation, are there still obstacles to your agreement "that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act"? If so, what are they? What would help your church to agree?
3. If your church agrees that in this matter the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act and that therefore it is necessary to confess in words and deeds, what kind of assistance can you

offer to other WARC member churches in order to come to a common understanding in this regard?

2. The understanding of confession in §15-36 and its ecclesiological implications

Accra's consensus on the *Confession of Faith* (§15-36) was formed through intensive debate and discussion at the General Council regarding the ecclesiological character of the Accra Confession. The Plenary agreed to include an explanatory paragraph on the understanding of confession in this text. It was adopted by a large majority, inserted as §15 at the beginning of the confession part of the Accra document, and should be regarded as the core text for the ecclesiological interpretation of the Accra Confession.

Faith commitment may be expressed in various ways according to regional and theological traditions: as confession, as confessing together, as faith stance, as being faithful to the covenant of God. We choose confession, not meaning a classical doctrinal confession, because the World Alliance of Reformed Churches cannot make such a confession, but to show the necessity and urgency of an active response to the challenges of our time and the call of Debrecen. We invite member churches to receive and respond to our common witness.

In the following paragraphs I want to speak about the ecclesiological implications in line with the three parts of this text, §15.

1. "Faith commitment may be expressed in various ways according to regional and theological traditions: as

confession, as confessing together, as faith stance, as being faithful to the covenant of God." (§15a) Under special circumstances, if the gospel in its essence is being challenged in a severe way, the confession itself, the integrity of the churches' faith and witness to the gospel, can be at stake. At this point a *faith commitment* is unavoidable. Responding to the Debrecen call of the WARC General Council 1997 for a *processus confessionis*, and reading the signs of the times according to the WARC General Council 2004 in Accra, it is clear that this point has come and a faith commitment is to be taken (§4+15).

Different regional and theological traditions deal differently with the need of confessing. Reformed tradition always has been a *confessing tradition*. *Confessing together* as an act of responding and being obedient to the gospel is a matter of both word and deed. In the face of current challenges to confessing, a written *confession* has the purpose of publicly clarifying how the church with its witness can confess the truth of the gospel today. Contextual plurality implies a certain diversity within the unity of a "corridor of confessing." Whether the term being used to indicate this urgency to confess our faith anew is "confession," "confessing together," "taking a faith stance" or "being faithful to the covenant with God," is not important. These terms are all heading in the same direction: not exclusive but inclusive, as an invitation and call to confess in words and deeds, according to the respective traditions

and contexts in multiple and various ways, but at the same time aiming to orient and unite the churches as part of the worldwide ecumenical church in their witness with binding commitment.

2. “We choose confession, not meaning a classical doctrinal confession, because the World Alliance of Reformed Churches cannot make such a confession, but to show the necessity and urgency of an active response to the challenges of our time and the call of Debrecen.” (§15b) The Accra Confession is not a classical doctrinal confession, because WARC as such does not have confessions and cannot make confessions. In Reformed ecclesiology it is not a (worldwide) alliance of churches but a (local) church in its specific context which is the subject making the confession. This is true for the classical Reformed confessions at the time of the Reformation as well as for such confessions of the 20th century as the Barmen Theological Declaration (in the context of the German church’s struggle in 1934) or the Confession of Belhar (in the context of the South African anti-apartheid struggle in 1986). This is why in §15c WARC states: *“We invite member churches to receive and respond to our common witness.”*

It is up to the individual member churches to decide how they want to receive this common witness of the WARC General Council. And it is up to them to decide in what way they want to respond to this common witness, either by adopting the

Accra Confession as their own, or by responding with a specific witness or confession related to their specific context. Important, however, is that the Accra Confession is being recognized by the member churches as a challenge to enter this joint worldwide confessing journey and to respond to the Accra Confession in an authentic and committed way.

Like *Barmen* and *Belhar* the Accra Confession was not written with the hermeneutical purpose of interpreting the biblical message of the gospel in the context of today’s life under normal circumstances. The necessity and urgency is crucial: the challenges of our time require an active response of the church: “the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization” (§16). At the same time, the confession is a response to the Debrecen call, which already in 1997 was aiming at a confession of faith that affirms our faith in God and rejects and struggles against economic injustice and ecological destruction. In its confession, the church responds to God’s promise and command. This is also true of the Accra Confession: in the global crisis of life and “in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all” (§7), in the context of neoliberal globalization, the key issue is the common, fundamental acknowledgement of God’s promise and command.

The Trinitarian Accra Confession itself (§17-36) explains the three articles of §17: 1. “We believe in *God, Creator and Sustainer*

of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world.” (§18-27); 2.”We live under the promise that *Jesus Christ* came so that all might have life in fullness (Jn 10:10).” (§28-31); 3.”Guided and upheld by the *Holy Spirit* we open ourselves to the reality of our world.” (§32-35) It concludes with the Trinitarian praise in §36.

The confession in *part one* and *part two* consists of positive affirmations (“We believe...”) with negative implications (“We reject...”). The *affirmations* state that God is sovereign over all creation (§18); God has made an inclusive covenant with all of creation - in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners - implying an economy of grace for the household of all creation (§20). Therefore, any economy of the household of life is accountable to God and has to serve the dignity and wellbeing of people in sustainable community (§22). God is a God of justice and in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged, and the abused (§24) and calls us to stand with those who are victims of injustice (§26). God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow Jesus Christ, who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (Jn 10:10) (§28).

These affirmations of faith go along with *negative implication*. With regard to *God’s sovereignty*: to reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule (§19). With regard to *God’s*

covenant: to reject the current neoliberal world economic order or any other economic system that defies God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life (§19), and to reject the culture of rampant consumerism and competitive greed (§21) and the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth (§23). With regard to the *God of justice*: to reject any teaching which in the name of the gospel justifies or fails to resist any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people and does not care for all creation (§25), to reject any theology that claims that God is only with the rich and affirms that human interests dominate nature (§27), to reject any church practice or teaching which excludes the poor and care for creation in its mission (§29), and any attempt in the life of the church to separate justice and unity (§31).

The affirmations and rejections of parts one and two of the Accra Confession up to a certain extent in spirit, wording and content are related to confessions of the past that have been formulated in response to special challenges to confess during the 20th century, namely the Barmen Confession of 1934⁷ with the background of the church’s struggle in Nazi Germany and the Belhar Confession of 1986⁸ with the background of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

Parts one and two lead to part three of the confession affirming that the church is called in the Holy Spirit to account for the hope that is within us through Jesus Christ

(§32). The implications of this are the churches' acknowledgement of complicity and guilt, their confession of sin and their commitment to confess, witness and act, culminating in §33: "We commit ourselves to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God." Taking up the very formulations of Belhar Article 5, the third part of the confession before the final Trinitarian praise (§36) concludes: "We believe, in obedience to Jesus Christ,... the church is called to confess... even though the authorities and human law might forbid them, and punishment and suffering be the consequence(s). Jesus is Lord." (§35)

Since the Kitwe consultation in the run-up to Debrecen 1997, when members of the Southern African Region of WARC urged the General Council to declare a *status confessionis* on economic injustice and ecological destruction, up to Accra 2004 there was a dispute within the WARC member churches: Will the process of confession the churches have been called to engage in -sooner or later - have to culminate in a *status confessionis*, as was the case in Barmen 1934 and Belhar 1986?

By interpreting the term as a situation which requires a confession, because the integrity and credibility of the churches' witness to the gospel is at stake, one can argue that the urgent need to confess may arise not only due to a false doctrine or false practice of the church, but also through a challenge from outside the church. Obviously this is the case with regard to the

present challenges of neoliberal globalization.

However, WARC distinguishes between the urgent need in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction to come to a confession, and the declaration of a *status confessionis*. The Debrecen call for a *processus confessionis* went along with its deliberate renunciation of the use of the term *status confessionis*.⁹ The 1997 WARC General Council made it clear that in the tradition of the Reformed family the function of *status confessionis* as an *ecclesiological* term is to fight for the unity of the church when this is threatened by heresy and by the fact that those who wish to confess their faith are prevented from bearing witness.

In this situation, rejecting false doctrines (heresy) and offering resistance to those who suppress the confession that is required, is a last attempt to call back into the unity of the church those who err. In the *status confessionis*, a position propagated in the name of the gospel but contradicting the confession is ruled out. Those that hold the position ruled out in the name of the gospel therefore exclude themselves from the unity of the church. Accordingly, a church doctrine or practice has to be identified as incompatible with the gospel and the "confession response will then have to show what compromises the integrity of the gospel - in other words, how the preaching, witness and credibility of the

gospel are compromised by world views and lifestyles *propagated in the name of the gospel itself*.¹⁰

In Accra this was not at the centre of the matter. What the Accra Confession rejects is not “false doctrine” or “heresy.” Rather, it first rejects economic, political and military claims that subvert God’s sovereignty over life and act contrary to God’s just rule (§19); the culture of rampant consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the neoliberal global market system (§21) with its unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth (§23); and any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people (§25). Only then does the Accra Confession speak as well about what has to be rejected within the church: any teaching which in the name of the gospel justifies those who support, or fail to resist, an ideology that puts profit before people (§25); any theology that claims God is only with the rich and permits human interests to dominate nature (§27); any church practice or teaching that excludes the poor and care for creation from its mission (§29); or any attempt in the life of the church to separate justice and unity (§31).

All these rejections are important. At the same time, there is a fundamental difference between rejecting any “teaching, theology, church practice, attempt in the life of the church” on the one hand, and rejecting false “doctrine” on the other hand. No one in Accra named any WARC member church that was propagating as doctrine what was rejected in the Accra Confession.

Based on the consensus about the problematic nature of today’s global economy, the General Council easily reached a decision to respond in a confessional manner, even though some of the delegates were in favour of a declaration or a statement. However, the General Council hesitated to go for a *status confessionis*. It did not want to divide the Reformed family along confessional lines on this issue.¹¹

The Accra Confession, on the basis of its affirmations of faith and their implied rejections, aims at implementing the faith commitment of the third article “to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God” (§33). This positive aim at the same time is the most important ecclesiological implication of the concluding last part of the Accra document *Covenanting for Justice* (§37-42), again taking up its overall title *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*. Therefore the decisive §15 culminates in the sentence:

3. “We invite member churches to receive and respond to our common witness.” (§15c) Taking up this invitation we would like to put the following questions to WARC member churches.

With regard to §15: What form of confessing would be most appropriate to your church in your context, as a positive faith commitment to the Accra Confession? What steps are you taking towards decision-making and action? How do you think this decision and action could help to move the ecumenical process in your context towards clarity and commitment?

With regard to §17-36: What kind of concrete action has to be taken in your own context for implementing affirmation and rejection? What kind of confession and repentance has to be made in your context in response to §34 of the Accra Confession?

3. The understanding of Covenanting for Justice (§37-42) and its ecclesiological implications

Accra was the culminating point of the Debrecen call for a *processus confessionis*. This ecumenical process aims at a *basic theological recognition* as well as at different possible *implications for current action* under specific circumstances. With this understanding the Accra Confession in §38 explicitly takes up the three different phases of the *processus confessionis* initiated by the Debrecen call, addressing churches in different phases of this common journey:

1. “On this common journey, some churches have already expressed their commitment in a confession of faith. We urge them to continue to translate this confession into concrete actions both regionally and locally.”

2. “Other churches have already begun to engage in this process, including taking actions and we urge them to engage further, through education, confession and action.”

3. “To those other churches, which are still in the process of recognition, we urge them on the basis of our mutual covenanting accountability, to deepen their education and move forward towards confession.”

Communicating with member churches who have not (yet) reached this recognition, the Accra Confession embarks on the way together, calling the churches into a joint witness of the entire worldwide church in terms of the fundamental direction, although it may certainly take different forms, in line with the different church contexts and traditions.

With the title “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth” (*processus confessionis*), the General Council took up the earlier suggestion of the 2000 WARC Executive Committee in Bangalore for a new name.¹² As S.W. Park correctly states, without weakening the significance of confessing, “But the new name does not mean the focus has been changed, it may become more inclusive. It includes both confession against untruth and commitment to work together for truth.”¹³ He sees a new focus in the next phase of the ecumenical confessing journey:

“If the process from Debrecen to Accra is described as a *confessing process with resistance against injustices and commitment to justice*, then the process from Accra and beyond should be a *covenanting process of working together for justice and truth*.”

I can subscribe to this by underlining that resistance against injustices, where necessary, continues to be part of the commitment to justice (§35). The emphasis is on a new practice in covenanting for justice. The words of the confession are not the aim in itself but serve to clarify,

encourage and safeguard the churches' witness locally and globally within the joint corridor of confessing. Therefore the Accra Confession invites the WARC member churches to join in *covenanting for justice* (§37-42).

Reformed theology has always put special emphasis on the biblical concept of God's covenant. As WARC has made clear in the past, the covenant is a gift of God which transforms our reality. It calls for the act of confessing as our human response. God's covenant claims our entire life and the entire life of the church. At the same time, the recent ecumenical understanding of "covenanting" and "to covenant" goes one step further. These verb forms, recently used primarily in an ethical sense, describe a joint process of engagement in which different partners commit themselves to joint and shared responsibility to live and to act in a specific way.¹⁴

Consistently and in compliance with the Reformed churches' self-understanding, WARC has deliberately been open to other ecclesiological entry points outside of the Reformed tradition and has let the term *processus confessionis* recede into the background in the course of the journey on which it has jointly embarked with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). In conformity with the WCC and LWF approaches, the focus is on the positive obligation of the churches to engage in joint witness for justice, both in the economy and on the earth. With the Accra Confession

the WARC *processus confessionis* finds its focus in *Covenanting for Justice*. Worldwide, the Reformed churches are called to give witness to the transformative power of God's grace by joining hands beyond denominational borders. Thereby living out their commitment through covenanting for justice, Reformed churches are contributing to the wider ecumenical family's *Call for Alternative Globalization addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE)* in connection with the 9th WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre, 2006.

Questions to WARC member churches

With regard to §38: Where is your church with regard to the three phases of confessing? What are your next steps and commitments towards a binding confessing witness?

What kind of assistance do you need (from other churches, institutions, WARC,...)? What experiences, insights, ideas and actions can be shared from your church?

With regard to §37-42: What does your church see as its specific contribution in implementing the covenanting calling? Which recommendations of the Public Issues Committee (see §40) are of special importance in your context to express the ecclesiological implications of the Accra Confession? How is your church responding to it? What other recommendations of the WARC action

plan and beyond do you regard as essential in your context, and how are you going to respond?

May these questions inspire your church at all levels, especially in your

local congregations, to interpret this confession and to live out its covenanting for justice commitment, especially by responding to the plan of action mentioned in §40.

Notes

¹ Resolution by the General Council. Proceedings of the 23rd General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Geneva 1998, Section II Report, quoted according to: "WARC: *Processus Confessionis*. Process of recognition, education, confession and action regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction", Background papers No.1, Geneva 1998, p.25-31.

² *Ibid.*, p.29.

³ WARC, *Processus Confessionis*, p.28. Full texts in: "Debreceen 1997. Proceedings of the 23rd General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches." WARC, Geneva 1997. Texts also in: www.warc.ch/pc/debreceen/index.html.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁶ "In the Accra Confession there was a kind of solidarity between unity and justice, even though there was not a full consensus in the analysis of the situation." (S. W. Park, *A journey for life: From Debreceen to Accra and Beyond*).

⁷ "Theological Declaration of Barmen," May 1934. Text under: www.warc.ch/pc/20th/index.html.

⁸ "Confession of Belhar," formulated in 1982, adopted by the Synod of the NGSK in Belhar, September 1986. (1. Introduction, 2. Article 1: Unity, 3. Article 2: Reconciliation, 4. Article 3: Justice, 5. Conclusion) Text under: www.warc.ch/pc/20th/02.html. Article 3 in particular emphasizes the God of justice, who in a world full of injustice in a special way is the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged, and calls the church to follow him in this and to witness and strive against any form of injustice, and in following Christ to witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

⁹ With express reference to the definition provided by WARC concerning the conditions for a declaration of *status confessionis* at its 1989 General Council in Seoul: “It demands of the church a clear, unequivocal decision for the truth of the gospel, and identifies the opposed opinion, teaching or practice as heretical. The declaration of a *status confessionis* refers to the practice **of the church** as well as to its teaching.” (WARC, *processus confessionis*, *ibid.*, 29, underlining by U.M.).

¹⁰ Dirkie Smit, “Theological approaches for churches’ involvement in matters of globalization. Reformed perspectives from Southern Africa” (Theologische Ansätze für kirchliches Engagement in Fragen der Globalisierung. Reformierte Perspektiven aus dem Südlichen Afrika, in: *Ökumenische Rundschau* 2/2004, 160-175. 171 (§18) (italics by U.M.).

¹¹ S. W. Park, *A Journey for Life. From Debrecen to Accra and Beyond*.

¹² Cf. WARC (ed.), *A Continuing Journey toward a Covenanting / Confessing Movement for Economic Justice and Life on Earth (processus confessionis)*, Geneva, 2004, 3. On this issue, see also the important comments of Dirkie Smit on “Covenanting from the Reformed Perspective.” Smit, *ibid.*, 172-174.

¹³ S. W. Park, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Smit, *ibid.*

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Biblical paradigms for our covenant with God and our neighbour

Ofelia Ortega

Through a reading of the biblical stories of Abel and Cain (Genesis 4) and of the flood (Genesis 6-9), Ortega seeks to shed light on the theological stimuli underlying the Accra Confession. A former president of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas, Cuba, she is presently the director of the Christian Institute for Gender Studies. She is also one of the six vice-presidents of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

During the last two years (2002-2004), the Theological Commission of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) has held several meetings to reflect on issues based upon the analysis of church mission in our continent. The “theology of grace, cross and hope” has been the main topic.¹ During the meetings we have heard the stories of participants from Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba and Mexico who made us see the relevance of the topic to our region.

Elsa Támez, a Bible scholar, tells us that the appeals court in Guatemala quashed the 30-year sentence imposed on the killers of Monsignor Juan Gerardi, Bishop of Guatemala.² This event clearly shows the violence, injustice, corruption and impunity that has prevailed in the region. In the book *Guatemala Never Again!* there is an account

of what happened in Guatemala between 1976 and 1996. One of the stories is about a nameless woman from Malacatán, Guatemala, who sees herself as “a bird on a dried branch.” This is her testimony:

They killed my husband. And from then on, I suffered like a little girl. I couldn't manage money, or work, or support my family. You see, the life of a woman among men is hard; and the life of a woman alone with her children is worse yet. They left me like a bird on a dead branch.³

On June 23, 2005, the Reformed Churches in Argentina issued a declaration on the impunity laws, expressing their satisfaction at the abolition of the laws that had allowed the disturbing facts to stay hidden in Argentina. That abolition will allow the trials to be held - trials that will help heal the wounds of the people of Argentina, caused by torture and violence over the years.

The search for truth and justice is an essential element of the mission and testimony of our churches in Latin America and the Caribbean. That is why we are pleased to have received the document “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth”, approved by the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, Ghana, August 2004. It urges us to read the signs of the times and to respond with concrete actions to the process imposed by the prevailing dominant powers, following the prophetic emphasis to “break the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free” (Is 58:6).

It is true, as we recognized in Accra, that “the signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted. The root causes of massive threats to life are above all the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death” (Reading the Signs of the Times §6). The system tells us, “There is no choice.” Jesus helped the poor and the hungry, leading them to share what they had and building what we call “the economy of the Grace of God” (Mk 6:35 and 8:1).

When Juan Stam tells us about the “theology of full life,” he links it with the covenant of Deuteronomy 28-30, in which life itself and the means of life are related: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses” (Deut 30:19). The solemn words of the alliance include “life” and “blessing,” indicating what is obvious in

the biblical text: the life that God offers involves the material provisions that support it (Deut 28:1-4), and death is the absence of them (Deut 28:15-68).⁴ The Christian claims concerning the sovereignty of God stand in opposition to the totalitarian pretensions of the market economy.

The messianic claims of the market and the consumerist lifestyle are in sharp conflict with the Christian confession that Jesus Christ is the Lord. The process of rapid globalization, which has dissolved many hitherto homogenous cultures, leading to fragmentations and exclusion, makes it our urgent task to understand the gospel as the power that creates true human community, “a viable human culture.” It is imperative for us to examine some of the biblical paradigms that offer us values vis-à-vis the destructive forces of globalization and the market.

As we affirm in the Accra Confession (Confession of Faith in the Face of Economic Injustice and Ecological Destruction §20):

“We believe that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Gen 9:8-12). God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the market place (Is 55:1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners, and calls us to put justice for the ‘least of these’ (Mt 25:40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hos 2:18ff).”

Violence against the other and separation from God (Genesis 4)

Cain “the murderer” In Genesis 4 we find the story of the first crime, the first murder in the Bible. Death enters the Bible with a brother’s murder. Chapter 3, known as “the fall,” is intimately related to chapter 4: it is not only that we feel ashamed of our nakedness before God, but that the rupture of relationships with God always leads to the rupture of relationships with the brother/sister.

There is a movement in these two chapters. It is the movement between the vertical crisis relationship with God and the horizontal temptation: the brother’s death. And the crucial aspect of humanity’s calendar today is the problem of brothers and sisters. The same as in the story of the fall, here God also shows up just a moment after the fact. God’s question is not now: “Where are you?” as in chapter 3, but “Where is your brother?” The responsibility before God is responsibility before the brother. God’s question is enunciated as a social question.

Cain does not care about this question, which gracefully, on God’s part, gave him cause to admit his blame, but he answers with insolence, full of effrontery: “Am I supposed to take care of this unhappy one that keeps the livestock?” Cain lies to God with boldness; his attitude is more hardened than that of the first couple in Genesis 3.

