

The Accra Confession

Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth

The Accra Confession was adopted by the delegates of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana (2004), based on the theological conviction that the economic and environmental injustices of today's global economy require the Reformed family to respond as a matter of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Accra Confession calls upon Reformed Christians around the world to engage injustices in the world as an integral part of their churches' witness and mission.

Letter from Accra

From the delegates gathered from throughout the world in Accra, Ghana, at the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to the congregations of all those churches belonging to this fellowship, Greetings. We have met as 400 delegates in this council from July 30 to August 12 2004, worshipping, studying the Bible, deliberating on urgent issues facing God's world, and participating in the rich life of local churches in Ghana. We write to share with you what, on your behalf, we have discerned and experienced. Grace and peace to you from our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our most moving and memorable moments came from our visit to Elmina and Cape Coast, two "castles" on the Coast of Ghana that held those who had been captured into slavery, as they suffered in dungeons waiting for slave ships that would take them to unknown lands and destinies. Over brutal centuries, 15 million African slaves were transported to the Americas, and millions more were captured and died. On this trade in humans as commodities, wealth in Europe was built. Through their labour, sweat, suffering, intelligence and creativity, the wealth of the Americas was developed.

At the Elmina Castle, the Dutch merchants, soldiers, and Governor lived on the upper level, while the slaves were held in captivity one level below. We entered a room used as a church, with words from Psalm 132 on a sign still hanging above the door ("For the Lord has chosen Zion..."). And we imagined Reformed Christians worshipping their God while directly below them, right under their feet, those being sold into slavery languished in the chains and horror of those dungeons. For more than two centuries in that place this went on.

In angry bewilderment we thought, "How could their faith be so divided from life? How could they separate their spiritual experience from the torturous physical suffering directly beneath their feet? How could their faith be so blind?"

Some of us are descended from those slave traders and slave owners, and others of us are descendants of those who were enslaved. We shared responses of tears, silence, anger, and lamentation. Those who are Reformed Christians have always declared God's sovereignty over all life and all the earth. So how could these forbears of Reformed faith deny so blatantly what they believed so clearly?

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Yet, as we listened to the voices today from our global fellowship, we discovered the mortal danger of repeating the same sin of those whose blindness we decried. For today's world is divided between those who worship in comfortable contentment and those enslaved by the world's economic injustice and ecological destruction who still suffer and die.

We perceive that the world today lives under the shadow of an oppressive empire. By this we mean the gathered power of pervasive economic and political forces throughout the globe that reinforce the division between the rich and the poor. Millions of those in our congregations live daily in the midst of these realities. The economies of many of our countries are trapped in international debt and imposed financial demands that worsen the lives of the poorest. So many suffer! Each day, 24,000 people die because of hunger and malnutrition, and global trends show that wealth grows for the few while poverty increases for the many. Meanwhile, millions of others in our congregations live lives as inattentive to this suffering as those who worshipped God on the floor above slave dungeons.

In our discussions in Accra – indeed in the past seven years of reflection since we last met in General Council at Debrecen, Hungary – we have come to realize that this is not just another “issue” to be “addressed.” Rather, it goes to the heart of our confession of faith. How can we say that we believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord over all life, and not stand against all that denies the promise of fullness of life to the world?

If Jesus Christ is not Lord over all, he is not Lord at all. That is why we find in the Bible a constant criticism of idolatry, emphasized in our Reformed tradition. To declare faith in the one true God is to reject divided loyalties between God and Mammon, dethrone the false gods of wealth and power, and turn from false promises to the true God of life.

We know that this does not come easily for any of us. Yet our hope lies in confessing that the power of the resurrected Christ can overturn the idols and the modern gods that hold the world captive to injustice and ecological destruction.

