

The ACCRA Confession

A pamphlet which contains background information is available on the WARC site http://www.warc.ch/documents/ACCRA_Pamphlet.pdf

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 (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 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 per cent is equal to that of the poorest 57 per cent, 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 are 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 " (Ps 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 (Ps 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 (Mic 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" (Am 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 judgment 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 (see Appendix 18).

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).

Terms used in the Accra Confession

Capital speculation – The buying, holding, and selling of stocks, bonds, commodities, currencies, collectibles, real estate, derivatives, or any valuable financial instrument to profit from fluctuations in its price as opposed to buying it for income or for use.

Commodification – Turning what is normally a non-commodity into a commodity. Assigning economic value to something that traditionally would not be considered in economic terms, for example, persons valued only according to the work they are able and/or forced to do, or nature valued only according to its consumer use-value.

Complicity – Association or participation in a wrongful or unjust act or system.

Deregulation – The process by which governments remove, reduce, or simplify restrictions on business and individuals with the intent of encouraging the efficient operation of markets. Regulations that provided protections to low-income people, farmers, local businesses, the environment, or other groups are often lost after deregulation.

Domination – Having unjustified control or power over persons, things, or nature. A totalitarian regime, for example, seeks to unjustifiably enforce political domination over its citizens.

Empire – The convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military imperial interests, systems, and networks for the purpose of amassing political power and economic wealth. Empire typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities, and countries to the more powerful. The Bible is full of stories of empires rising, over-extending, and falling. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation states, and can marginalize or co-opt religious communities.

Human trafficking – The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people for the purpose of making money. Trafficking involves a process of using illicit means such as threat, use of force, or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability.

Ideology – An ideology can be thought of as a comprehensive vision, a “lens” or “filter” through which the world is viewed, and/or as a set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to its members. The purpose of an ideology is to promote a particular social, economic, or political model through a certain way of thinking about and understanding the world.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) – The international organization entrusted with overseeing the global financial system by monitoring exchange rates and balance of payments, as well as offering technical and financial assistance when asked. Many IMF policies have proven to be destructive of the people and economies of countries in the global South.

World Bank – Part of a group of financial institutions, the World Bank focuses on the reduction of global poverty and seeks to achieve this through the provision of low- or no-interest loans and grants to countries with little or no access to international credit markets. The World Bank (as a financial institution) also seeks to safeguard its own financial interests and has been criticized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments, people’s groups, and citizens for its structural adjustment programs (SAPs) which attempt to implement neo-liberal economic policies (i.e., deregulation and privatization) in the countries where the World Bank operates.

World Trade Organization (WTO) – The successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the WTO deals with the rules of trade between nations at a near-global level; it is responsible for negotiating and implementing new trade agreements, and is in charge of policing member countries’ adherence to all the WTO agreements, signed by the bulk of the world’s trading nations and ratified in their parliaments. The structure of the WTO allows the interests of the major industrialized countries of the global North to dominate the processes and agreements.

Liberalization – Liberalization is a relaxation of previous government regulations and protections which often occurs along with privatization. Liberalized and privatized public services may be dominated by just a few big companies, particularly in sectors with high capital costs, or high sunk cost, such as water, gas and electricity.

Neoliberalism/Neoliberal economics – In its dominant international use, neoliberalism refers to a political-economic philosophy that de-emphasizes or rejects government or other intervention in the economy; it would allow the market to operate without restraints or protections. In the U.S. and Canadian contexts neoliberal economics is more aligned with conservative and neoconservative political views than with liberal ones. Neoliberal economics focuses on free-market methods, fewer restrictions on business operations, and property rights, rather than human rights. It promotes the market as the primary engine of human economic activity, emphasizing competition and growth, and upholding individual self-interest over the common good. Neoliberal economic policies include privatization of services such as education, water, and health care; deregulation which often results in reduced rights and protections for workers and the environment; reductions in government spending on social programs, such as education, and erosions in

the safety net for the poor; the free flow of investments, products, and jobs (but typically not persons) across national borders without restraint; and increased trade.

Oppression - The negative outcome experienced by persons who are marginalized or dominated by those in power in a particular society or social group. Oppression is primarily used to describe how a certain group is being kept down by unjust use of force, authority, or societal norms; the term itself is derived from the notion of being "weighted down." Oppression is most commonly felt and expressed by a widespread, if unconscious, assumption that a certain group of people are inferior (i.e., persons of color or women). The Biblical prophets and Jesus preach frequently about bringing justice to the oppressed as integral to faith in God.

Privatization - The process of transforming property, businesses or natural resources (e.g., water) from public ownership or trust to private ownership and/or transferring the management of a service or activity from the government to the private sector. Corporate profits, not the good of the community or country, become the overriding concern.

Information from World Alliance of Reformed Churches