The dialogue is impossible but the narrator attempts it, with interpretation: “Why have you done this terrible thing?”

expressing, in a more humanly possible way, the horror of God before such a crime. Then Cain realizes something he had not thought about: the body was well buried, but the blood of the innocent rises with screams of protest, a clamour that arrives at once before the throne of God. It is a scream appealing for the protection of right: “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”

Just like the story of Paradise, this story is imbued with the earth issue (*adamá*). So, the earth is the essential foundation of all human existence. Cain has cultivated the field, has offered the crops of the soil, and has made the land drink his brother’s blood, the land he cultivated, but from the furrows the criminal charges rise against him for the blood shed, and for that reason the earth denies him its fruits - Cain is expelled from the earth.

This is a sacred topic, as the aboriginal people have taught us, because the cultivated land is the closest place to God’s blessing, and God’s cult.

I always remember a story from Cardinal Arns, when he told us that after their eviction from the land in Brazil, the peasants came every day to the rural watch station to ask for the cultivated corn, and in the face of their insistence the annoyed guards asked them, “What’s the problem with the corn? The land does not belong to you anymore.” But the peasants responded that the fruit should not be lost - it was mother earth’s corn - the fruit should be harvested

so that mother earth would not cry but could be satisfied.

In Matthew 23:35 we read, “As a result, the punishment for the murder of all the innocent will fall on you.” So in the Bible, Cain is not only a person, he is also a system; he represents the system of competition, infidelity, cruelty and annihilation of the other.

The breaking-off of human fraternity

There are cultural differences between the brothers (Abel is a shepherd and Cain a farmer). There are cult differences too. The pastor offers animals and the farmer fruits and vegetables. They organized two altars. But the most significant fact is the difference between the names. The name Cain is linked with a verb that means procreate - create: “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord” (Gen 4:1c). The meaning of the name Abel is vapour-air-puff, vanity, “He is a nobody.” The names express quality. Abel is the weak, the younger, the powerless.

Divine acceptance of the offerings There is no difference between the two offerings; the same word is used for both. The extra element in Abel’s sacrifice, “his fat,” has the extra element of Cain’s sacrifice in compensation, that is to say, “an offering.” In Lev 3:16, the fat is an offering to the Lord. According to Dr. Hans de Wit, “It is important to point out that the verb “look gladly,” “take a good look at” or “he accepted” is not used in Hebrew. A neutral verb that does not involve acceptance or special joy is used. It is a verb that means “to look,” “to address.”⁵

God looks at Abel because he is the one who needs God’s look the most. He is the brother who seems to be born by chance and to disappear without a trace. Abel represents those whose lives seem to vanish, not to have continuance, not to last. They are those whose names seem to have never been written down in the book of the living. They are, in short, those that the Bible insists on keeping and making live, because they are the excluded, they are those who are condemned not to exist. The descendants of Cain make fun of their brothers and sisters; they kill them and do not even know where their tombs are; they make them disappear and do not know where they are.

The breaking-off of communication

When Cain sees God looking at his brother, instead of following God’s gaze he becomes angry and breaks off communication with God and his brother. (His face falls down - the literal phrase in Hebrew.) This shows that God has not rejected Cain. God offered him opportunities to change. But Cain wanted to have another God, to invent his own God. Genesis 4:8 says that Cain said to his brother, “Let’s go out to the field,” but it turns out in the original text that he did not say anything.⁶ The old translations tell us that Cain says, “Let’s go out to the field.” But the reality is that the brothers did not look at each other, did not speak to each other. The final act of the breaking-off of human fraternity took place.

The authentic purification

God cannot bless hands that are stained with innocent

human blood. It is interesting to know that for the people of Israel “homicide” extends to any exploitation of the neighbour or any attack on the fullness of life. It is homicide not only to destroy life totally, but also to diminish its quality, making it a miserable, hard, rough, inhumane life. An attack against the quality of life is a bloody attack. The text of the prophet Isaiah, 1:10-20, is very revealing: “Wash yourselves clean. Stop all the evil that I see you doing and learn to do right. See that justice is done - help those that are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows.” To the series of useless sacrifices is opposed God’s will.

Thus, purification is not about religious rituals of purification. The first thing is to wash our hands of the blood of social injustice, wash ourselves clean. “Stop all the evil that I see you doing, and learn to do right; and as for the meaning of “do right,” it is summarized in a few words: to do right consists in seeking and respecting the rights of everyone. In the tradition of the Hebrew people it meant the rights of the weak and the poor, the humble, who lack the means to make themselves worthy. For that reason they are the helpless (the excluded). Powerful people have the means to defend their rights; the poor do not.

In Israel there are social categories that embody the excluded: widows and orphans. As a sociological category, the widow is one who does not have a husband or children that support her. She is indigent, helpless; and according to the sociological category of orphans, they are the ones who do not have

a father or a mother to take care of them. They are the indigent, the helpless. The third category is formed by immigrants, those that come to the country to work because in their native country there is none: second-class citizens, without equal legal rights, always exposed to exploitation and abuse. And there is still a fourth category of helpless in the Bible: the Levites, who do not have economic independence because they do not possess land: “widows, orphans, emigrants and Levites.”

Paul and James continue using the language of the Old Testament and it is logical that it is this way because there can be a rich orphan and a widow that is a good catch. As for sociological categories, the people of Israel do not understand each other this way.

So purification is not washing our hands as in the ritual of Pilate, but defending the rights of the most destitute.

Builders of cities What became of Cain, the one that shed his brother’s blood? There is a small text, almost lost in verse 17, “Cain built a city.” In biblical history, Cain is the first builder of cities. The search for security is always the oppressor’s problem - you will recall the justification for the dictatorships of national security. That national security includes war and militarism; it is not to defend the rights of the poor and the oppressed, but it is the search for the security of those that have their hands spotted with blood.

Expelled from his land, Cain had to build a city for his own sake. The city and his son

Enoch carry the same name: inauguration, initiation. Cain wants to assure his future through his progenitor and his system of security: the city. The city is the answer to his economic problem (the earth will not give him fruit) and to his military problem (“the one who finds me will kill me”). So Cain escapes from creation again, from the God of creation. In Genesis, at the beginning it makes totally different sense. At the beginning of Cain’s city, anti-creation tries to survive. Cain does not turn to a spirit of repentance to receive the grace of God; rather, each step he takes is a new disobedience, a new offence.

In Nicaragua, it is interesting to see the big walls of the neighbourhood of Las Colonias, where the rich live. Those walls get higher and higher, and more and more paramilitary posts are added to keep watch.

The well-known ideologist of “pure capitalism,” Milton Friedman, sees coming from the “city of the system of the free company” nothing else than “tyranny, slavery and misery.” The system of economic security that is the capitalist market economy, according to him, must answer to the human fear, solitude and insecurity it has created. To recover “paradise” it is necessary to walk with a strong sense of all that is created. The economic system has come to be a “Second Nature,” an alternative creation, a new cosmos, in the eyes of human beings. But that image is oppressive.

So in Cain’s history we see that “the economic problem” is a spiritual issue: Am I maybe my brother’s keeper? History tells us

that Cain escaped from the presence of God. The history of Cain’s city is narrated throughout the Bible up to the last page. Following Cain’s steps we find the search for power all through the Scriptures.

The other builder of cities was Nimrod, the son of Cush, the son of Ham (Gen 10:8). The big city in the Bible is the symbol of the dominance over nature; it is the technological progress that can be used to enslave and not to liberate. It is technology along with militarization. (Two fifths of the investigations into accidents are bound directly to and serve the military sector.)

Today, fortified cities are being built: cities of Babel (Genesis 11). José Comblin tells us that the basic ethical problem of our time is not the residue of the past that historical evolution can solve; neither is it an underdevelopment issue; on the contrary, the problem comes from the developed countries. A new social group concentrates in its hands all the power and wealth. It is the group of those “analysts of symbols” who manage the symbols but do not have a direct connection with the production of goods.

In the first place, the members of this new elite break the social pact of the nation and of work. They do not practise solidarity. In other words, they are not keepers and protectors of their brothers and sisters! They are shut in themselves, and they do not accept the restrictions that the practice of solidarity would exercise in them. In this way they enter the world of so-called globalization - a world that globalizes the elites only and leaves the masses out, aside.

This fact is expressed in the words of Eduardo Galeano: “The world economy has never been so dramatic, the world has never been so brutally unjust.” There is no national solidarity when the elites abandon the nation and live far from their problems. The call for us is to exercise a “kenotic ecclesiology” that helps churches to meditate in their inner life, in the stewardship of their material resources and the exercise of their power.

In the second place, these elites not only destroy national solidarity but they disarticulate the solidarity of work. In the primitive industrial society, work was the main socialization source. Today in the world of work, solidarity has lost its identity and value. Jobs are diverse, temporary, insecure, without meaning. Jobs are subject to the laws of the market. Work has lost its dignity.

Education today does not include the “ethos of the community,” though “ethos” is the basis of the moral consent of society. The “ethos” is the unconscious organization of a group or a society. It is the source from which norms and values arise. It is all that is observed unconsciously. It is the spontaneity of the universe of patterns of people’s behaviour. It is what is expressed in Acts, Proverbs, symbols, myths and phrases of popular wisdom. It is the evident aspect of social culture. It is what keeps the members of society together.

Education no longer contains that “ethos of the community” that was exercised in the practice of collective work as it was in primitive civilizations. Our task as educators

is to cultivate ourselves through basic human education that consists in teaching what is useful for our lives. And that means the capacity to socialize, to work together.

Thus, Konrad Raiser, in his book *To Be the Church: Challenges and Hopes for a New Millennium*, tells us that it is urgent to recapture the basic forms of conciliation: strengthening the capacity of reciprocity, solidarity, dialogue and non-violent resolutions of conflicts, reinforcing the process of sharing. The main emphasis should be to contribute to the transformation of systems changing the cultural conscience. The biblical concept of Metanoia in the sense of conversion or change of heart, leads us to that direction. Such a conversion is not an act of momentary moral decision, but a learning process and a new form of living.

The rainbow over us: an anti-story of commitment and liberation (Genesis 6-9)

The story of the flood in Genesis 9 gives continuity to the history of creation in Genesis 1. The nucleus of Genesis 1-11 is in the chapters that relate to the flood (6-9). It is a work of generations and people, a complex and concrete composition. The story of the flood is full of prophetic memory. To understand the flood it becomes necessary to locate it in the conflict and confrontation between an Empire and its enslaved and fully exploited vassals. Claus Westermann tells us: “Genesis 1-11

is related to the present through the mediation of history.⁷

We are in exile, in Babylon - as in Genesis 1, next to the rivers of Babylon (Ps 137:1), the people were turned into forced labourers. They worked hard to survive and give the tributes demanded by the Empire.

The history of the flood is next to the suffering of the exiled. In Genesis 6-9 many traditions, voices and cultures converge. It is a text of the people, humanity's patrimony, the *oikoumene*.

The Brazilian Old Testament scholar Milton Schwantes brings great illumination to this text in his book *Projects of Hope*.⁸ For him this is a counter-story - expressed from the reverse of society. It uses the language and the oppressor's mythology to say the opposite. It is a contradiction. An anti-imperialist emphasis prevails in the text. The religion of the Empire menaces people with the threat of flood. This threat justifies the oppression promoted by the imperial armies. Genesis 6-9 disapproves this use of the tradition of flood, because it will never be repeated. Therefore it is not necessary to fear the Empire. The question is the worth of the whole *oikoumene*.

The house of the just and of all minorities guarantees humanity's future. In *Noah* (in the house, in justice, walking with God) is the future of the cosmos. Noah was able to read the signs of the times and was obedient in protecting and keeping the household of God. The destination of the prophetic minorities is the destination of the cosmos. The impoverished are the heart

of the *oikoumene*. In the words of the report that includes the Accra Confession,

We have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Rom 8:22). We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic conversion between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation (§5).⁹

The system and we ourselves produce many floods that destroy the earth and humanity. We need to unite our voices with the faith stance of our people in Buenos Aires that calls upon us to reaffirm that God has made an inclusive covenant with all of creation (Gen 9:8-12). This covenant has been established by the gift of God's grace, a gift that is not sold in markets (Is 55:1).¹⁰

Our passage belongs to the "Noah cycle" (6:9-9:29), which deals with the story of Noah and his family. In its redaction are joined different traditions, voices and cultures. Probably it comes from the time of the Babylonian exile and the background would be one of oppression, slavery, tragedy, pessimism and fear. In that area of Mesopotamia they were used to but always fearful of flooding. In fact, this may have been used by the rulers as blackmail against their slaves in order to inspire panic and subjection. That is why some of the exegetes say this narrative is like an "anti-story," coming from the "reverse" of society and using the very language and mythology of the oppressors to oppose them, proposing another side of the story, this time in a positive and liberating vein. The captian is

“No more floods!” No wonder the etymology of Noah is related to “dispelling sorrow,” to “comfort.” We know that there are many different popular traditions about floods and Noahs.

God established an alliance with Noah and gave the rainbow as a sign of God’s kindness, the restoration of the cosmic order and the gestation of a new cycle. The original meaning of the term “rainbow” in Hebrew, as Gerhard von Rad remarks in his commentary, referred to the bow as an arm, since in Hebrew *queshet* refers at the same time to the bow and the rainbow. After Noah the meaning was turned from the wrath of the bow into a promise of redemption for the whole of humankind. “Here a divine will of healing forbearance is at work; indeed, faith even knows of a solemn guarantee of the cosmic orders which were disturbed by the temporary invasion of chaos. But that was only the beginning for this theology: the preservation and support of an aeon, which would be lost without the word of blessing which the Highest God spoke to it. The natural orders, fixed by God’s word, mysteriously guarantee a world in which in his own time God’s historical saving activity will begin.”

Note in the text the repetition of the idea that it will never happen again. So we can say that in this sacred history there is a distinction between an era “before the flood” and “after the flood.” One of the main lessons from this pericope is that we human beings are called to follow the example of the Creator God, that of taking care of life

and enhancing it. Rabbi Nachmanides would say that in the end God’s bow points down like the warrior who puts down his bow as a sign of peace. After the forty days of the flood, the calm arrived, symbolized by the flight back and forth of the dove.

In Revelation 4:3 when the seer is describing the final glory of God, a rainbow appears which surrounds his throne in order to indicate that although God is the judge of history and humanity, he remains favourable to his people. In fact we could say that all human history, from the beginning to the end, from Genesis to Revelation is encircled by the rainbow.

The prophet Hosea in 2:18 reaffirms the same idea: “In that day I will make a covenant for them, with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land so all may lie down in safety” and all people will experience salvation together. We need to link this prophecy with the historical reality of their time; it was a time of despair: the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser II (eighth century before Christ) was building his imperial power and entered Israel; the country was destroyed - the harvest and the land, due to the Assyrian war chariots; and the wild animals took over afterwards, but God sowed the earth again (v.23) “...and that day the heaven will have the answer from me, the earth its answer from them” - the grain, the wine, the oil, their answer from the earth (v.22), and God will sow in the country.

Hosea is thinking of a complete restoration of the land; the people that will return after Tiglath-pileser in the year 733 are the peasants who returned to their own land, to plan their land again. It is not only that God has mercy and compassion; Yahweh is acting in history, and God's grace and compassion have meaning in our historical reality. At the end of this biblical passage we have this reciprocal love, which includes a complete and holistic restoration of our world (creation, land, earth) with very clear historical demands for us today. It is a call to make covenant against all the forces that destroy the creation, all the forces that bring war and militarization instead of peace and reconciliation.

A covenant with the people that have been excluded from the benefits of creation, a covenant with the women who are transplanted from their own lands to work as prostitutes; a covenant for a better world - and only with them, said Yahweh: "You will be my people...and you will know me (v.23)." And as Terence Fretheim writes in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, "God's promissory relationship with the world generates more particular promises in order to enable these universal promises." The late Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas, referring to the present ecological catastrophe, said

I find the example of the "flood" very attractive; first the text says that God repented for having created human beings because of the wicked things they had done to nature and he decreed the flood, etc. And then God sets, and this is before the rainbow, the new covenant

with Noah: "the desires of the human heart from adolescence tend to evilness". We have to conform to that. But in this new alliance God promises: "never again will there be a flood to destroy life on earth". God himself has set a more modest objective for humankind and I believe we have to accept that also. And this means, for the ethics we all strive for, rejecting the ethics of perfection, that in a certain way the power of humankind has certain risks that could lead it to what God himself established before the flood. *Fiat justitia et pereat mundus*. An ethics of fear in the face of our own power would be instead a modest ethics. This, it seems to me, is one of the lessons we could gather from the flood. This presupposes that we have to understand that human beings are worthy as they are and not as they would be completely perfect. It is worthy to continue with the human experiment.¹¹

But this passage has also some implications for the much needed inter-religious dialogue. Jacques Dupuis points to this narrative in Genesis as one of the relevant passages in the Bible for this issue. He says: "The covenant with Noah is not to be understood simply as guaranteeing knowledge of God through the elements of nature. It deals with a personal, universal intervention on the part of God in the history of the nations, previous to the subsequent covenant with the chosen people. The religious traditions of humanity are the chosen testimonials of this covenant with the nations."¹² It is to be noted that the first time that the Priestly writer uses covenant terminology is in the Noah cycle. God's providence and care of the earth of

humankind has to be mediated through the different living religions of the world.

Milton Schwantes has stressed that the narrative has a “clanic-familiar” flavour. The household of peasant minorities, just and wholesome, are the ones to guarantee the future of humankind, people like Noah and his family. The practice of justice, in the humble walk with God (Mic 6:8), is the future of the whole Cosmos. This is the vocation and destiny of the prophetic minorities. The oppressed are the heart of the *oikoumene* and the protagonists of a better possible world.

The symbol of God’s pact with us and with the earth is the rainbow. God commits himself to respect and to protect life, not only human life, but all the life that there is on earth. No more destruction, but healing; the rainbow is a sign of peace, of peacefulness, of reconciliation. “Never Again” is the multicoloured message.

The whole human history, from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, is surrounded by the rainbow because God is the Lord of the Rainbow. In Revelation 4:3 the glory of God, with a rainbow that surrounds the throne, is described to indicate that although God is a

judge, he remains kind to the people.

Lord, you are light
that breaks out in a rainbow
you are an arch without arrows
and in it you hold us
and in it you unify us
and although we are different
you do not uniform us
Lord rainbow

Lord of the seven colours of the rainbow.

In the United States of America Rev. Jesse Jackson founded the Rainbow Coalition - the rainbow symbolizing, with its diverse colours, the union of all the races in the fight for greater equality and social justice. Today we need a rainbow church where unity stands out and not uniformity: unity in diversity, the richness of a multicoloured Christianity. This rainbow church must preach, teach and live a continuous covenant for justice inspired by our faith.

By confessing our faith together, we covenant in obedience to God’s will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth, both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings.¹³

Notes

¹ Cf. *Teología de la Gracia, Cruz y Esperanza*, Quito, CLAI publications, 2004.

² Elsa Támez, “Sobre las experiencias en los seres humanos: Gracia de Dios y dignidad humana”. Israel Batista (ed.), *Gracia, Cruz y Esperanza*, Quito, CLAI, 2004, pp.241, 244-245.

³ *Guatemala Never Again!* Maryknoll (USA), Orbis Books, 1999, p.82.

⁴ Cf. Arturo Piedra (editor). *Haciendo teología en América Latina - Juan Stam: un teólogo del camino*, San José, Costa Rica, Misión Latinoamericana/Visión Mundial/FTL/UBL, 2004, vol. I, pp.171-172.

⁵ Hans de Wit, *He visto la humillación de mi pueblo: relectura del Génesis desde América Latina*, Amerindia, Santiago de Chile, 1988, p.143.

⁶ See the *New Revised Standard Version*, Oxford University Press, Genesis 4:8 (Sam GK Syr. Compare Vg: MT lacks “Let’s go out to the field.”), 1989.

⁷ Claus Westermann, in *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament I/1*, 1974, p.783.

⁸ Milton Schwantes, *Proyectos de Esperanza: meditaciones en Génesis del 1-11*, Quito, CLAI, 1989, pp.43-44.

⁹ *Accra 2004 - Proceedings of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, Geneva, WARC, 2005, p.154.

¹⁰ “Faith stance on the Global Crisis of Life: South-South Member Churches Forum - Buenos Aires, Argentina, April 23-26 2003”, www.warc.ch/24gc/rw041/04.pdf.

¹¹ Hans Jonas, *On Technology, Medicine and Ethics*, 1985.

¹² Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Maryknoll (USA), Orbis, 1997, p.33.

¹³ *Accra 2004 - Proceedings of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, Geneva, WARC, 2005, p.160.

The biblical and theological significance of the Accra Confession: a perspective from the south

René Krüger

According to the Argentinean New Testament scholar René Krüger, the World Alliance has “an eminently theological task” today, namely to make it clear to humanity “that uncontrolled Mammon is destroying life”. The alternative here is not capitalism or communism, but “God or Mammon”. A pastor of the Evangelical Church of the River Plate, Krüger is also the president of the Instituto Universitario ISEDET, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is the author of books and essays on biblical scholarship and practical theology, among them Gott oder Mammon - das Lukasevangelium und die Oekonomie (1997).

Today, as a worldwide community of churches, we have an eminently theological task. We can publicly point to the disintegrating long-term effect of idolizing the total freedom of the Market. As quickly as possible we must make it clear to humanity, which on the one hand is growing together and on the other is disintegrating, that uncontrolled Mammon is destroying life. Here the alternative is not “capitalism or communism,” “East or West,” “North or South,” “conservative or revolutionary” but “GOD OR MAMMON.”

Two different hermeneutics

In the wealthy countries of the northern hemisphere an interesting debate is taking place in church circles on how to evaluate globalized neoliberalism. First of all we should note that people often speak of

“globalization” without defining it; but since this term is vague and imprecise, embracing many different phenomena, the term “neoliberal globalization” or “globalized neoliberalism” is better used in academic and theological discussion.