Therefore, we invite you, in Reformed churches throughout the world, to take this stance of faith, standing against all that denies life and hope for millions,

as a concrete expression of our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, this is a grave and serious invitation. As those who have met on your behalf in Accra, we declare to you that the integrity of our Christian faith is now at stake, just as it was for those worshipping in the Elmina castle. Confessing our faith and giving our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ requires our opposition to all that denies the fullness of life to all those in our world so loved by God.

Such a confession also sends us forth with new eyes of faith into the world. Mission, it can be said, is embodied in the life of the church in the world. In Accra we recognized that living according to what we say we believe changes our understanding of mission today. We recalled that the church was born in a time of empire. God's Spirit called forth the church, in response to God's work in the world, as a new community bearing witness to a new global reality and opposing the false claims of earthly gods.

God's mission involves your congregation and each of ours in fresh and challenging ways today. How can we share the message and liberating love of Christ's life in those places where suffering and death seem to reign? This much we discovered for certain in Accra: more than ever, faithful mission today requires our connection – really it demands bonds of belonging – between one another as churches. The challenges we now face in proclaiming the Good News will simply overwhelm us if we confront them as individual churches alone.

In today's world the divisions between the North and the South, the rich and the poor, and the powerful and the powerless, grow sharper and seek to isolate us from one another. That's why mission requires us as churches to belong more deeply to one another, overcoming those divisions through the work of God's Spirit as an evidence of the hope that is offered to the world. In our inclusive fellowship here in Accra, we have experienced a taste of this hope and seek to share it with you.

In this council we have focused on current threats to life, especially economic neoliberalism and the arrogance of imperial power. Our churches in central and eastern Europe remind us that for long decades they suffered under the tyranny of another empire. The wounds of this past are not yet healed. We recognize the need for all of us – East and West – to work through this bleak

chapter of our history, and to ask whether Reformed churches in the West heard sufficiently the cry of their sisters and brothers in the East.

Being truly mutual and accountable is hard and even painful, testing the depth of our trust. It requires the vulnerability demonstrated in Jesus. But there is no other way for us to follow God's mission, and building unity for this purpose is one of the practical things the World Alliance of Reformed Churches can make possible.

But we discovered one more truth in Accra that we want to share. If confessing what we believe as Christians requires our spiritual and practical resistance to economic injustice as well as environmental destruction, then we need new depths of spirituality. This isn't mere political activism; we're being called to a spiritual engagement against evil, and for that we need our lives to be deeply rooted in the power of God's Spirit. To put it simply, we need, as never before, the transformation of our lives promised through Jesus Christ.

This spiritual challenge flows from the words found in John 10:10, where Jesus declares the promise "that all may have life in fullness". That biblical theme, in fact, wove itself through the work of the council during these days. Our Christian spirituality opens us to the presence and power of God in all the creation. Further, it draws us into ever-deeper community with one another. Deepening our spirituality can connect us with God's power for the healing of personal wounds, social scars, and political divisions.

We also realized more clearly than ever that such spiritual transformation and the community that it creates are only possible as the gifts of women and young people are freely exercised and liberated in our life together. We experienced a glimpse of this in our gathering, as both women and youth shared so richly in worship, Bible study, presentations to the council, and leadership roles, and we long for the spirituality that makes this possible in every one of our congregations.

Because we were in Accra, Ghana, we were blessed constantly with the spiritual vitality and power of the local churches that hosted and received us. The drums and songs that saturate the soul of the African church

permeated our worship. We marveled at offerings given with such dancing and joy from hearts so full of gratitude. Here we tasted a spirituality that seemed so whole, so worshipful, so connected in community, and so embracing of God's creation. It draws from the gifts of the culture and sings not only in these enchanting songs, but also in their daily lives, as their witness to the fullness of life in Christ.

As we entered the homes of our hosts on a weekend of visits to churches throughout Ghana and then were carried away by the power of their worship, our hearts were filled with hope and gratitude. We experienced the warmth of their hospitality and the power of God's Spirit to bring new life and community. And we knew this is the sign of the only power that can sustain us as we confess our faith in Christ, stand against the powers of evil that threaten life, and live in mission with the hope of fullness of life for all promised by our Lord.