In the North, a method of evaluation is frequently used which sets the positive and negative aspects and elements of neoliberal globalization side by side, and then tries to advise how to check the negative effects and combat the disadvantages, in line with the logic “keep the good and correct the bad.” This method avoids any conflict with the economic, political and military powers-that-be, and in addition even functions as an alibi: the system “surely cannot be so bad,” so its negative effects are criticized in order to improve them, and the supposedly good sides are highlighted.

In contrast, attention in the South of the globe is repeatedly drawn to the extensive negative effects of the globalized world economic system. The subjection of all humanity and nature to the logic of barefaced acquisition of ever more capital is denounced as inhumane, sinful and contemptuous of life. The point is also made that most of the winners in this system sit comfortably in the North, while the exploited and excluded suffer under miserable conditions and die early in the South. The real issue in the South - and among a small but growing group of awakened, critically intelligent people of goodwill in the North - is one of life and death - not an academic debate about a philosophy of economics. The South's hermeneutic approach is not an abstract quest for the truth but the concrete urgency of survival and the search for justice, for which the starting point lies in analysis of the living conditions of human beings who have been harmed by neoliberal globalization.

The starting point: Argentina's economic and social situation

A decade after the assiduous introduction and implementation of the neoliberal recipe for the economy, the countries of Latin America - and particularly Argentina as the model pupil for this recipe - have been suffering from the dissolution of an incipient welfare state, the destruction of the middle class, and an insoluble foreign debt (partly repugnant and illegitimate, and also long since discharged through high rates

of interest), the systematic reduction of industrial production, the paralysis of agriculture, and high unemployment, with more than half the population living below the poverty line. In addition we have the collapse of most social networks, the destruction of the environment, the squandering of state reserves, corruption that beggars description, economic instability, and the total impoverishment of the lower classes. Injustice and human despair reached a critical mass in December 2001 leading to the long-feared, devastating collapse of the Argentine economy, accompanied immediately by a social explosion.

The case of Argentina confronts us dramatically with the failure of this wholly uncontrolled economic model. Considering that twenty-five years ago, roughly 60% of the country's population belonged to the middle class, the present situation of poverty is shocking.

In Latin America, the foundations for this system were laid three decades ago by military dictatorships, which crushed and eradicated any political resistance by means of state terror.

We can observe the fiasco of the neoliberal model everywhere in Latin America. The economic and social promises that introduced the system have been proved completely wrong, unmasked as dishonest and fraudulent - not just the false promises of prosperity for all, but also because the system was based on the false claim that the state would not be involved

in matters relating to control of the Market. And this indeed is untrue, because the economy of the wealthy nations of the North did not grow as a result of the neoliberal measures currently imposed on the poor countries, but first of all because these countries protected and continue to protect their economies through subsidies, import regulations and controls; secondly because in the South the powers-that-be in the economy and in financial speculation are clever at using state organisms to make their money, achieving this with unsurpassable corruption; thirdly because the uncontrolled flow of money destroys many national economies and does not promote growth at all; and fourthly because the state as an *imperium* - an "empire" - uses violence to implement its aims and thus makes the assumption of a free market absurd. Instead of reducing poverty, the present world economic system is the strongest cause of its spread: the formula of the totally free market consistently enriches the transnational, politically powerful aristocracy of wealth while enlarging the masses of the poor.

The rejection of neoliberalism and the desire for alternatives is growing throughout Latin America. The elections of the last two years, and different political developments in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Venezuela and Uruguay, have given vigorous expression to this desire. The peoples in question are unequivocally rejecting the neoliberal, globalized model and are literally banishing from the political scene certain

representatives and champions of this model, which caused such great harm during the last decade of the twentieth century.

We still do not know how the brutal, corrupt privatizations, the squandering of national reserves, destruction of the environment, vast unemployment, impoverishment of the middle classes and pauperization of the lower classes can be reversed; but in any case an estimated majority of at least seventy per cent of the population has come to realize that we no longer want to have anything to do with the socioeconomic and political model of globalized neoliberalism.

Ideological and economic ties to the imperial religion

Since Constantine, the majority church in Europe has been the religion of the state. This is also true of a number of the Protestant churches that came into being because of the Reformation, in relation to which it does not matter (from the standpoint of the ideological analysis) whether the issue is that of state churches in a principality, a monarchy, a tsardom or an Empire, or of churches conforming to the state and the powers-that-be in a modern democracy. In the mindset of the population and in the view of many politicians, official state churches, even where more than one of them exists in a country, are part of the all-embracing category of "imperial religion."

Latin American history and likewise developments in other countries and

continents show that the official character of the church as a state church can often become a hindrance to free proclamation of the gospel.

Today the “imperial” religion of the State is globalized neoliberalism. Even official state churches are thus brought into disrepute by the negative effects of this system on the majority of the world’s population. Unfortunately this is also true for those churches that are not indeed state churches but tend to go along with what the state wants, on account of their theological tradition and certain privileges, and so put a gloss of order and decency on the conservative forces that profit from neoliberal globalization.

In view of the swift and profound expansion of poverty throughout the world, along with the destruction of the environment, the wealthy churches must ask themselves whether they will continue to be linked with the doctrine of the official imperial religion of globalized neoliberalism, and to be part of that system, or are prepared to transform themselves into churches that unequivocally wish to part with that imperial religion, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and exemplifying it in their own lives.

With even naïve champions of neoliberalism slowly realizing in Latin America that the highly acclaimed model for the economy, with its ruthless instances of privatization, has not brought the promised prosperity for all, but has only enriched a small class of society while the absolute majority becomes increasingly

poorer, the great difficulty churches in the wealthy countries find in adopting a clear attitude toward the “imperial” system is in itself an extreme embarrassment.

More and more Christian communities and churches in Latin America are recognizing that a clear protest must be launched from the standpoint of the gospel, against the neoliberal system, which is profoundly destroying human and social life and nature, intensifying poverty, distress, violence and unhappiness among the majority of the population. A consensus is growing in the “two-thirds world” that economy and finance must be understood as an issue of faith, and that the gospel provides a clear rejection of globalized neoliberalism on a biblical and theological basis.

This resistance, supported by experiences of the direct effects of neoliberalism, and by biblical theological reflections, takes the form of alternative projects, responses, preaching activities and pastoral care, guided by the criteria of solidarity, mutual aid, fraternity and reverence for life, and for human beings as God’s creatures - not as a means for acquiring income. The churches in the South, with their manifold diakonia campaigns, and thanks to the help of their partner churches in the North, are proving that the minority churches can take on a role as leaders for alternative solutions and as champions of weak members of society and marginalized minorities. Today this role is more necessary than ever, in view of the dramatic

consequences of neoliberal globalization.

The Protestant churches, by their responses - which are constantly deepened through further analyses and indictments, and by participating in ecumenical encounters and declarations about these problems - are clearly involved in a process of confession, where the theme being presented is of social and worldwide development, and the rejection of globalized neoliberalism, for social, economic and theological reasons.

The nature of the destructive system

The basic structure of globalized neoliberalism consists in giving an absolute status to the Market. This it implements by deregulation, liberalization and privatization and the associated restraining of state regulation of the economy. We are living now in a new stage of capitalism which combines all forms of power and affects every dimension of life. The capitalist system of production has turned into a financial system with a global financial market that has transformed itself into an *imperium* supported by military, political and ideological power, and has its laws worked out by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The collapse of the Argentine economy in December 2001, which was at once accompanied by a social explosion, is by no means a special case, but simply a burst ulcer in a deeply entrenched sickness that encompasses the whole world. It consists in dominance over the poor countries (and

especially over the poor of these countries) by the wealthy nations, by the accumulation of wealth, international finance and the wealthy in the South. The system has only one goal: maximizing the accumulation of wealth for just a few. The Bible calls this *Mammon*. *Mammon* is the ultimate biblical means of sharply pointing out that just a few are hoarding more than the great majority do. A number of instances of sins are available for this purpose: senseless accumulation of goods, unqualified private property, high interest rates, financial speculation, major landed property associated with getting something for nothing, systematic plunder of land and charging high rates of interest.

Money is used for speculation rather than to produce goods and services and thus sustain life; but some people have to toil hard so that others may earn tremendously much, with the transference of large sums of money in every direction. This results in a deterioration of the economy into a totalitarian system serving the purpose of fewer and fewer people, while the majority and nature are subjected to destruction without protection. This globalized abuse shows that the system is intrinsically perverse and we can therefore only reject it.

The Gospels clearly show that Jesus unmasks the constricting and shackling power of wealth as a hindrance to entry into the Kingdom of God. This unquestionable declaration leads us to the question of the fundamental challenge of neoliberalism with its fixation on Mammon.

The crucial point: the theological challenge

The following obvious data relating to globalized neoliberalism call for a clear standpoint by the churches, as they call in question the nature of Christian faith.

1. The process of globalization embraces the whole world. All human beings, countries, culture groups, peoples, classes and age groups are affected by it. However, as this process has not produced more justice and solidarity in the world's population, but on the contrary simply more violence, exploitation and death as a result of its "imperial" development with explicitly universal ambitions, it is on a collision course with the biblical vision of the *oikoumene*, the unity of humanity and the worldwide church - the concept of the one body of Christ with its members growing "fitly framed together" (KJV Eph 2:21).

2. The neoliberal economy is based on a permanent sacrificial system. The North sacrifices the South in order to continue consuming the bulk of the world's reserves. Nature is sacrificed to production and the Market. National economic systems are sacrificed to speculation. Whole countries and peoples are sacrificed through the mechanism of indebtedness, so that the rich can remain rich and become richer. This sacrificial system is diametrically opposed to the abolition of all sacrifices through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for others.

3. The gap between poor and rich is becoming increasingly sharper throughout

the whole world. The neoliberal process of globalization provides a small class with huge opportunities for advancement and enrichment, while an increasingly large class is being excluded systematically from the chance to satisfy its basic needs, and so is being rapidly impoverished and plunged into destitution (that is, wholesale, hopeless impoverishment). The violence with which this "Empire" imposes and implements its system is one of the fundamental elements of this process. One must also stress that corruption with its various consequences is an element of the system, and not simply a weakness in the character of the South, for it ensures that the system runs smoothly. Thus the process contradicts the justice God calls for, and the command to love one's neighbour.

4. Basing itself on the total inviolability of private property in the hands of the rich, and on an exaggerated greed for material things, the deregulated capitalistic system turns this into the system that the Bible criticizes. The crucial element of the biblical criticism of social and economic abuses - the selfish accumulation of wealth - is turned by neoliberalism into the substance of the system, without any rectification.

5. In terms of ideology and religion, globalized neoliberalism is a totalitarian world-view that presents itself as the only true one and, theologically speaking, makes money its God through its total commitment to individual profit and economic efficiency. Neoliberalism thus is idolatry. It is also a fundamentalism of the

Market, and ultimately an idolization of the Market, as it uncritically believes that the Market is what facilitates social life and progress - in a mysterious and paradoxical way that we can summarize in the following formula: "The best way to help your neighbour is to act in your own interest." "In this Market, selfishness is the best way to bring about altruism. The more you love yourself and only yourself, the more you will help others through the Market without realizing it." Because of these principles, neoliberalism stands opposed to biblical monotheism.

6. In this system, human beings are considered only from the standpoint of production and consumption, and not as persons in relationship with God, their neighbours, the community and nature, nor as beings with a spiritual focus who are capable of love and need love. Thus work and abilities are regarded simply as goods. Likewise nature is regarded simply as an object from which profit can be gained. Thus neoliberalism stands opposed to the biblical doctrine of creation and its anthropology.

7. Globalized neoliberalism is also an unchristian doctrine of salvation because of its promise to create a world without hunger and illness, and with enough wealth for everyone. It lays claim to a messianic role in building up the economy and calls for maximum recognition above national and international laws. It thus stands opposed to the absolute character of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Neoliberalism, with constituents of this

kind, comes into collision with biblical monotheism, biblical anthropology, the biblical doctrine of salvation and other principal essential contents of the Christian faith, and so can only be rejected. To think of cosmetic and moral repairs to the System as such - or of making adjustments to it - is also completely pointless, both in terms of the effects on the weak members of society and of the Christian faith. At stake is the identification of the contrast between a system constructed on accumulating wealth in favour of a few wealthy people, and the Bible's purpose, which can be summed up as follows: As "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (NRSV: Ps 24:1), everyone and all nature are entitled to a full and dignified life.

This fundamental biblical principle points us to the question of the system itself, and not to moral improvements in it that neither impede nor indeed utterly prevent social decline, destitution and the destruction of the environment. The contrast between the super-exploitative system, and the biblical plan of a dignified, full life for all in justice and peace, is so clear that the churches can do nothing other than adopt an unambiguous standpoint. In the South, social, economic and political conditions are on the agenda for Christian communities and churches.

The hermeneutics of life

In the light of the contrast between life and death, between God's will and neoliberal

globalization, one has to inquire as to the ecclesial and theological evaluation of the neoliberal system. And the question is posed for those in charge of local church work, preaching, pastoral care, theology and church leadership; but also for all church members:

What are you doing about the religion of Mammon? Which themes are defining the agendas of congregational councils, the meetings of church leaders, synods? What motivates professors and students in theological faculties where the next generation of ministers and teachers of religious education are trained? Which are the overarching concerns, themes and tasks of theology and church policy? What part is played in your reflections by the connections between *money, property, poverty and eternal life*?

In this regard the South today is also asking the North: Are you willing to share with us the Bible's critical presentation of social, economic and political developments? Are you willing to share with us the fundamental biblical concerns for a life in love, dignity and abundance?

In the North, one can still hold up and reverse processes aimed at the destruction of the middle class, an experience the South has long since had to suffer. However, putting forward naïve pros and cons about general problem situations, and letting everything otherwise continue in its wonted way, is not enough. We have to identify and indict what lies at the very root of the problem: globalized neoliberalism with its inhumane, unbiblical drive for the

accumulation of wealth by the few.

A base of opportunity for resistance and alternatives

The church has dried people's tears and bound up their wounds for centuries. But nowadays it can no longer rest content with this, for it provides a most welcome service of consolation in relation to the exploitative system if it concerns itself even with just a small percentage of the population that the system excludes, for which the Market cares nothing at all and which governments also write off. Today the church has to be a *centre of opportunity* for an alternative society and for resistance, and not simply an institution that alleviates or provides a palliative. The essential thing is to be able to specify the pain and the need, and reveal what causes them - to complain and indict, to say publicly that God does not want this kind of system - and to build an alternative community characterized by solidarity. But this resistance is possible only by way of clearly recognizing the object that has to be resisted.

Today, as a worldwide community of churches, we have an eminently theological task. We can publicly point to the disintegrating long-term effect of idolizing the total freedom of the Market. As quickly as possible we must make it clear to humanity, which on the one hand is growing together and on the other is disintegrating, that uncontrolled Mammon is destroying life. Here the alternative is not "capitalism or communism," "East or West," "North or South," "conservative or revolutionary" but "GOD OR MAMMON."

Preaching on justice: the question of the homiletic implementation of the Accra Confession

Peter Bukowski

*Preaching on justice is first of all preaching on God's justice as free grace. It includes exposing not only the others' injustices, but also ours. It aims at accompanying the congregation along the path of justice. As he reflects on these topics, Bukowski engages in a critical dialogue with the Accra Confession. A professor at the Reformed Seminary of Practical Theology in Wuppertal, Germany, he is the author of *Die Bibel ins Gespräch bringen* (1994) and of *Predigt wahrnehmen* (1999). He is also a member of the Executive Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.*

Confessing and preaching are interrelated: that which is recognized and confessed as the truth of faith in a specific situation, insists on being passed on to other people; conversely, the church's witness has to orient itself to its confession. One could go even further and say that confession and sermon are interwoven, since each confession contains an element of preaching and each sermon represents an act of confession.

Nevertheless, it must be said that despite their interrelationship, confession and preaching are clearly distinct speaking acts. This is clearly demonstrated by the simple fact alone, that although there are a limited number of confessions within the church, there are an almost unlimited number of different sermons. And nothing else can be

expected, since a confession - if it is true to its name - is the outcome of a spiritual process of clarification, a concentration of essential and binding faith truths, which, despite all its clarity of content, is formulated in a generalized and fundamental way, so that it can find as broad an agreement as possible.

The sermon is addressed to a specific congregation at a specific time in a specific place. Normally, it does not seek to take stock of a spiritual process, but to give impulses; it does not seek to appeal to as many Christian people as possible but to this actual congregation. That is why it strives not to bring together as much as possible into generalized tenets, but to throw light on one aspect of the gospel in such a detailed and concrete way that it is able to reach

those hearing it firsthand in a way that is relevant to their lives.

In fulfilling its task of witnessing, the church must heed this distinction between confessing and preaching. If not, there is a real danger that a confession which is bound too much to time and place, which is too concrete, i.e., “sermonizing,” will exclude people, or that a sermon which is too transcendent of time and place, which is too principled or theoretical, i.e., too “confessional,” will simply not reach them at all.

This distinction must be especially observed when, as in Accra, a gathering of Christian people sent by churches from throughout the world agree on a new confession. Precisely because a confession seeks to reach and take on board as many people as possible, it is not enough to merely make it as widely known as possible, to refer to it loudly and clearly at every opportunity or to recite it, while perhaps pointing out *how* important it really is. A confession is, after all, not the objective, but one stage along the path of the witness of the Christian congregation or church. It is undoubtedly an important stage, since here, in listening to Holy Scripture and in perceiving the challenges of our time, the orientation is established.

However, any possible orientation reveals its relevance only when it is *followed* by the congregation, i.e., when it *continues* its path of witness and service in the specified direction.¹ This was something clearly recognized by the General Council of

the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra. That is why it not only instituted the “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth,” the core of which is the “Confession of Faith in the Face of Economic Injustice and Ecological Destruction” (“Accra Confession,” hereafter abbreviated to AC), but also established a “Plan of Action,” which gives recommendations on what, on the basis of the Confession, should be done in the future.

The Plan of Action begins with the recommendation to congregations to participate in the protests of the people through “praying, preaching, teaching and specific acts of solidarity.” The fact that the Plan of Action begins with ministry corresponds to our understanding of the church as *creatura verbi divini*. That is why preaching is already explicitly mentioned in the Declaration: “The General Council calls upon member churches, on the basis of this covenanting relationship, to undertake the difficult and prophetic task of interpreting this confession to their local congregations” (AC39).²

My understanding of this is that the churches are to orient their local preaching to the newly adopted confession and, in this respect, *to preach prophetically*. The aim of prophetic preaching is to call to repentance and to a return to the path of justice (Mk 1:15), and to give guidance on how to follow this path. What needs to be observed in doing this is discussed in detail below.

Preaching on God's justice as free grace

Preaching on justice means speaking about God in the indicative. Faced with the demand which God's commandment places on us, our task is to deliver "the message of the free grace of God to all people" (Barmen VI). Because, in the Bible, justice is first and foremost a summarized rephrasing of God's own good works. The Psalms declare: "How wonderful are the things the Lord does ... his righteousness endures forever" (Ps 111:2f.). Hence, "the heavens proclaim his righteousness" (Ps 97:6) "and from one generation to the next ... shall sing aloud of [his] righteousness" (Ps 145:7).

God's justice (i.e., righteousness) - that is, his active caring for his creation - is his attentive accompaniment of his people; that is, his saving deeds and his good guidance. Justice - that is, his constant listening to the cries of the suffering - is his strong arm that liberates the captives; and in all this is God's passionate love for his people, which can rage terribly about their wickedness and stupidity, but which can do nothing else except be "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps 103:8). Where the *justitia* is blind, indeed inevitably must be blind to avoid being dazzled by the specific case at hand, it is said of the God of Israel: he watches, he listens and he yields - he applies the freedom of his love by doing justice to each of his creatures in a way that is conducive to his or her life in his or her particular situation. Justice: that is the way of our God

through the time and space of his creation, the way on which he keeps his covenant and faithfulness to Israel unto eternity, and through Israel to the whole world, and never abandons the work of his hands. And hence: In the path of righteousness there is life (Prov 12:28a).

Also in the AC, this *prae* of God's justice takes precedence before all human endeavour. That is why the statements of faith always start with confessions of belief in God before going on to the rejections of economic injustice and ecological destruction.

In this context, I believe it is important to explicitly praise the confessional character of the Accra Declaration. For, in a very specific way, it corresponds to the fact that for us Christians standing up for justice is not a matter of political belief, but the response to God's own words and deeds, through which we live and to which we, in faith, bear witness.

In order to make this clear, the sermon will, however, have to make the praise for God's justice resound more clearly and comprehensively than the Accra Confession did or was able to do. I draw attention again to what was said at the beginning regarding the distinction between confession and sermon. Whereas the Accra Confession recalls God's action in rather dry theological sentences, the sermon, guided by Bible stories, tells of the salvation work of God in such a way that it becomes clear: what happened at that time is also true today; the (hi)story of God with his people also

embraces my world and my (hi)story. God is able to change my world and my life, and he will do so!

Hence, the sermon should avoid speaking “*gesetzlich*” (which means mixing gospel and the law) about the gospel (Manfred Josuttis). This always happens when the impression is given that human deeds could/should take the place of God’s action, as in: “Easter occurs when we rise up against death...” This kind of sermon does not offer much comfort, for it leaves those hearing it on their own, when they would in actual fact be in urgent need of God’s healing action.

When, in this context, I look back on the General Council, I am left with a twofold impression: the spiritual life, with all the acts of worship, Bible groups and prayers bore credible witness to the primacy of God’s action. In some of the theological lectures and documents, the situation was somewhat different; here, the indicative theological statements were sometimes no more than a kind of “compulsory exercise,” to be passed over quickly in moving on to what was really important, i.e., ethics.

That is why I incidentally believe it is also a shame that, on closer inspection, only just over half of the statements of faith in the AC beginning with “I believe” actually talk, in a narrower sense, about God’s saving action (AC 17, 18, 20, 24, 30), whereas the others are concerned, yet again, with our deeds, in that they lay down what we are being “called” to do (AC 22, 26, 28, 32). One is tempted to issue the warning: *Pelagius ante portas!* For, if a confession is going to

include ethics, then it must at least be able to point out more clearly than in the AC, how God, who calls us, also *enables* us to obey his call (see also p.7).

This is by no means only a matter of dogmatic *correctness* (even if our texts would indeed benefit from theological accuracy!), but of an extremely deep pastoral question: what makes people persevere on the false path and what helps to motivate them to repent? We find the answer in Jesus’ own preaching.

Jesus repeatedly warns about the life-destroying power of Mammon (cf. Mt 6:24). But, at the same time, he knows that admonitions are a poor means of motivating people to change their ways. That is why the Sermon on the Mount proceeds therapeutically. It diagnoses *anxiety* as the fertile ground, in which Mammonism primarily prospers. The reason for our greed, namely, lies in the fact that we are all walking unconsciously into the trap of the model of scarcity. We are driven by the crazy yet simultaneously real fear that there will not be enough for all. “What will we eat, what will we drink?” - these anxious questions are seen by Jesus as the symptom of our ever-present fear of not being able to get enough. As long as I define myself in terms of this model of scarcity, I will, of course, never get enough, entirely regardless of my actual income level, for who knows what might come up? Thus, I have to cling on to and hoard more than I need - like the children of Israel in the desert, who could not be content with the daily manna.

Healing can only grow out of words of comfort: “Your heavenly father knows what you need” (cf. verse 32). Hence, away with the model of scarcity; away, too, from ethical appeals towards a new trust in God: discover how many gifts you have received from God! Jesus tries to win this trust with his references to the wonders of creation: look at the birds in the sky, how considerably God feeds them; marvel at the lilies in the field, how beautifully clothed they are - by how much more will your father in heaven care for you. And the more you become aware of how abundantly you have been blessed, the more you will discover that you do not live from a position of scarcity, but from a position of abundance. In his preaching, Jesus picks up on the pastoral guidance contained in the Psalms, which also act as encouragement to trust in God through recalling the goodness of God: “Bless the Lord, o my soul, and do not forget all his benefits” (Ps 103).

One particularly striking example of such healing pastoral care is found in the Jewish passover liturgy. One of the songs sung during the celebration lists, one by one, all the good things that God has given to his people, and after the naming of each individual deed, the refrain is: “It would have been enough.” Thus: If God had only led us out of Egypt - it would have been enough. And so it continues: if he had only defeated the Egyptians - it would have been enough. And if he had only parted the sea, it would have been enough. And led us through the sea, enough. And provided for us in the desert,

enough - and so on. Each individual deed in the history of salvation is individually praised as a gift from God, with the words “it would have been enough” - in Hebrew “*dajjenu*” - being constantly repeated: it would have been enough, it would have been enough, it would have been enough, enough, enough.

After Accra, our basic task in preaching, and simultaneously our unmistakable Christian contribution is to keep making new attempts to tell about the justice of God and to offer it to our listeners as free grace so that despite all their fears and hardship they will become aware of their wealth; despite all their weaknesses they will become aware of their God-given power (cf. 2 Cor 6:3ff.; 12:9) and so become willing and able to stand up to injustice.

Exposing the others’ injustice and our injustice

In the light of the justice of God, the “*works of darkness*” (Eph 5:11ff.) become evident. That is why preaching about justice also means exposing injustice and calling it by name. From the perspective of the AC, the main focus is on the economic and ecological injustice, which, in paragraphs 5 to 14, is described as the consequence of the neoliberal globalization, and which in the confession section, in the light of the statements of faith, is decisively rejected.

The sermon will have to take up the criticism and the clear rejection of an economic system that operates in a way that is anti-human and anti-nature. But it is also true here that it must be concretized

and extended in its own particular context. Above all, it must be simplified into its elementary structures, so that it can be understood and accepted. For, ultimately, the aim of this part of the sermon is to keep the congregation away from the false path or to find them guilty of their sin (i.e., their following the wrong path). A few comments on this:

1. Martin Luther translates Lamentations 3:39: Why are the people complaining in life, each complaining against his own sin. One could dispute whether this translation is exegetically tenable,³ but there is no doubt that it is in line with the Bible as a whole and it corresponds with the intention of the passage, for the following verse stresses: let us examine our ways and turn back to the Lord. Complain about one's own sin; examine one's own ways: preachers must heed this admonition absolutely. For, if only the sin of the other is brought to light and charged, this only serves as self-justification for the congregation - this kind of sermon is not helpful; on the contrary, it numbs and leads to harm.

In saying this, I by no means want to rule out that in the sense of partisanship and advocacy for those who have no voice, the guilt of others must also be brought to justice; only, the one must not be done at the expense of the other.

It seems to me that in this respect the AC (like the majority of texts and statements from the General Council in Accra) is very gracious towards Europe and America in that it gives us plenty of material and

assistance to help us with the task of examining our own sinful ways. That is appropriate in so far as the neoliberal economic system, after all, starts with us.

Nevertheless, the churches and congregations of the South also now face the task of examining their own sin, without diminishing the "criticism of Empire." The exceptional Africa Forum during the General Council impressively proved that this is indeed being done. For this very reason, it is striking that the assistance offered by the Accra texts in this respect remains particularly colourless, generalized or indirect (cf. for example AC 34 or the corresponding passages from the Action Plan).

As well as addressing corruption could it not also have more decisively addressed the non-Western collaboration with the unjust economic system? As well as the frequent mention of the HIV problem, would it not have been possible to have made more explicit mention of the "homemade" guilt - one only has to think of the scandalous way in which President Mbeki has spoken for years about this issue! And is the impression not given at times of monocausality, whereas in reality several factors are involved (cf. AC 5-13; despite 11)? The "Empire" is undoubtedly a very important but certainly not the sole reason that terrible wars are being waged in Africa, or that a country like Zimbabwe is being progressively ruined.

In saying this, my intention is by no means to divert attention away from our

“Western” guilt, or to balance out one guilt against another. But when it is a case of preaching about justice in our own local congregations and churches, the admonition for each of us to examine our own ways, to (also) consider our own sin, cannot be ignored, for if we do we cheat those commended to us of the opportunity to change their ways.

I draw attention again to Isaiah 58, the motto of the 1997 General Council in Debrecen. In historical terms, we know that the economic injustice which the prophet is attacking, was brought about by an external factor: the tax reform pushed through by the Persian King Darius I (after 521) permitted taxes to be paid only in coins. This forced the small farming businesses that were not geared up for surplus production (i.e., had nothing to sell) to go bust. They ended up in the debt trap and were ultimately swallowed up by large landowners. It is this inner-Israeli “furtherance” of an externally-imposed injustice that the prophet makes the focal point of his sermon, precisely because his concern is the healing of *his* people.

2. This is especially relevant for the part of the sermon concerned with exposing sin: what is said here must be accurate. This appears to be self-evident, but it is not. Again and again, in sermons on ethics, it can be shown that statements are only half or three quarters true, that the research has been sloppy or that what is said is too general. This is particularly bad in our context, because factual errors make it all too easy

for the congregation to also fend off criticism that is in fact justified.

Particular consideration must be given to one trap (in taking up AC 11): only in exceptional and borderline cases can human co-existence be assessed by the tools of binary logic. Anti-semitism, for example, or apartheid are cases where our “either-or” is required. More often, however, it is a matter of bringing the conflicting values into balance, instead of deciding in favour of the one and against the other; and hence in the economy, for example, it is a matter of finding the balance between the poles of public welfare and self-interest and not a matter of contradictory principles.

One other example relates to the use of “we” in statements on the issue of justice. According to the particular context, I am perpetrator, victim, co-participant, co-sufferer, co-originator, co-injured party, etc. But I am not always everything at any one time, and that is why, from case to case, it is important to question precisely, to talk precisely. An indiscriminating “we” seduces me and those listening to me to seek refuge on the agreeable side. Talking precisely also requires courage to confess along with Peter at the given moment: I am a sinful man (Luke 5:8), or to say with Nathan: You are the man (2 Sam 12:7).

3. Finally: in the part of the sermon exposing sin, the task again and again will be to draw attention to the misery of the particularly disadvantaged and to raise awareness for their suffering. This cannot be done through statistics alone, no matter

how terrible they are. They are invaluable as information for the congregation, but statistics on many thousands of victims cannot be felt. I am more likely to be moved by what has happened to an individual. In such an example the unimaginable is made vivid and the demands on me cannot be rebuffed.

Accompanying the congregation along the path of justice

The sermon on justice is not restricted to clearly identifying and exposing injustice; instead its aim is much more to accompany the congregation along the path of justice or to encourage it to stay on this path.

One forethought: justice must be *done*; the path of justice must be *followed*. Isaiah 58 does not demand that we “recognize” or “name” or “confess,” but that we “*break*” the chains of injustice. Justice aims at the praxis of liberation. This does not make the church’s words, statements and confessions on the issue of justice superfluous; however, one latent risk must be pointed out here, which simultaneously accompanies our declaration as if it were its shadow. On the one hand, declarations – especially when they are passed by so-called high-ranking or distinguished committees – promote the illusion of being influential: as if by (only) saying the right thing, justice will be established (cf. Karl Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach!).

In my opinion, this overestimation of what is said is often responsible for the bitter struggle over individual words. To put it

bluntly: we should put more of our energies into the cooking instead of into a continual re-editing of the recipe! And, on the other hand: in making declarations on justice one is at risk of blanking out one’s own complicity in guilt: in speaking, one has, after all, taken up a position on the “right” side. I am always astonished at how we committed Christians, in particular, are entirely able to block out our own structures of miserliness and greed!¹⁴

That is why the sermon, too, must not be content with just articulating the proper insights (no matter how important that, in itself, is!¹⁵), but must point out ways the congregation can follow, i.e., offer them help to take action. Two things must be observed here.

1. Instructions on ethics only make sense if they can be fulfilled. Take, for example, the sentence: “We must all ensure that the gulf between the rich and poor does not keep growing.” Can this be fulfilled? In theory, yes. But in practical terms, many people will simply not know how. How can this directive be put into practice by a family that has barely enough to get by, never mind someone on social security benefits? And how can it be put into practice by the many people who believe that “those at the top” will do what they feel like doing anyway? I believe that everyone, in fact, has the potential to do something. But only when the preacher is prepared to go beyond a general appeal, “earth” it and comes up with some concrete ideas as to *how* the congregation can follow up this directive concretely: through asking such questions

as: "What do you pray for?", "For whom do you vote?" and "Is the maxim 'learn to share' part of the way in which you bring up your children?"

One more comment on this: we should avoid playing off the different ways of taking action against one another (as many of us, including myself, have done in the past): active struggle against contemplation, political action against local initiatives, missionary work against social commitment. Instead, in learning from the New Testament teaching on talents and gifts we should encourage each member of our congregations to discover their own gifts and potential and to use these on the path of justice.⁶

2. Anyone admonishing his or her congregation should reflect on the likely consequences. I have never forgotten the following incident: as a young minister, I spoke with great conviction and in fiery words in calling on my congregation to boycott products from the apartheid regime. This included silver Krugerrands being offered at the time in our banks. A woman who helped out at the weekly children's services, called me up to ask: "After applying for 50 jobs, I now have the chance of a job with the Deutsche Bank; should I take it? If I do, I will have to sell those coins you spoke about in the church on Sunday." This scene set me thinking and made me ashamed of myself. Our purpose should not be to rob our directives of all their essential clarity and radicalism.

But as preachers, we should be aware of

what we are expecting of our congregations. It does not cost a theologian much (at least not in my context) to commit him/herself to economic and ecological justice. On the contrary, in return for simply showing sufficient commitment, he or she might even be awarded a church commission and get the chance to meet lots of interesting people throughout the world. For the members of our congregations, however, a similar commitment may be a matter of life and death. We must be aware of this, and an appreciation of their difficulties must also be perceptible in our preaching.

I have left the most important aspect to the end: even where the sermon is focusing on the obedient action of the people, it must not cease to speak about God. For, according to biblical and Reformed understanding, it is not only our justification that is the work of God alone, but our sanctification too (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; 1 Pet 1:2). Of course, this sanctification does not occur without us: God has chosen us, after all, as his partners in covenant; he wants our co-operation and, in this, our free and self-responsible action. But yet, it is *he* who effects this will and work in us (Phil 2:13⁷).

The sermon on repentance, of changing one's ways, does not take its power from the volume of its ethical appeal, but from the encouragement that God believes us to be capable of much (Mt 28:20), from the discovery of our God-given potential (Romans 12), from the recognition of the power of the Spirit with which God has equipped us in our battle

against the powers of evil (Mk 16:17f.; Eph 6:10-17).

Whether the preacher is counting on the power of the Spirit will be demonstrated not least in whether he or she is capable of discovering its traces in the life of the congregation. The letters of the apostle Paul are full of the grateful recognition, appreciation and articulation of all the good that is being done in the congregation.

Reformed preachers, specifically, should learn a lesson from him. For, in this respect, I found many of the lectures and documents from the General Council to be quite simply substandard. An outsider could have gained the impression that we were talking about congregations and churches which, without

exception, were stuck on the path of injustice, and thus had to be called on to take the very first step in a new direction. We have a way of practising criticism which has nothing to do with modesty or humility, but shows contempt for the many encouraging acts of justice also to be found within our churches.

A sermon on justice which is unable to recognize fruits of the Spirit is desolate. Part of the skill of preaching is the art of praising. Let us do so in following Paul's example: We always give thanks to God for all of you ...constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 1:2f.).

Notes

¹ We will see later that this can unfortunately be completely different: even with the correct directions at hand, one can remain on the false path; see below.

² The wording is unfortunate and contains an element of unintentional humour: it does not say much for the clarity of a text, when prophecy is required for its interpretation. A text written today must speak for itself and is not much use if it does not; it would also be like a joke which no one laughs at, forcing the teller to attempt to explain why he had to laugh when he heard it - which does not really help matters. I hope that my understanding of paragraph 39 catches the real meaning of the text.

³ The Revised English Bible translates this differently; however, the Hebrew text of this verse is extremely difficult to decipher.

⁴ The psychotherapist Alfred Adler once said: "a bad conscience is actually the good intentions which one does not have." By this, he meant that a bad conscience exactly fulfils the level of self-punishment that enables us to continue our undesirable behaviour. A bad conscience helps the smoker to go on smoking. A modification of this would allow us to exaggeratedly say: declarations on justice represent the ways one does not follow.

⁵ This task is especially demanding when one attempts to formulate not only the negation, but also the position itself. The Plan of Action accompanying the AC attempts to identify direction and course; but much still remains to be done here.

⁶ In this respect, the "Plan of Action" is very helpful, as it demonstrates the whole variety of what can be done.

⁷ So too Barmen II: our service to God's creatures arises out of his act of liberation.

Spirituality, worship and the Accra Confession

Gretel van Wieren

The author defines spirituality as “the fundamental life orientation (...) towards God, one another and creation that is formed by the Spirit within individuals and the community of Christ.” She goes on to ask: In which ways is our spirituality affected by economic globalization and environmental destruction? In which ways can our spirituality resist these forces? She concludes by suggesting five ways in which the message of the Accra Confession may come alive in Reformed worship. Gretel van Wieren is an ordained pastor of the Reformed Church in America, USA.

From the very beginning (Debrecen, 1997), the process of recognition, education and confession with regard to economic injustice and ecological destruction has been understood as a matter of faith. Reading the “signs of the times” – the cries of the suffering poor and the earth, the rising gulf between the rich and the poor, the drive for excessive profit and unlimited growth, the insatiable desire for “more” of everything – we have been convinced that neoliberal economic globalization is deeply inimical to our basic beliefs about God in Jesus Christ.

Hence, the Accra Confession is a *confession of faith* in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction: we reject neoliberal economic globalization on the basis of our faith in God, Creator of the earth, Liberator of the poor, and Sustainer of the world. Making such social injustice a

confessional matter for the Church follows the powerful historical witness of the Barmen Declaration of the Confessing Church in Germany (1934), the Ottawa Declaration on the apartheid system by the General Council of WARC (1982), and the Confession of Belhar (1986) and the confessional stances of Asian churches against the colonial powers.

The Accra Confession implies: (1) repentance before God and the victims of oppression, (2) discernment of God’s grace, which unmasks the merciless and cruel character of the powers that be, (3) resistance to the idolatry of money and market, (4) reparation and reconstitution of just relationships in the light of reconciliation of Christ.¹ The act of confessing in the presence of God, the community of Christ, and society at large, is

a spiritual act that is central to Reformed worship, liturgy and spirituality.

Two lines of thought about spirituality and worship are terribly important as we read the Accra Confession. First, we must name the specific ways in which spirituality has been victimized by economic globalization and ecological destruction. This will involve naming the values inherent to neoliberal capitalism that are “at odds” with those implicit in spirituality and worship. Second, it is critical that we in the church (and society in general) think about ways worship and spirituality might serve as both a rejection of and alternative to the present global economic system. To this end, the Accra Confession challenges us to identify the ways worship and spirituality might lead to the transformational activity (inner and outer) necessary to affirm and build up an economy in the service of life.

Spirituality as a victim of neoliberal economic globalization

One of the main victims of neoliberal economic globalization is spirituality.² Other victims of the dominant neoliberal system recognized in the Accra Confession are: the poor and vulnerable (human and nonhuman), the earth, community, culture, family, and individual human dignity; what our world is currently facing is no less than a “global crisis of life,” as WARC member churches in Buenos Aires stated in their “faith stance” (2003). As each of the types of victimization and degradation are interconnected, each contributes to the

unravelling of the tapestry and fullness of life. Nonetheless, the aspect of spirituality, of which worshipping God is the cradle for Reformed people, is especially difficult to “name” and analyse because of the ways neoliberal economic globalization disallows, indeed, “stamps out” the shapes spirituality and worship take; ego-lessness, resistance, non-violence, service, simplicity and community are neither valued nor allowed to flourish within the bounds of the dominant economy. So, here we have a paradox: while neoliberal economic globalization “stamps out” the values and activity of spirituality and worship, the Accra Confession recovers and lifts up such spirituality and worship in the form of confession and covenanting as ways to resist and provide alternatives to economic and ecological injustice.

The Accra Confession (9) points to the underlying beliefs of neoliberal economic globalization, beliefs that are fundamentally “at odds” with a biblical and Reformed understanding of economy. Neoliberal economic globalization is based on: (1) unrestrained competition, consumerism, and unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth; (2) ownership of private property with no social obligations; (3) capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and national resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes, and the unrestricted movement of capital; and (4) the subordination of social obligations -

protection of the poor and the weak, trade unions, and relationships between people - to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.

In contrast, a biblical and Reformed understanding:

1. Regards material goods and money as instruments of God's grace. Material goods and money are gifts from God that help us to live in relationship with one another in community, with creation, and, ultimately, with God;

2. Recognizes a danger that money could become mammon. When possessions and money become something beyond a gift from God in the service of life, they become what Jesus calls Mammon: a thing that takes away from total service to God. Reformed theology overcame the medieval dualism and asceticism of separating God from money. Instead, money is understood as something to be used in the service of God and community, particularly the poor and needy;

3. Argues that human economic activity needs regulation. In 16th century Europe the "discovery" of the New World had flooded Europe with gold, multiplying commercial exchanges and industrial ventures. Calvin, in this context, saw the potential for accumulation of possessions by the rich at the risk of forgetting service to the poor, and hence, the disintegration of Christian community and society. Thus, Calvin developed a theology of economy that protected the poor from victimization

and the rich from being led into temptation to exploit the poor;

4. Affirms that economy should be life-enhancing and life-centred. Money and material goods are viewed as gifts from God for the life and health of the community and all creation. This is the fundamental teaching in Leviticus (25), that it is God that "owns" the land, and therefore human persons do not have absolute ownership over it;

5. Promotes a "solidarity economy" between the haves and have-nots. Calvin, taking the example from Exodus (16) where manna was distributed among the Israelites, strongly affirmed that wealth was to be circulated within society for its overall good;

6. Advocates a "poor-friendly economy". Calvin sought to remedy the potential breakdown in the community of Christ with a theology of economy that protected the poor from victimization by the rich. The rich, according to Calvin, are in a privileged position to share their wealth with the poor; the poor, in turn, are in a privileged position to help the rich rid themselves of the money and possessions that enslave them. Hence, Calvin calls the rich "the ministers of the poor" and the poor the "vicars of Christ" or "proxies of God";

7. Emphasizes that grace and love are God's economic motive. This is potentially the most spiritually demanding aspect of a biblical understanding of economy. God's grace is a gift; it is not for sale in the market place (Is 55:1-3). It is God's grace and love that motivate us through the Spirit to build

an economy that affirms and uplifts the life God has created and continues to sustain. God's grace and love move us to service, sharing, and the radically giving of our whole selves to the praise of God and God's creation.³

So, then, we can begin to see that a biblical and Reformed vision of economy - and the spirituality upon which it relies - is very different, in fact, completely contradictory, to that of neoliberal economic globalization. This fundamental contradiction of ideas regarding economy and life is what motivates us as churches to confess our faith and profess our alternative vision. Further, it becomes clear that in order to regain and build up the values underlying an economy in the service of God, the poor and creation - because they run so profoundly counter to those of the dominant neoliberal capitalist economy - the church and we ourselves as individuals will need the deep spiritual grounding and strength available to us through the grace and love of God.

Worship and spirituality as resistance to neoliberal economic globalization

Worship has the profound potential to form a Christian spirituality of resistance to economic injustice and ecological destruction. Indeed, worship in itself is a form of resistance to the absolutizing power of the market. Worship for Reformed people extends from the celebration of the Lord's Day to the whole of life, so that all activities

and spheres of life are oriented towards worshipping God. Thus, the fundamental, constant activity of our lives is worshipping God - not money, profit, possessions, or power; it is God alone that is worthy of our praise and adoration.