We want you to join in the confession and covenant with one another we have made in Accra. As part of the fellowship of those churches throughout the globe that share in common the Reformed tradition of Christian faith, we long for our experience here to enrich and encourage your mission and ministry. We've included a liturgy that could enable you to share in worship the same confession, commitments, and promises that we have made here at this council. And we've also included an appendix that gives a summary of the many other urgent issues and concerns from around the globe that received our attention.

Our prayer for you is that God may reveal to you in fresh ways how our faith is deeply connected to all of life. May none of us ever live our faith insensitive to brutal suffering and indifferent to urgent cries from our world. May all of us know the power of God at work in our Lord Jesus Christ to overcome evil and offer to all the world life in the fullness intended by God.

And may the grace of God, the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and forever more.

*Accra, Ghana ,
August 12 2004*

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Glossary of terms used can be found at <http://www.pcusa.org/foodcrisis/glossary>

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.

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;
 - unrestrained competition, consumerism and the unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth are the best for the whole world;
 - 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.
9. 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.
 10. 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.

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. We see the dramatic convergence of the economic crisis with the integration of economic globalization and geo-politics 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

14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps 24.1).

18. 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.
19. 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).
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. 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.
23. 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.
24. 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.
25. 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).
26. 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.

27. 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.
28. 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).
29. 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.
30. Therefore we reject any attempt in the life of the church to separate justice and unity.
31. 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.
32. We commit ourselves to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God.
33. 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.
34. 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 move-ments 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).

Why does the church need the Accra Confession?

1. ***Justice is a matter of faith.*** The Accra Confession states that matters of economic and environmental justice are not only social, political, and moral issues: they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church. Being faithful to God's covenant requires that individual Christians and the churches take a stand against current economic and environmental injustices.
2. ***The unity of the church is critical.*** Unity is concerned with togetherness, however divisive the issues confronting the confessing body may be. While the complex realities of globalization have not led to a full consensus, the global Reformed family addresses the problematic nature of today's global economy in the Accra Confession.
3. ***The church stands in solidarity with persons who are suffering and struggling.*** Following the justice traditions of the biblical prophets and of Jesus in the Gospel narratives, the Accra Confession views the current world (dis)order by "looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people." It calls the churches and society to hear the cries of the people who suffer and the woundedness of creation itself, over-consumed and undervalued by the current global economy.

What is the World Alliance of Reformed Churches?

WARC, now the World Communion of Reformed Churches, is a worldwide movement working together for unity and fullness of life for all, within the member churches and in the wider context of a world that cries out for justice. A fellowship of more than 80 million Reformed Christians in nearly 250 churches in 100 plus countries, WCRC member churches are Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, and Waldensian churches with roots in the 16th-century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox, and others. WCRC has a small secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, and regional councils in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America.

WCRC Member Churches in North America and the Caribbean

Christian Reformed Church in North America,
Cumberland Presbyterian Church
Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America
Dominican Evangelical Church
Evangelical Presbyterian Church
Guyana Congregational Union
Guyana Presbyterian Church
Hungarian Reformed Church in America
Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada en Cuba
Korean Presbyterian Church in America

Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church
Presbyterian Church in Canada
Presbyterian Church in Grenada
Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbytery of Guyana
Reformed Church in America
United Church of Canada
United Church of Christ
United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

Glossary of Terms from Accra Confession

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

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 marginalizes 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.

Liberalization – Liberalization is a relaxation of previous government regulations and protections. It may occur along with privatization. Liberalized and privatized public services may be dominated by a few big companies, particularly in sectors with high capital or 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 promotes market operations without restraints or protections. Generally 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 unregulated trade.

Oppression – The negative outcome experienced by persons who are marginalized or dominated by the powerful within 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. 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.

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.