What are some ways the Accra Confession challenges the church regarding our understanding of worship in the context of neoliberal economic globalization?

When we worship God with our whole hearts, minds and souls we are saying "no" to the claims of the market. When we worship God as the sovereign one over all creation (Accra Confession, par. 18), including the economy, we are saying "no" to economic, political and military strategies that claim total power (empire) over life. When we worship God as the one who came as a servant and liberator of the poor, we are saying "no" to the dominant economy which is based on power through possession and domination of the poor and the earth. When we gather as the community of Christ, as persons "equalized" in power, status and wealth by the redeeming love of Christ - in the Body of Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor free - we are saying "no" to the economy that thrives on exclusion and injustices based on gender, race, class, disability, or caste.

When we break bread together at the Eucharistic meal in remembrance of the one who poured out his life so all may live in the fullness of life, we are saying "no" to the economy that requires an endless flow of sacrifice from the poor and the earth in order

to build up the wealth of a few. When we celebrate the Sabbath as the Lord's Day of rest, we are saying "no" to the excessive, constant grind of the economy that demands unlimited growth and production despite the groaning of creation and the cries of the people.

Worship and spirituality as a basis for an economy in the service of life

While worship in itself is resistance to economic injustice and ecological destruction, the Accra Confession also challenges the church and society to reflect on ways our worship and spiritual lives may be purposely oriented towards building an economy in the service of life. Though there are many ways our Christian spirituality motivates us to "covenant for justice," five suggestions for interpreting the Accra Confession in a context of Reformed worship will be lifted up here.

Votum Many Reformed churches call the community to centre on God at the beginning of worship with Psalm 146:5: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Most often, our call to worship ends there. But when we look to the wider biblical context, we see two verses later (v.7) whose "help" is being encited: it is the hungry and oppressed, the Psalmist tells us, whose help is in the name of the Lord. The maker of heaven and earth provides justice (7a) and bread (7b), frees prisoners from captivity (7c), heals illnesses exacerbated by poverty (8), embraces the

stranger (9), and upholds the poor widows and orphans (9).⁴ Might we read these parts of the Psalm to affirm that it is not the market, but the God of the hungry and poor who calls us to worship and provides our help?

Confession The Accra Confession is a confession of faith, a faith statement, an act of being faithful to the covenant of God. Confession does several things in worship. It prepares our hearts to receive God's Word, it opens our hearts to joyfully proclaim a Psalm or song of praise, and it joins us together as the community of Christ who comes humbly before God to lift up our own individual and collective sins. The Accra Confession (par. 34) challenges us to understand sin in the context of economic injustice and ecological destruction. Might we read the "signs of the times" or other aspects of the Accra Confession as part of our collective confession?

Receiving God's Word through preaching and communion The centrepiece of Reformed worship is hearing God's word through the reading and preaching of Scripture and the celebrating of the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism. Scripture is replete with verses that specifically speak to economic injustice and treatment of the poor as well as to an alternative vision of economy (*oikonomia*) rooted in community, mutuality, self-giving love, special treatment of the destitute, poor, exploited, the wronged and abused (Accra Confession, 24). So, too, the Lord's Supper is a celebratory feast to which all are welcome

and no one is privileged. We are reminded at the table that Jesus is the bread of life for the hungry and the cup of salvation for the oppressed (28). Might we preach through the texts of the Accra Confession and lift them up as we received God's grace at the table?

Prayers of the People The prayers of the people are the prayers of those in need of God's help. The Accra Confession points to the fact that creation is groaning and people are crying under the weight of neoliberal economic globalization. The dominant system demands an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and the earth (6-10). Might we pray, "looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people" and creatures and environments of the earth? (11).

Sending Forth Typical in Reformed worship is the benediction coupled with a proclamation for service. This "sending forth" reminds us that our worship extends from the Lord's Day to our daily witness and service in the world. This also suggests that worship is not only saying and singing what we believe, or worshipping God with our heart, minds and souls; worship as our fundamental orientation towards God imbues us with the Spirit to act. Thus, the final lines of the Accra Confession (42) are

appropriate for "sending forth" the community of Christ: "Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing, and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live (Deut 30:19)."

Additionally, there are ways that churches can work to regain and deepen an understanding of spirituality that affirms a biblical understanding of economy and people's relation to creation. The spiritual practices of silent prayer, simplicity, peace, living in community, service, resistance, and advocacy on behalf of the voiceless are all ways in which we can both reject the dominant system of competitive greed, profit, consumption and waste, and present an alternative way of life.

Worship and spirituality are victims of neoliberal economic globalization. The church is blessed with a vocation to regain and affirm a spirituality and view of worship towards the building of an alternative vision for the economy. This is our confession of faith, our witness to society: that God has come, and continues to work in the world, so that all may live in the fullness of life (Jn 10:10).

Notes

¹ *A Continuing Journey Toward a Covenanting/Confessing Movement for Economic Justice and Life on Earth (processus confessionis)*, Geneva, WARC, 2004, p.19.

² Spirituality is understood here as the fundamental life orientation - inner and outer - towards God, one another and creation that is formed by the Spirit within individuals and the community of Christ. Worship, public and private, is understood in the Reformed sense as the primary context and activity for forming such spirituality.

³ S. W. Park, "Reformed Spirituality of Resistance against Economic Injustice". *A Continuing Journey Toward a Covenanting/Confessing Movement for Economic Justice and Life on Earth (processus confessionis)*, Geneva, WARC, 2004, pp.29-31.

⁴ H. Russel Botman, "Whose Help is in the Name of the Lord?" in *Crossing Ten Seas: Studies on the theme "That all may have life in fullness" (John 10.10)*, Geneva, WARC, 2002, p.20-21.

Pedagogical implications of the Accra Confession

Omega Bula

In the context of Empire, writes Omega Bula, “education for justice ought to move actors beyond the moral and ethical approach that attracts actions of charity to the poor, leaving the structures of injustice that create poverty intact”. The teaching of a “prophetic and liberating statement” such as the Accra Confession, she notes, calls for a liberation pedagogy rooted in a postcolonial analysis. It has implications for ecumenical learning and the empowerment of local communities. Born in Zambia, she is the Executive Minister for the Unit on Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations of the United Church of Canada.

Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth (The Accra Confession) is a faith commitment made by people of God called together in the struggle to end global economic injustice and ecological destruction. It is a call “to break the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free.” (Is 58:6)

The Accra Confession, a prophetic and liberating statement, has embedded in it great potential as an educational instrument for justice and transformation. The system of social oppression is clearly named as “the interlocking system that involves ideological control as well as domination and control of institutions and resources of the world, resulting in a condition of privilege of the agent group relative to the exploited target group.”¹ Unless checked, education and knowledge

in this context of social oppression can be used as a tool for domination.

In order to strengthen the impact of the Accra Confession in the life of the churches, educators for justice need to take this opportunity to strengthen liberation pedagogy, to educate for resistance to oppression, equality and justice. It is an opportunity that should provoke dialogue, critical thinking and committed action. All actors, through this process, must be encouraged “to relate questions of economic justice to their faith, to deepen understanding of the factors creating injustice in the global economy, and to discern ways that individuals and communities might work together toward an economic order that will promote justice and compassion for humanity and creation.”²

Education for justice

The Brazilian Paulo Freire was one of the most important contributors to an education for justice approach in the second half of the twentieth century. Working out of a commitment to empower the powerless, the marginalized, the hungry and those excluded by systems of injustice, Paulo strengthened the concept of “education for liberation” as the way to engage people in their own liberation. He argued that education is not neutral - it is either liberating from the forces of oppression or domesticating to the forces of oppression. He struggled to enable both the oppressed and the oppressor to understand that oppressive forces are not part of the nature of things created by God, but rather the result of forces historically and socially constructed by human beings. Anything socially constructed can be changed again by human beings.

Freire argues, “Pedagogy ought always to bring on structural change in an oppressive society. As such, at its core, pedagogy ought to be ethical in character; good pedagogy ought to be aimed at political transformation for the purpose of justice, righting the evils of oppression.”⁷³

Even though not all agreed with Paulo’s metaphors - and there are piles of critical reflections on his work - those like myself, who grew up struggling against colonialism, racism and apartheid, patriarchy, economic marginalization, etc., find meaning and inspiration in this approach and understanding of education. It gave people

like me the energy that fuelled our resistance to domination. It worked to raise the consciousness of the poor and marginalized with whom Paulo was engaged in this pedagogical praxis. What might we learn from this process and what might we build into a pedagogical process for use today?

In the context of Empire, education for justice ought to move actors beyond the moral and ethical approach that attracts actions of charity to the poor, leaving the structures of injustice that create poverty intact. Such education leads to actions that turn poverty into projects for humanitarian assistance. Education for justice arising out of a confessing approach, however, must struggle with the root causes of the injustice that has impoverished two thirds of the world. It will name the systems that maintain these structures and show how and why God’s abundance is monopolized by a few due to greed and the perpetual search for profit. No doubt, it will be an education for justice that recognizes the conflict between the haves and the have-nots, that forces those who have to be self-critical of their lifestyles of consumerism, and their complicity in the suffering of the majority of God’s creation.

What are the implications and challenges of this teaching moment?

The Accra Confession and the invitation to take a stance of faith that stands against all that denies life and hope for millions of people, offers a teaching moment in the life

of the church, to “develop” new eyes to see, new voices to speak, new ears to listen, and new minds for inspired action.

We have before us an *educational* challenge: how to enable people to grapple with the implications of this as a statement of confession - a matter of the integrity of our faith. How will the living out of the Accra Confession challenge the content of worship and the liturgical life of the church in general? How will this work transform our public witness and public theology, and our practices of faith, including the sacraments? How do we experience communion and baptism with a consciousness of hunger and of the threat to water, for example? These are questions that need to be addressed pedagogically within each specific context.

For example, the bringing together of the economy and the earth in one covenant, challenges us to develop a holistic approach to education for justice. We need education that extends to the entire social and created order; that places value on reflection, learning and action that is integrative and not compartmentalized. There is much to be learned from indigenous and traditional cultures that have long recognized that all life on this planet is interconnected, and have therefore developed spirituality that emphasizes harmony with the earth and all of life.

The Accra Confession provides a window of opportunity to resurrect and explore the use of liberation pedagogy to educate for equality and justice. There is a whole range of pedagogies that have been developed and

are being used to overcome oppression.⁴ Noting in particular feminist pedagogies, for many years known as consciousness-raising processes, these have been used to work with women towards personal and social transformation. A more recent additional strength to this methodology is the use of personal stories, or the telling of life stories as a tool and process for healing and empowerment.⁵ In this process, feminist pedagogies have strengthened the interconnections among race, gender and class - what has been called the triple oppression - and the encompassing class analysis that Anne Bishop describes as follows:

“Class is not just a factor in inequalities of wealth, privilege, and power; it is those differences. Other forms of oppression help keep the hierarchy of power in place; class is that hierarchy. Class is the end product.”⁶

The church should be challenged in new ways to look again at the participation of women in moving the Accra Confession within the life of the churches. In Africa, for instance, The Ecumenical Decade Churches in Solidarity with Women 1988 to 1998 offered a space for women to educate on life issues such as child survival and development, which challenged the churches to go beyond the “Jesus loves you” songs in church school and to ask why these children had no shelter, school fees or food; economic literacy, which brought into the church conversations on structural adjustment programmes that were crippling the lives of communities, impacting

negatively on education, health, food, security, etc.; and women and health, which brought into the church conversations on HIV/AIDS, and opened ways into conversations on sexuality, which before that had been taboo in the church.

To date, much of the educational work in the churches is done by women. A pedagogy that ignores the ways in which women learn and share their stories, would not be helpful in engaging the majority of people in the pews, who are women.

The Accra Confession calls for a theological pedagogy rooted in a postcolonial analysis and engagement in theological reflection and education. We might begin by asking why we need to encourage postcolonial analysis and engagement in theological reflection and analysis; what it is; and why it is critical to a pedagogy of social justice.

G. A. Wenh-In Ng explains that postcolonial as used in postcolonial discourse and biblical interpretation recognizes that although colonialism has come to a formal end, its practice is still very much alive - through economic domination via free trade and market globalization, for instance. A postcolonial reading advocates an oppositional stance, one that intentionally adopts a stance of resistance to approach familiar stories “from the other side” - the losing side, the voices that were and are not heard or passed down, the incidents that never got recorded. This forces us to see things from the side of the conquered [or sinned against].”⁷ Such an

approach would challenge the church to acknowledge its role in colonization and cultural impositions that have destroyed lives for generations to come.⁸

The Accra Confession has ethical pedagogical implications for further understanding of who human beings are and their relationship to the earth and all of God’s creation. It is a foundational question for education for social and economic justice. We need to grapple with the current implications of the lack of respect for creation and the fact that we live in a world with limited resources; therefore stewardship is a critical notion related to how we see the dominance of human existence over the rest of creation.

The Accra Confession has pedagogical implications for ecumenical learning among people of different cultures and religions. There are challenges to use dialogical methodologies, to respect differences, to understand vulnerabilities, and to be open to learning from different experiences. How can learning reflect the sharing of power that enables the space to challenge dominant views? The goal must be that of building right relations among people and with the environment - as the focus of education for action. The likelihood of conflict in contexts of diversity and complexity also carries the potential of conflict as a resource for change, providing us with a window for creativity at the intersections of difference. The educational process would raise the need to engage with and challenge the use of education and

knowledge as tools for domination and oppression. How can the Accra Confession help provide a pedagogical structure for the asking of critical questions/critical thinking? For example, is this an educational space where the targeting of research funds to corporate globalization strategies can be challenged? Or where the monitoring/attacking those doing postcolonial education/analysis can be exposed? Who are the agents and who are the targets, and why? What instruments are being used? What is the power behind these instruments? How are religion, theology, access to power, privilege, and racism being used?

The Accra Confession calls for the sharpening of the existing tools for social justice education in the WARC member churches. Where these do not exist, the challenge to develop them is urgent. These tools might be curriculum designs, study guides, methodologies, training of trainers, resources for youth and young adults, children's resources, etc.⁹⁹ Some examples from recent work in the United Church of Canada are:

Through what actions might it be possible to scan the membership of WARC and other ecumenical networks for the educational resources that already exist, that can be shared, or adapted?

The Accra Confession calls WARC to seriously consider providing the capacity for

leadership, human and financial resources. For the majority of WARC member churches in the South, moving the Accra Confession beyond a historical document for an indefinite shelf life will require concrete support. The task for member churches with resources, such as my own church - the United Church of Canada - is to seriously engage in the task of educating for economic and social justice; and the challenge is to stay on the issue long enough (for life - not just a quick fix) in order to make an impact. This involves making connections with all the work that has been so well done already on the economy, and getting a sense that there is continuity and a global movement of resistance. There must be a structural way within WARC to provide this support. What might that look like?

In conclusion

These are initial thoughts to “kick-start” our conversations on some of the pedagogical implications of the Accra Confession. No doubt, every context will need to struggle with its own specific challenges. What is key is that, unless there are concrete ways to educate the wider community on the Accra Confession and its implications in our everyday lives, it will remain a Confession on paper only. What is needed is an educational process that transforms the world.

Notes

¹ Maurianne Adams, "Pedagogical Frameworks for Social Justice Education", in M. Adams et alii (eds), *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice - A Source Book*. New York, Routledge, 1989, p.34.

² *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil - Towards A Global Economy for All God's People*. Guide for Study Action and Worship. United Church of Canada, 2001, p.91.

³ Clarence Joldersma, *The Tension between Justice and Freedom in Paulo Freire's Faith-Full Pedagogy*, Gd. Rapids, USA, Calvin College, 1999, p.2.

⁴ See for instance P. Schreiner et alii (eds), *Holistic Education Resource Book - Learning and Teaching in an Ecumenical Context*, Münster, Waxman-Verlag, 2005, pp.105-185.

⁵ E. J. Orteza (ed.) *In Search of A Theory: Toward a Feminist Pedagogy*, Geneva, WCC, 1998, p.5.

⁶ Anne Bishop in *Becoming Allies*.

⁷ "Reading Scripture from a Feminist, Postcolonial Perspective for Anti-Racism Work." Paper by G. A. Wenh-In Ng, p.1.

⁸ Cf. L. E. Donaldson and K. Pui-lan (eds), *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, New York, Routledge, 2002.

⁹ Some examples from recent work in the United Church of Canada are:

1. *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil - Towards a Global Economy for All God's People*: Guide for Study, Action and Worship, UCC 2001.

2. Websight - Connecting Youth for Global Justice - A Facilitator's Guide, UCC 2002.

A Southern African perspective on the Accra Confession

Moiseraele Prince Dibeela

Prince Dibeela tells the story of the boy who killed Kgogomodumo, the legendary dinosaur-like monster. He goes on to show how the story helps us to understand how Africa relates to globalization, whose ramifications include a “neoliberal anthropology”, idolatry, and the desecration of creation. As they wrestle with the beast, he writes, Africans should focus on poverty, access to medication, and relations with donors, including well-known church-related agencies from Europe. Prince Dibeela is the outgoing Principal of Kgolagano Theological College, Botswana. He is the newly elected General Secretary of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.

The 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, meeting in Accra, Ghana in 2004 produced a document called, “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth,” otherwise known as the Accra Confession. The document is the culmination of many years of a faith struggle by Reformed Christians, though not exclusively, through what has come to be dubbed *processus confessionis*. Through this process the churches have been challenged to “...break the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free” (Is 58:6).

The Accra Confession is a radical and bold public statement by the Reformed family on the current neoliberal system of globalization. It is significant that this statement was proclaimed in Sub-Saharan

Africa which has suffered the worst effects of global capitalism. The African continent suffers much injustice at the hands of Western governments, multinational corporations, a few African elite and neoliberal policy makers at the World Trade Organization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the so-called G8.

African wisdom and globalization

I remember a story that my grandmother used to tell us as children as we sat by the fire in the evenings. It went something like this:

A long time ago there was a village in the middle of a very thick jungle. In this jungle lived a very large beastly creature called Kgogomodumo.¹ One day this creature came and swallowed all the living things in

the village; people, cattle, goats and other domestic animals. Only one person survived, a frail and very old lady.

One day the old lady was frying water melon seeds for her dinner, when suddenly one of them jumped out of the pot and fell near the fire. As she tried to pick it up, it turned into a boy. From then on the boy lived with the old lady and accepted her as his mother. One day the boy asked the old lady, "Mother, where are the other people of this village?" His mother then told him that they had been swallowed by Kgogomodumo. When the boy heard this he told his mother that he would hunt down the creature and kill it. His mother though told him that Kgogomodumo was a very large creature and no person could kill it. But the boy said he would kill it anyway.

The next day the boy went hunting for Kgogomodumo, and he killed a hare. He brought it home and asked if it was Kgogomodumo but his mother said it wasn't. He went again, but this time came with a fox. But his mother still said it was not Kgogomodumo.

He kept going back to the jungle until he came face to face with the beastly creature. He killed it, jumped on top of it, and tore through its stomach with a large knife. Just then people and animals popped out. The village was saved and the people were eternally thankful to the mystery boy who killed Kgogomodumo.

For me globalization is like this legendary monster that many African children learned about through the

Fireplace theology, except that now it is no longer just a fable, it is real, here and now. It consumes, decimates and destroys many lives in the Southern part of the globe.

Wisdom stories like the one narrated above abound in Africa. Through such stories Africans are able to address the demonic and life-destabilizing forces around them. Kgogomodumo represents greed, hegemonic cultural and religious belief systems imposed on the small people of the world. It is a beast that comes to destroy the way of life of a people. One of the things about globalization is that it destroys local cultures and lifestyles that people have adopted for hundreds of years. For example, only a few European languages are promoted as being credible for commerce and academic purposes. The result is a dissipation of indigenous languages in preference for English, French, German and Spanish. Increasingly African parents are opting to teach their children these languages over and against their indigenous languages. This is because if you know any of the European languages you are more likely to make it through than, say, when you know *Bemba*, *Setswana* or *Zulu*.

Many Africans live close to the earth and practise organic farming. However, with the advancement of technology, multinational corporations are now involved in the large-scale production of genetically modified crops.² The result is that the small farmers are pushed off the land, and often their only alternative is to sell their labour to the new farmers or to migrate to urban areas. The

African way of life is therefore being systematically dismantled by monstrous global forces.

The Fireplace tale above is subversive. It is important to note that although the monster destroys and tramples people's lives, not everything is destroyed. It is not possible to destroy everything about a people's life. The old lady remains, frail as she may be, but the fact is she remains, and she becomes the flicker of light for a new future. Imperial global powers may descend with their might on the African continent, but not everything will be destroyed. Some will remain who will preserve the memory of how things were, and will pass this on to coming generations. We preserve a dangerous and subversive memory of what used to be, what could be and what happened to dismantle reality as we know it.

The role of women in resisting empire and the reconstruction of our economies is a pivotal one. It is significant that it is an old woman in the tale who informs the young man about the effects of empire, and it is she who inspires him to resist. There is a saying in *Setswana: mosadi o tshwara thipa ka fa bogaleng* (it is the woman who holds the knife by its blade). In other words, women have the courage and the determination to confront any situation, irrespective of how difficult it is. Women therefore require the space and the support to participate in activities which do not only resist empire but are life-enhancing as well. Some of the ways through which African

women are involved in fighting the effects of empire include microeconomic business ventures such as basket weaving and hawking. Through these they raise children who grow to challenge the imperial religious, political and economic ideologies.

The Fireplace tale therefore also embodies a theology of resistance. A young generation will rise that will confront the empire and its destructive ramifications on God's creation. The young man in the tale represents the small but passionate efforts of God's people who seek to resist the power of empire. Such resistance requires a determined intent to not only imagine alternative realities but to do everything possible to achieve them. It is possible to resist the enticements and the lies of empire through small initiatives in our communities and countries.

The effects of globalization

There is no doubt that globalization has a positive effect on us, for example easy communication, more human contact and increased trade between nations that improve the quality of life. It nevertheless has scarred the world in which we live. It is a system that is full of pretences, enticements and seductions which in fact draws people away from each other and from God. In itself neoliberal globalization is an ideology that operates almost like a faith system. We are therefore not just dealing with an unjust economic system but with a religio-cultural phenomenon that seeks to obliterate what is essential to the teaching

of Jesus of Nazareth. I wish to cite the following ramifications of globalization:

Neoliberal anthropology Within the framework of global capitalism a human being is primarily perceived in consumerist terms. He/she is seen as being with “insatiable wants or desires” and as always competing for more. In this system called the free market, it is taken for granted that everyone is capable of competing, acquiring goods and capital, and becoming self-sufficient. Within this anthropology, others are seen as threats, competitors and opponents to beat to the game.

This *neoliberal* anthropology is in direct contrast to the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The crux of the gospel is about building communities of neighbours; it is about crossing theological, economic, political and racial boundaries.³ However, global capitalism buttresses these divisions. In the scriptures the other is not to be feared, is not essentially a competitor, but a mirror of yourself. The “other” ought to enrich you rather than be your enemy. No wonder the second greatest commandment is: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”.

Neoliberal anthropology has not only polarized humans on the basis of the free market competition mentality. The empire, which is its ideological basis, has also polarized people according to their faiths. Although in theory people are becoming closer through global systems, in actual fact people are becoming more and more distant from each other. The Christian is increasingly being polarized from the

Muslim, whilst the black is equally polarized from the white, and the rich from the poor.

Further, a human being is perceived, in this *neoliberal* ideology, in individualistic terms. Group formations such as churches, trade unions and political parties are feared by this ideology. They are seen as taking away the freedom of the individual. Such emphasis on the primacy of the individual results in apathy and disinterestedness in the face of injustice.

According to this ideology a human being is understood primarily as a consumer, such that even relationships are formed on the basis of what one can get out of them. The result is dysfunctional families, divorce and even so-called passion killings, because such relations are based on a false premise.

This concept of a human being is different from an African worldview, which sees a human being from the perspective of *botho/ubuntu*. In the Setswana language there is a saying that *motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe* (a person is a person through others). In other words we find our true humanity by being in communion with others. A human being does not find meaning or personhood through material possession or intellectual capability. Our political and economic structures are therefore supposed to serve the purpose of cementing our sense of community. Unfortunately though, neoliberal anthropology is an attack on this African understanding of life.

It is therefore critical that theological discourse should be developed that draws

from cultural meaning systems in the South. Such discourse should accentuate the role of peoples' movements and other group formations in the fight against individualism and the cut-throat competition of global capitalism.

Global idolatry Idolatry is a dominant motif in the Old Testament. The Yahwists were unambiguous and categorical, "You shall have no other gods before me."⁴ I mentioned above that the system as we have it operates like a faith system, undermining the basic tenets of the gospel. Those who have acquired enormous wealth, excessive knowledge in science and biotechnology, and have power over others, are deluded into thinking that they are self-sufficient. By implication they do not need community nor do they need God. Let us remember that:

...in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus has told us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Lk 16:13).⁵

Idolatry expresses itself in the false claims of power by those who rule over us. For example, in Botswana⁶ we claim a system of participatory democracy, yet in reality it is a few people who make decisions. It is the executive (the Cabinet) which has power over parliament. The latter is supposedly the supreme law-making body in the land. Such corruption of power is delusional and leads to the political disempowering of a nation. In the long run

there is a danger of it resulting in active political persecution. In fact, already the levels of intolerance, by the ruling elite, against those who critique and speak against government are scary. The Accra document denounces this type of elitism which has thrown many African countries into a politicoeconomic abyss.

Many who worship at the altar of global capitalism are rich beyond description. Yet in spite of that they continue to be under the grip of a demon of greed and selfishness. The more you have the more you want. The tragic consequence of such rampant greed is an acute gap between the rich and the poor. Such systemic economic differences provide fertile ground for political upheavals and labour revolts in time. A good example is the current dispute between the workers at Debswana⁷ and management. Workers are taking on mine bosses who pay themselves very high salaries and bonuses, whilst the workers are underpaid. What pertains now is a system of intimidation by the powers that be, which involves the sacking of the union leaders and court cases. This situation is by no means unique to Botswana as workers in other countries go through the same appalling working conditions.

Desecration of creation Global capitalism is about unlimited economic profits. It is about wealth and power at all cost. In the process the ecosystem has been harmed by the massive industrial and economic exploitation of the environment.

Technology has come to mean the unleashing of violence against land, forest, air and water. Toxic emissions, chemicals, and radiation undermine the integrity of creation. The result is dramatic changes in global climatic patterns. The current phenomenon of global warming is the direct result of putting profits before everything else. The United States contributes more than most countries to global pollution yet it continues to be unilateralist and uncooperative in efforts to develop protocols on saving the environment. For instance, the Bush administration has refused to sign the Kyoto convention which seeks to cut down global pollution.

Justice issues

The Fireplace theology narrative cited above is simple and to some it may seem naïve. But it is plain and categorical that the beast can and will be killed. God's children will be rescued from its belly, and it is by the efforts of the little people of God that the monster and its imperial power will be destroyed.

In the process of wrestling with the beast that my people called Kgogomodumo we need to focus on the following, among other things:

Poverty Poverty is a ticking bomb in the so-called developing world. Many people have been reduced to beggars, prostitutes, and other untoward behaviour because of abject poverty. What is tragic about Sub-Saharan Africa is the fact that it is one of the richest parts of the world, in terms of

raw materials and human power. However, our diamonds, coffee, cocoa, gold and sugar are used to enrich nations other than the people of Africa. Africans are under pressure to liberalize and privatize their economies. In the process the economies are given over to those with capital who are often the multinational corporations and their African cronies.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches could partner with the Make Poverty History campaigners to address the tyranny of economic liberalization. A broad ecclesial coalition of WARC with partners in the South could address these issues at a policy level.

Access to medication Many Africans die needlessly each day from preventable deaths. Many still die from diseases such as malaria, tetanus, and polio even though vaccines for these have long been in existence. Currently there are HIV vaccine initiative trials, using Africans as human subjects, at different sites in Africa, including Botswana, Malawi and South Africa. Whereas African people are offering themselves in this way, in most cases there is no legislation in the countries concerned to ensure that the subjects are duly protected. There is also no guarantee of access to vaccines should efficacy be established in the process. It is likely that the pharmaceutical companies and the researchers will claim exclusive intellectual property rights and patent the products wholesale.

Regional ecumenical bodies like the

Federation of Council of Churches in Southern Africa (FOCCISA) need to organize themselves so that they can lobby governments to create legislation to protect individuals who are involved in trials. Such lobby initiatives could also include challenging pharmaceutical companies to make drugs accessible to the poor in the South. In fact, it seems only fair that the countries which have participated in such trials, have a stake in the patenting of such drugs.

Donor relations Analysts ought to use the Accra Confession as a framework for problematizing the current relations that exist between the poor in the South and donor agencies in the North. What pertains at the moment is that many donor agencies use the poverty of the South as an opportunity for fundraising and starting all manner of initiatives to help the poor in the South. Poverty in the South therefore has become an industry through which people create jobs for themselves. Increasingly Northern agencies refuse to work with partners in the South, and create their own satellite agencies in the South through which they work.

The effect of this is that much of the money that is raised in the name of the poor ends up serving the bureaucracy and lavish lifestyles of the agencies. For instance, in recent years the agencies started the Action by Churches Together (ACT) in order to be better prepared for emergency situations. Initially all churches that were members of the World Council of Churches

were automatically members of ACT. Interestingly though, this has now ceased and churches are required to have a dual membership of the two organizations. Not excusing the laxity of the African churches in failing to seek membership of ACT, it nevertheless seems that the organization has become an instrument by which the agencies could marginalize the African churches. An overwhelming majority of the organizations that belong to ACT are the agencies themselves, including DanChurch Aid, the Lutheran World Federation and Norwegian Church AID.

The rules of the game are always determined by the Northern agencies and unfortunately they often seem to capitalize on those aspects in which the African church is weak. Their interest is in professionally designed proposals and timely and efficient reporting.

At present, there is a process underway to establish what is tentatively called PEAD,⁸ which will be a network of aid agencies. The fear among churches in Africa is that this will be another way through which the agencies will further sideline them. Through PEAD the agencies will establish themselves as a powerful consortium, with their outposts in Africa, and with the power to pick and choose with whom they wish to work. These fears are not unfounded as it has been illustrated above in the case of ACT, but it is also clear that the agencies increasingly choose exotic partners who are unrelated to the church, place less demands on them and are unable to challenge them. These

are mainly non-governmental organizations.

The Accra Confession is also a good tool for assessing the impact of the work of the agencies in fighting poverty. Has the contribution of these agencies reduced the levels of poverty in the South, or has it in fact been more of palliative care? Whilst the good intention of these agencies cannot be questioned the Boff brothers rightly lament that the approaches of the Aid agencies often treat the poor as “collective objects” of charity, not as subjects of their own liberation.⁹ The evangelist Luke records a parable of a poor man called Lazarus who begged daily at the gate of a rich man.¹⁰ Lazarus survived by eating the crumbs or the remains from the rich man’s lavish life. The relationship between these two was very clear, it was the man with the power and the money who decided when Lazarus would eat or dress. I wish to posit here that by and large the majority of Northern agencies operate with this skewed relationship which gives power to the rich to decide on the fate of the poor. This approach often does not recognize the need for the poor to participate in improving their situation. Further, it does not necessarily challenge the fundamental problems which are the root causes of poverty. It does not seek revolution but an improvement of the situation of the poor without disturbing the economic tranquillity of the rich.

It is important that theologians concerned with the liberation of God’s creation should not be satisfied with measures that will alleviate poverty on a

temporary basis. Christians are called to take seriously the biblical motif of creation which invites humans to be co-creators with God. God’s creation is not just cosmological; it is also socioeconomic and political. The questions that need to be asked therefore are why are the poor getting poorer and the rich getting richer? Why is God’s creation so full of injustices even though he saw that it was good?¹¹ What can Christians do to improve the lot of the socially excluded?

These questions require time, prayer, patience and a coordinated methodical action. They require recognition that poverty is a result of structural injustice and not the fault of its victims. Unfortunately, some of our brothers and sisters in the North are often misguided into thinking that poverty in Africa is a result of backwardness, laziness on the part of the poor, corruption or mismanagement. There is more to it than that, and it is only when those seeking liberation begin with basic “why?” questions that they may come closer to the truth.

Conclusion

The Accra Confession provides a platform for theological investigation, campaigning, lobbying and prophetic action in our wrestling with empire. It is critical that in this process it is not the voice of the powerful and those who are articulate in European languages that are heard. Jesus’ model was to always give the poor and the marginalized the opportunity to articulate their own suffering and dreams.¹² Given the opportunity God’s children in the South can

articulate their pain and dreams. For that reason it would be apt for WARC and its sister organizations to create a platform for Christians in the South to come together and respond to the Accra Confession.

The Accra Confession is also a great tool to critique and engage the African church and their governments. There are many issues that hold us back, such as economic

corruption, elitism, and bad governance. These need to be investigated and a prophetic theology developed to address them.

The Accra Confession is a result of much hard work, imagination and prophetic action by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. It is a document which can help us to glimpse the future and see what is possible.

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Farming for the Future, Biowatch South Africa, Cape Town, 2004.

Notes

¹ A legendary dinosaur type of creature.

² Cf. *Farming for the Future*, Cape Town, Biowatch South Africa, 2004.

³ Luke 10:25-37.

⁴ Ex 20:3.

⁵ Accra Confession, §14.

⁶ Botswana is the only country in Africa that has had uninterrupted multiparty democracy since the 1960s. Despite an electoral process every five years, only one party has ruled the country since independence. A political elite has thus developed over the years, which self-perpetuates its stranglehold on power by passing it on to their children, retired civil servants and military personnel.

⁷ A diamond mining company owned jointly by the Botswana government and DeBeers Mining Company.

⁸ Proposed Ecumenical Alliance for Development.

⁹ L. Boff and C. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1987, p.4.

¹⁰ Luke 16:19-30.

¹¹ Genesis 1:25.

¹² John 5:7-9.

Christian social and political witness today in the light of the Accra Confession

Ulrich Duchrow

After the Accra General Council, contends the German theologian Ulrich Duchrow, WARC member churches should engage in transforming action based on the rejection of an “unjust, dominant system”. They are called to confess their sin; to overcome “their complicity with the system”; to participate in the development of local and regional alternatives; and to build up “countervailing power in alliances with the affected people and their organizations such as unions and social movements”. One of the founders of Kairos Europe, Duchrow teaches systematic theology in Heidelberg, Germany. He is the co-author of Property for People, not for Profit (2004).

Owning and concretizing the Accra Confession for an economy in the service of life

While the emphasis in the follow-up of Accra must be put upon transformative action, the basis for this is the public rejection of the global neoliberal capitalist system - in principle and in concrete terms - by the member churches of WARC. This is clear for most of the churches of the South but not for many churches and Christians in the West. Particularly in Europe they keep up the illusion that we still have a “social market economy” as a guiding paradigm, although not only the politics but also the new constitution of the European Union (EU) is neoliberal. In addition, European militarization is growing in order to compete

with the USA in the building up of intervention forces to safeguard economic interests worldwide.

This suggests that at least in Western Europe we have to seriously continue working theologically (particularly on the biblical basis) and analytically on the theme of “God or Mammon?” in our context. Recommendation 1.6 of the Economic and Environmental Justice part of the Public Issues Committee calling for networking between research institutions is important here.¹ We need mission from the South to the North. In addition, mobilization from below needs to bring the effects of neoliberal strategies to the attention of the decision-making bodies of our churches.

If the churches clearly took sides this

would also have very real effects in the economic and political sphere. The de-legitimization of a dominant, unjust system in itself would have a very important practical political effect. It would weaken the unjust powers and encourage the people to resist, especially in a situation in which the propaganda of the dominant forces is supported by a very effective media system in the hands of big capital. The rejection and crucifixion of Jesus was not because he took up arms as in guerrilla warfare, but because he de-legitimized the empire and the collaborating elites and clearly took sides with the oppressed and marginalized people, building alternative communities with them.

What does the Accra Confession (AC) say specifically about the features of the system to be rejected publicly?

- The dismantling of the social obligation of private property (AC 9).² This is particularly dramatic in the field of production where the productive gains are not shared by raising wages and creating jobs but are put into the maximization of profits for the owners (shareholders) and into financial speculation. In addition, politics allows capital to evade taxes, thus indebting the public budgets and leading to social and ecological degradation.

- The privatization of public goods and services (water, energy, education, health, etc.), subjecting the whole of life to the logic of capital accumulation and preventing the poor from satisfying their basic needs.

- The transformation of the state from being responsible for the wellbeing of all

people and the protection of nature for future generations, into a state securing the economic interests of the owners worldwide by reducing taxes for capital, and furthering “free” trade where the stronger party wins (“competitive state for growth creation”).

- The building up of an empire by the USA, followed by most industrialized countries, with the aim to further and protect the global market and its vested interests (AC 9, 19).³

- The pseudo-Christian legitimization of the total market and empire by theologies of prosperity and by “Americanist heresies”.⁴

All this has to be rejected by the churches, in the form it takes in their respective contexts.

The example of the churches

Churches addressing these issues publicly will have no credibility if they do not themselves overcome their complicity with the system in their structures and actions. The beginning is the confession of sin as stated in art. 34 of the Accra Confession, the subsequent covenanting section and part 1 (“Within our Churches”) of the Public Issues Committee Report’s section on Economic and Environmental Justice.⁵ In relation to the latter document the following points are particularly important:

1.1: “*Share the cry of the people.*” Many churches relate mainly to middle-class people. This is important for their mission (see below under 3). But the liberating strategy of God according to the Bible starts

with and in the perspective of the people especially affected by a given system, in our case those affected by the neoliberal globalization strategy. As this dominating system is increasingly also hitting people in the North, the building up of relationships to these at all levels – beyond charity – should be the highest priority of all churches and their congregations. Are they building up their work at all levels with the people concerned as the main actors? Are they organizing their diaconal work in their interest? Will they outsource simple jobs as transnational corporations do? Will they, as in Germany, use one-euro-an-hour jobs for the unemployed to their own benefit? A clear position in these and other fields will be clearly noted by the economic and political elites. Any “dialogue” with them has to start from this position of solidarity.

1.2 and 1.3: There are two practical areas where every person and organization is linked into the system: *consumption* and the use of *money*. It is not just a question of using socially and ecologically sound and/or fair trade products. It is also a question of consumption and money *power*. Are the churches ready to publicly join boycotts of companies that blatantly commit injustices even beyond the normal participation in unjust structures? To give one example: In Colombia the unions called for a boycott of Coca Cola because eight union leaders had been killed while campaigning critically in relation to this company. Could the churches in Colombia, on the basis of the Accra Confession, ask their sister churches in

WARC to call for a boycott of Coca Cola in their respective countries? If they did, they would certainly be recognized by the elites and by the people, as Jesus was. And Coca Cola would stop killing workers, as the company did when US churches were threatening it with boycott in the 1970s, when union leaders were killed in Guatemala. There is also a successful record of boycotts in relation to apartheid.

The other area where all of us are implicated is the use of money. A first step would be to follow Recommendation 1.3 calling upon the churches to increase their ethical investments to at least 20% of their investments. A next step could be to examine the question of how much interest churches may accept, looking at the biblical prohibition against charging interest. Economically, this means that interest is forbidden in a stationary economy without growth. In a growth economy, therefore, the interest rate must not be higher than the growth rate of the economy, if one wants to follow the Bible.

This contradicts the orders and practices of many churches. In Germany, for example, the constitutions of most churches still say that money reserves have to be invested profitably – period, without qualifications. This should be changed on the basis of the Accra Confession and church money put exclusively in alternative banks that follow the guidance of the Bible. In addition, the three biggest German banks have been legally punished because they have been notorious in helping capital owners to avoid

paying taxes. Why not call publicly for the boycott of these banks, since tax evasion by wealthy people and companies is the main reason for the over-indebtedness of all public budgets, leading to austerity policies, which hit people worldwide?

I know this will create conflict within both the churches and society - as it did in the case of the disinvestment campaigns against banks supporting apartheid. But we have to remember that sometimes learning through conflict is the only way of learning at all - especially for the privileged. The church is called to be salt of the earth, light of the world, city on the hill (Mt 5:13ff.; cf. Is 2:1ff.).

A double strategy towards alternatives

There are two sides to positive intervention in the socioeconomic and political arena, besides resistance and defiance: participation in the development of local and regional alternatives, and building alliances for the common struggle towards macroeconomic and political change. Both have a biblical base. In the case of the Roman Empire, Jesus and his movement, particularly in Galilee, helped people to simply heal their community including their economy by re-establishing cooperative models in solidarity in the tradition of Hebrew covenantal rules.⁶ Today there are hosts of local alternative ways to strengthen local economies, particularly in the four fields of local exchange trading systems (LETS), cooperative banking, using

decentralized sustainable energy production from sun, wind, water and biomass, as well as local production and marketing of basic food.⁷ It will be very important for churches and congregations - on the basis of the Bible and the Accra Confession - to join directly in such existing efforts or to take the initiative in inviting others to start them.

As to the macro issues, there is an issue of principle to be clarified before getting into the concrete alliances for alternatives. During the biblical period of monarchy in Israel there was the opportunity to fight for legal reforms through prophetic critique, and concrete proposals to prevent economic injustice (e.g., by prohibiting the taking of interest) and to correct wrong developments (e.g., by the Sabbath and Jubilee laws). This was possible in a “national” context, comparable to the time of the achievements of socially regulated market economies on the basis of the workers’ struggles (after 1929 until the 1970s). During the Hellenistic and Roman imperial period this “taming” was no longer possible; the only option was resistance and small-scale alternatives. Also, the neoliberal global capitalist political economy uses every possible means to systematically destroy social (and ecological) regulation of the market.

This means that a reformist strategy as such is not possible. First of all, the political space has to be re-established to make reforms possible. Therefore, under present circumstances, strategies of reform make sense only in the framework of resistance and struggle. It is naïve or misleading to

assume that by “dialoguing” with the powerful there will be change. Only on the basis of real bargaining power will the powerful take the counterpart seriously. An example: On the basis of the critical brochure “Lead us not into temptation,” the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank asked the World Council of Churches to enter into dialogue. Therefore, it is not true that one destroys the possibility of influencing the powerful by engaging in systemic critique. On the contrary, only in this way do they see that you understand what is going on. In this way and in this framework, proposals for relative change can have their place as well. I am not talking about rich and powerful individuals like Zacchaeus, the only rich person Jesus was able to save by liberating him from his wealth. People can change even in closed situations. I am talking about the chances for institutional transformation.

On the basis of this reflection, the key lies in building up countervailing power in alliances with the affected people and their organizations such as unions and social movements. It is a real sign of hope that these movements are springing up all over the world, most visibly in the World Social Forum. Therefore, it is a very courageous step on the part of the WCC to hold its next assembly in Porto Alegre. It shows the world symbolically that the churches have started to move away from their Constantinian past of complicity with the empire towards a biblical future at the side of the poor. WARC and its member churches should find a way

after Accra to join this clarity and to concretely engage in alliance building of this kind at all levels. The membership of the German Reformed Alliance in Attac, a social movement for economic justice, is a good example of this.

Here the question of the middle classes comes up again. Historical and psychological research shows the following. As middle-class people are upwardly motivated, they are filled with fear of decline in times of crisis. Because of early childhood patterns they idealize the higher authority and project the bad side of it onto scapegoats beneath themselves (foreigners, Jews, etc.). This in turn is instrumented by the upper classes to stop any coalition building between lower and middle classes. But as alliance building is the key strategy in regaining political space in order to overcome the dominance of the capitalist economy, the liberation of at least part of the middle classes in order to win them as partners for the struggle is crucial for building up alliances with the underclass as a countervailing power. This means that the churches with their particularly strong middle-class base have a very responsible mission here. Mission to the middle classes in terms of liberation from fear, illusory consciousness and the creating of scapegoats, as well as making them ready for conflict with the upper classes in alliance with the poor and marginalized, could be a focus in the follow-up of the Accra Confession. Certainly this would have to include an intensification of economic and psychological literacy.

As far as the emphases of the struggle for alternatives are concerned, the alliance building will concentrate on concrete struggles. Here the churches can join existing campaigns and start from what really moves people. Kairos Europa, an ecumenical grassroots organization for economic justice, has identified four particular areas for action (2003): the struggle against unemployment and social degradation; the struggle against privatization of basic goods and services; tax justice; and international trade and finance. In Europe, Attac is a key partner, globally it is the World Social Forum movement in all continents.⁸ The agenda of the World Social Forum for the near future has been unofficially summarized by a group of nineteen intellectuals in the so-called Porto Alegre Manifesto. They have formulated twelve proposals for “another possible world”.⁹

The specific goals in these areas may be limited reforms, but the perspective is a participatory re-appropriation of economic resources by society, at present expropriated by capital owners under the protection of almost all states.

The practical organization of follow-up in churches and congregations

Kairos Europa published a brochure with texts from Accra and concrete proposals on how to implement the decisions.¹⁰ Two proposals stand out: The suggestion has been communicated to the Christian Council in Germany, the Conference of European

Churches, and the Council of Catholic Bishops Conferences in Europe to launch a three-year consultative process on the neoliberal globalization strategy as a challenge to the churches at the European level leading up to the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly in Romania in 2007. The model for this are the consultative processes in Germany, Switzerland and Austria on the social and economic state these countries are in and the role of the churches in this context.

The other proposal concerns the local level during those three years. Districts or coalitions between congregations might form advisory groups offering consultative services to congregations. In order to improve their local mission these are invited to participate in the ecumenical process by finding out their particular local entry point in the light of the Bible and doing a review of their entire congregational life from that perspective. The membership of the advisory groups would have to be selected accordingly: representatives of the global South, of those church activities and organizations having particular affinity to economic questions, members of unions and social movements, members of ecclesial decision-making bodies. The goal would be to implement the Accra confession starting from the respective local entry points in the light of the Bible.

Most examples I have given are taken from Europe. That is where I live. But this is not the only reason for this choice. The

other is that here the resistance against a clear confession has been the strongest. We have most to learn. I could have told about the struggles in the South against privatization of water, against the bilateral “free” trade agreements imposed on the Southern countries by the USA and the EU, for the cancellation of illegitimate debt, etc. But this will be done more effectively by representatives from those continents. Together we shall overcome.

Questions for further study and action

1. What decisions is your church taking in order to own and implement the AC?
2. What is your experience with elements of empire in its various

dimensions and how does this affect the life of your society and church?

3. Which steps is your church taking in order to overcome complicity with the dominating system?
4. How can churches improve their alliance-building with social movements in relation to analysis, resistance and work for alternatives?
5. How is the “plan of action” chance and challenge for your church?
6. What should be additional aspects beyond the plan of action?
7. How does your church contribute to opening new political space for transformation and re-regulation of the market by resisting the present system of capital domination?

Notes

¹ “Report of the Public Issues Committee”. *Accra 2004 - Proceedings of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, Geneva, WARC, 2005, p.200.

² Cf. C. Zeller (ed.), *Die globale Enteignungsökonomie*, Münster, Westfälisches Dampfboot-Verlag, 2004; U. Duchrow, F. Hinkelammert, *Leben ist mehr als Kapital. Alternativen zur globalen Diktatur des Eigentums*, Oberursel, Publik-Forum, 2002. (Spanish: *La vida o el capital*, San José (Costa Rica), DEI, 2003; English: *Property for People, Not for Profit*, London, Zed-CIIR, 2004).

³ Cf. *Project for a New American Century*, www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm, 1997; F. Hinkelammert, *La violencia sagrada del imperio: el asalto al poder mundial*, Bogotá, Proyecto Justicia y Vida, 2003; N. Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance*, New York, Henry Holt, 2004; C. Johnson, *The Sorrows of the Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, New York, Henry Holt-Metropolitan Books, 2004; R. A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2003; C. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*, Maryknoll (USA), Orbis Books, 1988.

⁴ R. Radford-Ruether, “U.S. Churches must reject ‘Americanist’ Christianity”. *National Catholic Reporter*, April 23, 2004.

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⁸ Attac is the acronym for an international action-oriented movement that links citizenship to the rejection of neoliberal economic globalization. Attac is closely related to the World Social Forum. On Attac, see B. Cassen, “On The Attack”, *New Left Review*, January-February 2003; also: www.newleftreview.org/NLR25303.shtml. The official website of the World Social Forum is www.forumsocialmundial.org.br (Editor’s note).

⁹ The full text of the Porto Alegre Manifesto, produced during the 2005 World Social Forum, is available on the web: www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-02/20group_of_nineteen.cfm. For a critical analysis of the Porto Alegre Manifesto see: Patrick Bond, “Discussing the Porto Alegre Manifesto”, www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-02/22bond.cfm (Editor’s note).

¹⁰ Kairos Europa, *Kirchen im ökumenischen Prozess für gerechte Globalisierung*, 2005.

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The Accra Confession and liberty

Helis Barraza Díaz

What is the meaning of the Accra Confession for Reformed Christians in Latin America? According to Barraza Díaz, the Accra Confession brings the churches “closer to the scene of world problems” and helps them to clarify “the way our society has been organized”. Our responsibility as churches of Christ should be “to transform the system, based on the decisive criteria of life and the common wellbeing”. A member of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia, Barraza Díaz is the vice-president of the Reformed University of Colombia. He is also one of the six vice-presidents of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

“To break the chains of oppression and the yokes of injustice, and free the downtrodden” (Is 58:6) was the focus of reflection by the Reformed Churches, as they embarked upon the process of recognition, education and confession regarding economic injustice and environmental destruction (*processus confessionis*). The result of this process, initiated in Debrecen in 1997, was the document “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth,” approved during the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, held in Accra, Ghana, August 2004. Now our task is to ensure its continuity, interpretation and application.

We wish to underline the fact that for those of us living in Latin America, this document signifies an opportunity to listen to the clamour of brothers and sisters throughout the world, to those whose lives

are threatened, to the problems that affect our peoples. It further allows us to understand the perils that endanger God’s creation, and attests to the suffering of millions of human beings. We are aware that this document prompts the Church to become actively engaged in problems, because it confronts Christians who are willing to obey Christ’s word, challenging us to give testimony and take action in the face of these myriad problems, even if the authorities and laws prohibit such action. We also understand that we must be able to explain and account for our actions and practices, and that these should differ from the actions taken by others. The person who has been converted and accepts Christ in her or his heart has given birth to a living hope, signifying that he or she is capable of the concrete actions that must be carried out on a daily basis. These practices are the

source of discomfort and the basis for questions that arise within the context of the Christian Church.

Apart from bringing the Church closer to the scene of world problems, the resolution serves to clarify the way our society has been organized - that is, the creation of a world system whose political and social model favours the accumulation of property and capital, which has become the central aspect controlling the various components of our present economic relations. A human being who "owns" nothing more than his or her working potential, becomes a salaried worker, who in turn becomes somebody who is at the service of a process that allows others to accumulate capital. Thus, land or property and workers become the means by which the owners of the world's capital increase their wealth, the end result being that this accumulation of property and capital exerts control, indirectly, over all human beings on the planet.

The document presents an analysis of the difficult reality posed by the many contexts in which we are called to preach and live, on the one hand, and on the other invites us to form alliances and to obey the will of God as an act of loyalty and mutual solidarity, and to form responsible relationships to resist evil.

The wounds that have resulted from this sombre world context prompt us to ask several questions. Can the Christians of the world recognize each other as foreigners or strangers? Are we not, more

pointedly, part of the folklore of the "western Christian society"?

Does living the faith of Jesus create conflicts with the society that surrounds us? Which weighs more heavily, faith in Jesus Christ, or the context in which we live? What are the consequences of this conflict?

In the study "Estudio Exegético-Homilético",¹ this conflict is referred to in the following manner. "As long as society expects one thing and the gospel of Christ another, conflicts will exist. It is a matter of what we wish to do with it. Can we be faithful to the will of Christ and be in conflict with society, or should we go along with society and enter into conflict with Christ? It is important to point out that only a profound life experience of faith will permit us to resist the adverse and crucial moments. Hence, our congregations cannot limit themselves to living a practice of faith, but must recognize and relive their fundamental issues, because this is what will permit actions even in adverse moments."

All kinds of reactions can be expected with regard to the act of confession, ranging from those expressed by persons who consider the document to be extremely strong, and fear that it might affect the relations between churches and the Alliance itself, to those who see in the document an element of hope. The reactions of the first group lead us to question the privileges of those who benefit, consciously or otherwise, from the "neoliberal" economic system. However, the reactions of those of us who believe and see in the document a voice of

hope consider it to be a first step in an act of resistance, a call for solidarity and the construction of a better world. We interpret the document as a defence of the right and autonomy of nations, the rights and participation of women in world affairs, and the defence of a vision of Peace and Justice - that is to say, a world that is more humane and less capitalist.

The Bible contains many experiences that are central to the people whom God imbues with dignity, people who are always accompanied by God, women and men who become organized in order to resist the empires that deny life, justice and dignity to God's people. Christians have inherited a rich religious tradition that has led us to reject the destruction of life, the erosion of dignity, and the negation of justice.

Some of these experiences help us to understand the following.

The people insist and are listened to: this is the primal experience that Israel makes of God's self-revelation. God immerses Godself in history, and as God reveals God's own being, God becomes implicated in history. The liberation that resulted when God's people fled Egypt is surrounded by a plurality of experiences of resistance to the absolute power of the Pharaoh. It is also full of experiences in which women refuse to assassinate in the name of the Empire, nurses secretly assist in childbirth, housewives resort to strategies to reactivate the domestic economy, workers are forced to labour and join together to share the burden, and an entire nation of

elders and youth, men and women refuse to forfeit their cultural identity. In this way, multiple acts of resistance question the oppressor and, guided by the Holy Spirit, they will give birth to the challenge of building utopia in a society based on respect and equality.

It is in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, his generous life in the service of God's Kingdom and in his commitment until death, that we discover His answer to the violence, power and domination that engender economic poverty. Christ's presence generates new relations of justice and dignity which subvert the economic order (such as that referred to in the episodes of Zacchaeus and Lazarus and the rich man, for example). In His eyes, the poor and victims of the system are at the centre of God's revelation, and from that perspective He allows us to contemplate the whole of reality. His liberating proposition denounces riches that do not guarantee life or equality.

Calvin proclaimed that church and state were separate entities. He further affirmed that both church and state must be granted liberties with respect to this large issue. Only God is master of this and is able to grant freedom in affairs dealing with faith, worship, or doctrines, and human mandates that contradict one another, or which are foreign to His world.²

Calvinism has derived from its fundamental relation with God a peculiar interpretation of the relation of man with man, which when put into practice, ennoble social life. If Calvinism places the whole of

our human life directly before God, then it follows that all men and women, rich or poor, weak or strong, fools or talented, as creatures of God, as sinners - nobody has the right to control or dominate others, because in the eyes of God we are equal. That is why Calvin condemns not only all overt forms of slavery and the caste system, but all forms of covert slavery, such as those that exist with relation to women and the poor. He opposes all hierarchies among men, and rejects aristocracy. Hence Calvinism is obliged to find its expression in a democratic interpretation of life, to proclaim the liberty of nations, and not to rest until each human being, politically and socially, simply by virtue of being human, is recognized, respected and treated as a creature made in the divine image.

According to Duchrow and Hinkelammert, "out of liberty and property came the liberty of property."³ The book further states that "imperial globalization must eliminate every obstacle to total domination by the capitalist market, i.e., every obstacle to the ability of capital property to pursue unlimited wealth accumulation without any attendant obligation to sustain life. As far as possible, every social and environmental restraint or obligation must be removed."⁴ (Ibid., p.107)

The development of this process, furthered by the new wave of globalization, has created a new scenario. This is nothing but the reinstatement of the capitalist market economy by means

of extending and widening measures to increase the free market and to aid in the creation of new spaces without regulation in which the activities of the world's capital might prosper. This instrument is the exclusive domain and privilege of capital, and in these new spaces the concept of capitalism acquires new dimensions.

In our region, this model was created more than two decades ago, in much the same way that it has been imposed upon the entire world. It includes the privatization of the functions heretofore carried out by the state, free trade, the creation of chains of international capital movements, the dissolution of the social state, thus surrendering economic planning to multinational corporations, placing the labour force and natural resources in the hands of those who govern the market. All of these developments have created a devastating trend that has swept across the continent, thanks to the implementation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the Free Trade Agreements. The results have further degraded the rights of workers, exacerbated working conditions, accelerated the destruction of our natural environment, placed at risk the life and health of nations, speeded up the privatization of social services, bankrupted small and medium-sized companies, and "de-industrialized" nations, with a concomitant increase of poverty and social exclusion. In response to these developments, society is militarized and

democratic rights are more severely curtailed.

The liberties we speak of today are not the liberties of human beings. The liberties that the capitalist system promotes and with which it acquires new dimensions are the liberties associated with capital; they are those that signify the opening up of the frontiers of peripheral nations, or third world nations, so that the developed nations might stabilize their balance of trade, stimulating the citizens of third world nations to participate increasingly in the consumer society.

What is different and surprising about this system is that it intentionally promises wellbeing, contradicting its open description of itself as an absolutist system offering no alternatives, a system that destroys life and brings about the death of human beings, and the death of nature.

In opposition to the self-regulated market's ruthless accumulation of wealth and private property at the expense of the wellbeing of many, our responsibility as churches of Christ should be to transform the system, based on the decisive criteria of life and the common wellbeing.

Notes

¹ Buenos Aires, Isedet, 2005.

² Cf. Jacob T. Hoogstra, *Calvin, Contemporary Prophet*, Grand Rapids (USA), Baker Book House, 1959. Quoted from the Spanish translation, *Calvino, Profeta Contemporaneo*, Clie, 1973, p.116.

³ U. Duchrow, F. Hinkelammert, *Leben ist mehr als Kapital. Alternativen zur globalen Diktatur des Eigentums*, Oberursel, Publik-Forum, 2002. Quoted from the Spanish translation: *La vida o el capital*, San José (Costa Rica), DEL, 2003, p.101.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.107.

Alternatives are possible!

Seong-Won Park, Ofelia Ortega and Omega Bula

The Accra Confession calls the churches to seek alternatives to the current economic globalization. The authors of this text, jointly prepared in Cuba, June 2005, offer three stories which they relate to another possible world. The first is about life-giving agriculture. The second is about visions and alternative life projects in Latin America and the Caribbean, including ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. The last one focuses on education for justice. Park is WARC's secretary for the Covenanting for Justice Programme. Ortega is one of the six WARC vice-presidents. Bula is the Executive Minister for the Unit on Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations of the United Church of Canada.

From 27 to 29 June 2005, a small group of people met at the Evangelical Seminary of Theology in Matanzas, Cuba for further reflection on the Accra Confession from the Southern perspective.

The participants felt strongly that it would be useful and helpful if some of the ideas and attempts at alternatives to globalization could be shared with member churches. It was therefore decided to present three stories of practical alternatives that have been initiated by churches, the ecumenical community and some Southern countries following Accra:

- Global Movement for Life-Giving Agriculture
- Integration of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in the face of today's dominant economic trends

- Some practical ideas for education on the economy from the justice perspective

In the hope that member churches may gain some ideas from these examples, towards initiating feasible alternatives in their own contexts, we share these three alternative stories, as follows.

Story 1: Life-giving agriculture is possible!

One of the visions of the Accra Confession was not merely to reject the neoliberal paradigm of the global economy. It also encouraged member churches to search for alternatives to globalization so that economy could be in the service of the life of people and the earth.

One such attempt that was made was the Global Forum on Life-Giving Agriculture,

held from 8 to 13 April 2005 in Wonju, South Korea. The forum was organized by the Ecumenical Coalition for Alternatives to Globalization (ECAG), consisting of the following Geneva-based ecumenical organizations: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of YMCAs, World YWCA, World Student Christian Federation, Frontiers in Mission and Pax Romana. WARC has been very active in organizing this coalition and pursuing its ideas for alternatives.

One of the main visions of ECAG is to search for alternatives to globalization, and this was the purpose of the forum. Agriculture was chosen as the entry point in the search, because it is the very basis for life, which economy should serve. This is an area where the Church can initiate alternative movements rather easily, thus helping to fulfil this major goal of the Accra Confession.

Over 70 participants from 20 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific, Europe and North America attended the forum. The main participants were organic farmers and others involved in organic farming.

The forum identified life-killing elements operating under the current framework of economic globalization. Specifically, international and corporate interests and entities are forcing farmers to conform to farming practices that damage and destroy nature and local communities. The present dominant development model of agriculture is

corporate- and market-driven; it is described in the forum report as capital-intensive, export-oriented and monocultural, with profit as its motive. It compels farmers to use GMO seeds, pesticides, chemical fertilizers and automation. Such methods lead to soil degradation, loss of indigenous seeds and biodiversity, biopiracy and concentration of lands in the hands of the few. It restricts diversity of agriculture, favouring the food patterns that are being dictated by fast-food companies. The present model increases job loss, displacement, drought and migration.

The increasing domination of this antilife agricultural model threatens the survival of indigenous communities around the world. Agribusinesses are now applying to organic agriculture the same mechanisms and methods that have been used in conventional farming, so as to continue their control and domination of the world food market.

Governments, in the name of growth-centred development, are forced to follow the destructive model of agriculture benefiting the corporations, the developed countries and the rich within the developing countries.

The decades-long use of these unsustainable agricultural practices has led to the erosion of cultures, traditional knowledge and sustainable agricultural systems. Conventional agriculture defies all the values that uphold communitarian living.

Therefore, this trend needs to be reversed: life-killing agriculture should be altered into life-giving agriculture.

At issue is sustainable life on the planet Earth. Faith in God, whose ultimate goal is fullness of life for all, is enabling people in different parts of the world to resist the pressures and to opt for life-supporting methods of farming. This is in fact the spirit of the Accra Confession.

The most significant lessons that were obtained from the forum can be highlighted in the following points:

Life-giving agriculture is possible! The forum began with field visits to six places in Korea where life-giving agriculture is being practised. We were impressed by the stories of those engaged in organic farming in Korea. There is a struggle to restore agricultural practice from the present life-threatening ways to an activity that is life-sustaining and life-nurturing. Contrary to the argument that there is no alternative to the highly industrialized approach, with continuous fertilizer, chemical and fuel input, the participants witnessed a number of alternatives already being practised. In the past, the Korean government had suppressed any attempts at organic farming. Over the last fifteen years or so, nature-loving farmers including many Christians have devoted themselves to promoting organic farming against conventional farming, in resistance to oppression by the government. After 15 years' struggle, the organic agricultural products have begun to be welcomed by consumers who are looking

for healthy food. Under this pressure from the people, today the Korean government has set up new policies in support of environment-friendly agriculture. The demand for organic agricultural products is increasing globally, and the future of organic farming is bright if we are successful in controlling the multinational corporations' manipulation of organic agribusiness as they do in the conventional agriculture market. In Japan and Korea, there is the further possibility of going beyond organic farming to natural farming, which is much closer to the original farming methodology that God programmed in the beginning.

Producer household and consumer household are not two, but one! "Producer and consumer households are not two things, but one. We take care of the consumers' life and they take care of our life," said an organic farmer in Wonju, Korea, during a visit by the participants of the Global Forum on Life-Giving Agriculture. The life-giving agriculture movement in Korea has realized the original meaning of *oikonomia*, from which the word "economy" comes. Organic farming communities there developed a significant covenantal relationship between the producers and the consumers. Contrary to the normal understanding of a producer household and a consumer household as different and separate, the farmer in Wonju called them ONE HOUSEHOLD (*Han Sallim* in Korean), because the producers are responsible for feeding the consumers with healthy food, and the life of producers also depends on

consumers. This is the concept of “convivial” life or covenanting life. Thus the coordinating agency whose main work is to link the producers and consumers, is called *Han Sallim* (One Household) or *Han Maum* (One Heart). This example shows us excellent everyday language for the covenanting concept that the Accra Confession is promoting.

3. Agriculture is a philosophy for reaffirming the basis of life in fullness, and moreover it is a driving force and practice for the fundamental change of civilization. Modern development of civilization has been carried out as a process of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. People followed this process in the hope that their lives would flourish as development continued. Today, however, people in modern society are tired of the industrialized, urbanized and modernized style of life. In Korea today, many families take their children to the countryside at the weekend, to experience farming and other rural activities. The rise of industrial civilization has subjugated the rural to the urban and industrial way of life. But today, people are looking for a reversed lifestyle, that is, life in the garden. Therefore, life-giving agriculture could become a driving force, transforming the neoliberal lifestyle into a less competitive, less speedy, less greedy, less selfish and egoistic, and more meditative lifestyle, with a more relaxed rhythm than urban life, in harmony with others and nature. Life-giving agriculture can remind people today what it means to be a

people of spirituality or faith in the context where neoliberal values dominate our spirituality. It can be a driving force for the transformation of stressful modern life into more relaxed ecological life.

4. The total transformation of agriculture into organic farming is possible. When the US embargo was tightened after the demise of the socialist block, securing chemical fertilizers as well as energy was extremely difficult in Cuba, as North Korea also experienced. In September 1991, therefore, the Cuban government set up a policy to transform conventional agriculture into organic form, as the way to overcome the crisis. Despite the evaluation of the research team from Stanford University calling the Cuban attempt the most challenging experiment in human history, it succeeded and today all agriculture in Cuba is basically organic. This success was possible through cooperation and solidarity among committed farmers, ordinary people, scientists, government, NGOs, and the research team. For the first two years, the agricultural productivity went down, but from 1994 it began to catch up to the level of conventional farming. The city of Havana was transformed into an ecological city, and the food culture was changed to vegetarian. People’s health was improved and the city atmosphere became more enjoyable. The Cuban experience has demonstrated that the adoption of agro-ecological methods and resources through plant-animal combinations and alternative pest management technologies, can bring better

productive and economic benefits in a socially equitable manner. Abstracting the Cuban experience, the elements of the alternative paradigm are: 1) agro-ecological technology instead of chemicals, 2) redistribution of land to small farmers, 3) fair prices and markets for farmers, 4) greater emphasis on locality of production, and 5) re-inventing new technologies and materials by grafting modern science onto traditional management techniques and resources. Besides the scientific achievement, the Cuban experience proves that resistance against empire is possible when all members of the community are united in the search for alternatives.

5. Local-based economy and global solidarity are important. The forum gave us the clear lesson that an economy is best when it is organized locally. This is true particularly in relation to food resources. The Life-Giving Agriculture movement could give a certain assurance that local-based economy is important and possible. We need to continue to read the signs of the times: the multinational corporations are busy trying to hijack organic agriculture by turning it into agribusiness. We need to monitor this activity very carefully and resist any temptation to support what the corporations are attempting. For this, strong solidarity among producers and consumers is needed at the local level. Strong networking and solidarity are also needed globally so that organic farming communities and consumers are not victimized repeatedly by the corporations.

Member churches are encouraged to initiate their own movements of this kind. They can consult the WARC Geneva office on joining the LGA global movement or to get information in support of their intention to launch an alternative movement in their own context. Information on life-giving agriculture is available on the WARC website (www.warc.ch).

Story 2: Visions and alternative life projects

Members of different churches, institutions and social ecumenical and scientific organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean gathered on November 23 and 24, 2002 in Havana, Cuba to consider the topic "The FTAA, the Church and people of faith."

The meeting was to discern the challenges posed by the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) for the destiny of our people.

In our analysis we agreed that the Mexican, US and Canadian experience under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has demonstrated not only the inability of the project to solve the socioeconomic problems of the majority, but furthermore its perverse impacts on sovereignty, employment, ecosystems and culture, besides showing itself to be an antidemocratic exercise.¹

The effects of the adjustment plan in Mexico, according to Virginia Bahera Morales, a religious sister working for social services, have revealed the great failures of

this free, absolute field. Some of the consequences are:

- The number of poor persons grew in Mexico from 30 million to 50 million. Of the 50 million, 22 million live in extreme poverty.

- 10 million Mexicans do not have access to health care services and 3 million cannot consult specialized doctors.

- 3 million children live in the streets, in contrast to the previous figure of approximately 1 million 250 thousand.²

Some of the alternatives proposed by the churches to overcome the impact of the process of integration are:

- To promote and publicize educational processes that can help our people to decipher the reality behind the law on trade proposed by the United States.

- To present to our community, as a viable alternative, the solidarity and brotherly/sisterly integration among human beings that was announced in the Ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

- To intensify our efforts to support different, liberating, integrating alternatives based on an ethics of common welfare for our continent; to press the corresponding authorities for their proper response; to effectively articulate and widely diffuse information to our churches that will enable them to resist the structures of oppression and injustice under the present economic neoliberalism, which disables the sovereign right of countries and states; and to design political and national strategies of development.

As Germán Gutiérrez from the

Ecumenical Department of Investigation, San José, Costa Rica, affirms:

“The main purpose of the United States in the FTAA is to strengthen its power over Latin America and the Caribbean, in the context of its economic confrontation with the European Union and Japan, and to exclude the latter from influence in the region. It is headed towards control of Latin America, in market and investment interests, in the positioning of speculative capital, and above all for access to natural and energy resources, mainly petroleum, and for access to drinking water, which is another great interest - for access to the region’s rich biodiversity.

Another purpose is to destroy the current attempts of Latin America and the Caribbean for integration that encourages relationships with other world economic areas in order to reduce its excessive dependence on the North American economy.”³

The vision of globalization must be challenged by the vision of our faith. The system tells us: “There are no alternatives.” Jesus helped the poor and hungry crowd, showing them how to share what they had and so building what we call “the economy of the Grace of God” (Mk 6:35; 8:1).

We have to confront and challenge the idea that only with neoliberalism is it possible to obtain the integrating objectives demanded by the current globalizing tendencies. As affirmed by the Accra “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth” approved by the 24th General

Council, we, by confessing our faith together, must covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth, both in our common global context and in various regional and local settings.

Some alternatives have appeared in the region; we should critically analyse these in order to continue their development in the search for viable solutions for our Latin American and Caribbean context. We will describe them, not as final solutions, but as "paths" that should be continually cleared, as signs of new perspectives of hope for our people.

Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) One of the proposals for a fairer integration, the "Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas" (ALBA), tries to establish an armory of concepts and practical measures for those countries that envision a society different from neoliberal capitalism.

ALBA was proposed by Hugo Chávez, president of Venezuela, in December 2001, and received a conceptual and practical boost three years later with the adoption of the Joint Declaration and the Agreement for the application of ALBA between Venezuela and Cuba.

Among the principles and cardinal bases that are included in ALBA, trade and investment should not be ends in themselves, but rather instruments to achieve fair and sustainable development, which requires the effective participation of

the State as regulator and coordinator of economic activity.

Physical integration should be done through joint plans for roads, railroads, sea transport and airlines, as well as through the energetic integration of telecommunications. Development should take place through norms that protect the environment, stimulate the rational use of resources, and avoid the proliferation of unnecessary consumption patterns.

Along with these considerations of an economic, commercial and financial nature, there are plans to promote education by granting scholarships of a regional character in the areas of greatest interest for development, as well as specific plans for health care and treatment in the poorest sectors.

Defence of Latin America and the Caribbean, and respect for the identity of their people is one of the main principles of ALBA, with particular respect to the autochthonous and native culture.

Plan of MERCOSUR towards integration The presidents of the member countries of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) signed, on June 20 this year at the XXVIII Summit of the Heads of States, a joint communiqué which seeks the integration of the Structural Convergence Fund to eliminate the conditions of the nations' asymmetry in MERCOSUR. The declaration was signed by the presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The fund will be oriented to promoting competitive and social cohesion to reduce

poverty and unemployment, especially of underdeveloped regions.

The setting in motion of the Free Trade Agreement among MERCOSUR, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela was also celebrated by the presidents. It will contribute to the creation of a free trade area between MERCOSUR and the Andean Community of Nations.

The declaration was also signed by the associated countries of Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela.

The fund to be created will provide an annual aid of 100 million dollars for 10 years, with a starting trial period of three years, and 61% of its resources will go to projects related to development and the struggle against poverty in Paraguay and Uruguay, the weakest economies of the block.

Energy integration project in the Caribbean The leaders of the Caribbean community (CARICOM), an integration of 14 countries, gathered on 28 and 29 June in Venezuela to analyse, together with the administration of Venezuela, the concrete aspects around which future regional energy integration may be based. This project is an initiative of the ministries of energy in the Caribbean, who took the first steps in July 2004 when they gathered in Caracas, and further developed it in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in August of the same year.

The PETROCARIBE organization is not an isolated project but is related to the formation of PETROSUR and PETROANDINA. These three energy axes

are aimed at revitalizing the countries' integrating concepts and multipolarity. They represent the search for viable alternatives for Caribbean development.

Healing and transformation processes in local communities The Theological Commission of the Latin American Council of Churches initiated a process that has continued since 2003, dealing with the experience of "Grace in the life of our churches." Cross, hope, reconciliation and spirituality are sub-themes of this reflection that link the theme of Grace with the challenges of the mission of the church in this century. This is a pastoral contribution by our local congregations.⁴

In the situation of difficulty faced by the people of Argentina, we can question what the system has done to reduce the misery of so many people, but at the same time we have to appreciate the manifestations of solidarity and reciprocal help, that are occurring throughout the whole country. We have to remember especially that the life of our churches in their best moments has been a manifestation of the grace of God in terms of love, compassion and permitting the redemption of millions of lives.

The Pentecostal theologian Elizabeth Salazar, during the meeting of this commission, told us,

In this world of the poor, the element that has contributed to the evangelical insertion is their intense community character, the solidarity that is given among their members, the force of

welcome to all types of affected people - those damaged physically, emotionally and psychologically by multiple experiences of threat and danger, poverty, loneliness, alienation, failure, frustration and other factors. The experience that we have had as observers and as an integral part of these churches, is that the evangelical communities constitute a network of people and groups that influence one another notably, including in the disposition of the individual and also in the affective behaviour of each one of their members.

When speaking of the current reality, then, we cannot just speak critically about the current situation; we have spoken enough of the painful things of our Latin American and Caribbean reality, but I would rather mention the signs of life that exist, signs of hope that accompany good news from distant lands and near lands, good news of great joy. The contribution of the evangelical population to society, to culture and the community should be known and recognized: the achievements that are made in the field of the prevention of psychosocial damage, in the field of protection of the environment, in the field of the overcoming of poverty and exclusion; here it is not that I want to refer to the theology of prosperity, but rather to the actions of solidarity and the creativity that are knitted in wonderful nets of concrete actions of the evangelical mission of gratitude; they are nets of peace amid the violence, they are nets of peace amid the injustice, they are nets of peace amid the oppressing powers, peace and love, peace and justice, peace and freedom.

It is evident, as Franz Hinkelammert affirms,⁵⁵ that this ethics of common

welfare has to do with resistance, interpellation, intervention and transformation.

We have to actively work around concrete and possible alternatives to the neoliberal model of economic integration at the service of great transnational corporations. The agendas of the social movements will be revealed, fostering the great dream that all we Latin Americans and Caribbean peoples have, which is none other than to be able to live in a society where we all fit in, one that is inclusive and even more participatory and human, in which the values and criteria of life, peace, solidarity, and coexistence always overcome the values of war, power and dominance, vanity and revenge.

Our commitment is “to proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing, restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live” (Deut 30:19; Accra Confession §42).

Story 3: Education for justice – a case study of the United Church of Canada’s partnership approach to global education

In 1995, Southern African member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in Kitwe, Zambia, recognized the growing economic injustice and ecological destruction affecting the majority of people in the world. This gathering issued an urgent alert and call to

the Alliance to confess the sin of economic injustice and ecological destruction. In response to this call, the 23rd General Council meeting in Debrecen invited its member churches into a process of “recognition, study and confession: *processus confessionis*.”

The United Church of Canada, based on its long-standing justice-seeking tradition, was already engaged in actions and advocacy work, as a denomination and ecumenically. The call of Debrecen further informed and invigorated our work on economic justice.

The following reflection attempts to share the United Church’s approach to **education for justice** as an ongoing process or cycle of recognition, study and confession.

The Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Programme of the United Church of Canada carries the lead responsibility within our church for enabling the wider church to engage with justice issues. The main pillars of this work are policy analysis and advocacy, accompaniment and solidarity with global partnerships through ecumenical and interfaith relations, sharing of both financial and human resources, and education for justice.

The work of this programme offers leadership that strengthens the church’s engagement in God’s mission embodied in Jesus Christ; the mission that seeks justice, peace and care of creation, locally and globally. Within this mission, we are

called to the sharing of God’s resources for engagement in God’s mission within a global, ecumenical and interfaith context.⁶

Undergirding this work are the principle values of partnership with others engaged in God’s mission in Canada and globally; faithful stewardship of God’s resources; prophetic witness rooted in the quest for justice; ecumenism; wholeness and inclusiveness rooted in the value of love and respect of community and service to all; and last but not least, an affirmation that we are a people of a living faith: a faith lived out through the engagement of its believers in God’s mission of seeking justice and resisting evil.

A holistic education that enables people to learn about justice issues which cut across national boundaries and the interconnectedness of the systems of injustice that are economic, political, cultural and ecological is key to the engagement of people in God’s mission.

What are the aims and objectives of the education for justice approach?

Canadian and global partners in mission live in a variety of diverse and complex socioeconomic, cultural, theological and political realities. These diverse and complex realities need to be understood and appreciated by United Church congregations engaged in the struggle for social justice. Within this context, the education programme is challenged to develop effective educational programmes that

address systemic injustice within a context that demands the integration of the Canadian and global justice commitments of our church in response to diverse and interconnected injustices stemming from social exclusion such as gender, race, class and sexual orientation, among others.

In order to do this educational work for justice, the development of resources and strategies for education using a broad variety of media that are accessible for the widest possible audience and age groups is key. Included in these resources are print resources, electronic-based resources, and video. The resources that are produced emphasize networking and dialogue that foster the integral connections between Christian faith, care for creation, and commitment to social justice.

For example, in order to educate for justice on economic injustice in the world, a popular resource called *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil – Towards a Global Economy for All God’s People* was produced and submitted to the United Church General Council 37. This resource contains an analysis of the global economic system, stories from global partners on their experience of the global economy and impact at the local level, as well as worship resources and actions with which folks at the local level can engage. In order to make this work accessible to young people, another process that is electronically based, called WebSight, was developed by young people themselves. A process to animate this resource is in place as well.

The report and ensuing related activities on *To Seek Justice and Resist Evil* have been identified as “not a finished business” but a step in the continuing journey. Among the current work begun since the Accra General Council is a study on Empire, globalization and militarization. The question being addressed is how do we participate in God’s mission in the context of Empire? The Task Group enabling this work will make a preliminary report to the United Church’s General Council 39 in 2006, which will call for reference to congregations for study and reflection.

Education for justice

Education for justice in this context of our work therefore aims at “opening people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all.”⁷⁷ Methodologies that encourage active and experiential learning, reflection and action, celebration of diversity and respect for differences in understanding of the world, and approaches to responding to social injustice are at the core of our educational work. Critical analysis of the root causes of injustice in the world is at the centre of our learning together globally.

This methodology reflects Jesus’ educational approach: one that encouraged those who were marginalized and oppressed by the systemic powers of their societies to reflect on the conditions and causes of their marginalization and oppression; to affirm their own dignity as human beings; and to

claim their own power to act on the conditions of their marginalization and oppression. In addition, Jesus always challenged the powerful and their systems of oppression and marginalization of the impoverished. For Jesus, education for justice always went hand in hand with advocacy against systems of injustice.

Challenges

The challenges we face in educating for justice are many. Here, I will only highlight a few from which we are constantly drawing learnings that can be shared.

Education for justice is about learning and understanding the global systems of injustice, so that we may act locally against injustice, with the aim of impacting global systems of injustice. This understanding provides challenges in a context where people with material resources, and a “quick fix” mentality rush to provide ready-made answers. This often invokes a charity response rather than a justice response to those who suffer from systems of injustice. It evades the responsibility to analyse and search for how the rich and powerful are complicit in the oppression of those impoverished by the very systems from which we benefit. It is an ongoing tension between education for justice that enables people to develop a different understanding and consciousness of the root causes of injustice in the world, and to develop just actions that address systemic injustice.

These tensions include fostering an understanding of partners’ contexts and

how they pursue God’s mission in those realities; supporting opportunities for global partners to accompany and be resource people for UCC mission initiatives in Canada; and in consultation with global partners, developing and implementing opportunities for United Church members to understand and experience Canadian and global partners’ life and work outside Canada.

Another challenge is how to engage folks in the cutting edge, prophetic responses that are key to overcoming systemic injustice in the world, while valuing the accompaniment of people and starting from where they are in the understanding of issues. Global education does not want to change the learner, but aims at transforming the learner’s understanding of the world to enable him or her to reflect on his/her environment.⁸

A critical understanding of whom the programme intends to educate and the methods to be used in the educational process is an ongoing challenge for our work. For example, a popular methodology in the education for justice processes practised by many of the United Church of Canada folks is group visits to countries in the South. They travel out of their own environment to faraway places in order to learn more about the impact of global economic systems, HIV/AIDS, theological reflection and practice, or to build schools and homes for the impoverished.

One is tempted to criticize this as a kind of tourism of poverty that is a privilege for the rich and powerful. Why should anyone

travel out to see the suffering of others in order to be moved into action for justice? Why are people not seeing the very similar issues of poverty and marginalization in their own context? Why do the members of a predominantly white middle-class group become experts to interpret another person's reality they have visited for only one or two weeks when they cannot do the same with their own reality in Canada? Should we challenge people to engage in local exposures before they travel outside their own environments? These questions are abundant and challenge us to look deeply into the practice as an instrument for education for justice.

Selby and Pike speak of the inner dimension of global education - that "it is a voyage along two complementary learning pathways. While the journey outwards leads the learner to discover and understand the world in which s/he lives, the journey inwards heightens her/his self-understanding and recognition of personal potential. Both journeys constitute a necessary preparation for personal fulfilment and social responsibility in an independent and rapidly changing world."⁹

It is an ongoing challenge for justice-seeking people in our programme to grasp

this strand in the process of education for justice.

We are learning along the way that necessary skills for the accompaniment of people in this process of education for justice include an active commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, with solid knowledge of the current dynamics of mission and ministry in a complex world. This includes the competence to analyse and articulate systemic justice issues from a contextual theological stance and reflection informed by an understanding of current missiology.

A strong commitment and engagement in work towards justice, peace, human rights, gender justice and integrity of creation have been essential in enabling an integrated approach to education for justice. This calls for pedagogical skills in popular and transformational education.

Encouragement to search for alternatives in one's own context

The above three stories are just glimpses into the possibilities that exist in different contexts. All member churches at all levels are encouraged to take initiatives that are contextually based. Member churches are also encouraged to share their experiences and efforts with other member churches around the world.

Notes

¹ See document “The ‘NO’ to the FTAA is a ‘YES to LIFE””, National Council of Churches, Havana, Cuba.

² From the document “The Impact of Neoliberal Policies on the Mexican Population,” presented in the meeting mentioned above.

³ G. Gutiérrez, “El ALCA y la Guerra Antiterrorista, *Revista Pasos*, No. 98, 2001, p.26.

⁴ Cf. Israel Batista (ed.), *Gracia, Cruz y Esperanza en América Latina*, CLAI, Quito, 2004, pp.7-29.

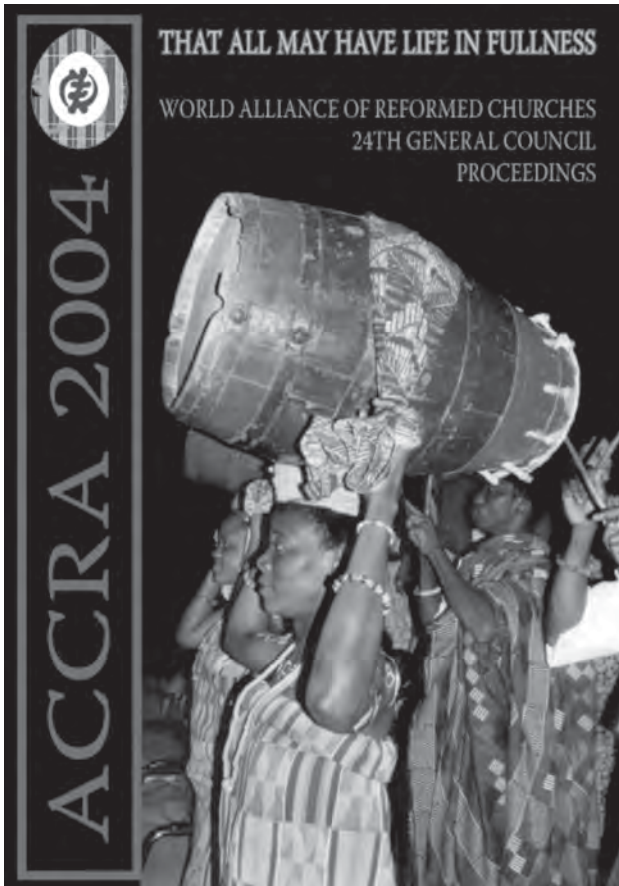
⁵ F. Hinkelammert and H. M. Mora, *Coordinación social del trabajo, mercado y reproducción de la vida humana*, DEI, San José, Costa Rica, pp.327-331.

⁶ From the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit Mandate - approved by Unit Committee 2003.

⁷ See Council of Europe 2002, Maastricht Global Education Declaration.

⁸ Schreiner, Banev and Oxley - *Holistic Education Resource Book - Learning and Teaching in an Ecumenical Context*. Waxmann 2005, p.142.

⁹ Selby and Pike (2000), *Civil Global Education - Relevant Learning for the 20th Century*, as quoted in *ibid.*, p.143.

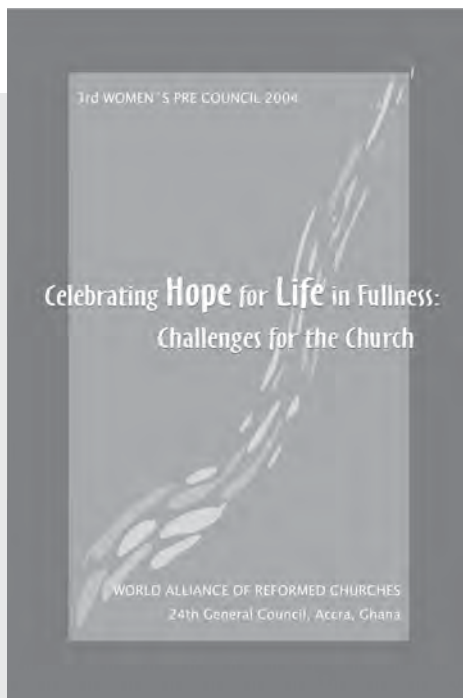


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