The story of the Accra Confession

The Accra Confession is the outcome of a 21-year-long process –

1989 – At the 1989 World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General Council in Seoul, Korea, “An Open Letter to the Children and Young People of the Planet” called upon WARC member churches to enter into a covenant for justice given “the threats to life in our age, for the sake of the whole creation, the future of all humanity and especially for the children and young people of the planet.”

1995 – The call was intensified when the African churches in Kitwe, Zambia, suggested to the Alliance that the current global economy be declared as antithetical to the Christian faith in a manner similar to the confessing churches’ historical stances against Nazism and apartheid.

1997 – The WARC General Council in Debrecen, Hungary called member churches to engage in “a committed process of recognition, education, and confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction.” The process became the *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth* and was implemented in regions of the world in partnership with the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation.

2004 – The 2004 General Council at Accra, Ghana, was a culminating point of the *Covenanting for Justice in*

the Economy and the Earth process. The churches from the global South in particular challenged the Reformed family, asking how long they would have to wait for a unified confession of faith against the harm done within the current global economy. While some churches from the global North were unwilling to take a doctrinal confessional stance, in the end there was consensus regarding the problematic nature of today’s global economy and the injustices it produces. Hence, the assembly reached a decision to respond in a confessional manner, that is, to take a faith stance regarding current global economic injustices and ecological destruction.

Though not a doctrinal confession like the Heidelberg Catechism or Westminster Confession, the Accra Confession challenges current economic doctrines with the traditional Reformed criticism of idols (i.e., Mammon, consumerism, the financial and speculative markets) that deny God’s life-giving sovereignty and defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable, and the whole of Creation from the fullness of life.

2009 – The North American Working Group for Covenanting for Justice developed “Globalization We Can Grasp” – an online curriculum based on the Accra Confession. <http://www.canaac.org/resources/accra-confession/>

Using the Accra Confession with your Congregation

The five-module curriculum, **Globalization We Can Grasp**, (posted at <http://www.canaac.org/resources/accra-confession>) offers a learning tool for North American churches to bring the *Accra Confession* to life. Through film, case stories, Bible studies, and prayer, the workshops help congregations engage a variety of issues related to global economic injustice and ecological degradation. The workshops are designed primarily for use in an adult education class or series of classes, though they also can be adapted for use with a youth

group and/or over the course of a day or weekend-long retreat.

Short of doing modules of the curriculum, congregations can use the following short discussion guides:

- Read the Accra Confession together and, at the end of a section or the document, look up some of the Bible verses and discuss the ones that are most applicable to your local (or regional) economic context. Which ones do you see as applicable to the

current global economic context? What Bible stories related to economic justice are missing in the Accra Confession?

- The Accra Confession is a faith statement that commits churches to “covenant in obedience to God’s will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships.” This covenant “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. In what ministries of economic and environmental justice-making are your congregation and/or community groups presently engaged? What are some of the economic or environmental injustices that your community or neighboring communities face?
- In the Bible, Jesus teaches us that that we cannot serve God and Mammon (Lk 16:13). The Accra

Confession calls us to reject today’s culture of rampant consumerism based on our faith in God.

Name some examples of consumerism that you see in your daily lives and in the world. How does consumerism keep you from fully loving yourself, others, and God and from caring for Creation? How might consumerism contribute to the suffering of other persons and creation?

- Numbers 17-36 of the Accra Confession are written in liturgical confessional form. Are there ways in which such statements of confession, belief, commitment, and praise might be incorporated into your congregation’s worship? The liturgy from the Trade Week of Action Resource may be helpful in putting together the worship service; go to www.tradeweek.org/typo3/en/worship.html.

Resources for Further Study

Books

Blank, Rebecca M. and William McGurn. *Is the Market Moral? A Dialogue on Religion, Economics, and Justice*. Washington: Brookings Institute, 2004.

Brubaker, Pamela K., Rebecca Todd Peters, and Laura A. Stivers, eds. *Justice in a Global Economy: Strategies for Home, Community, and World*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2006.

Denominational resources

Christian Reformed Church in North America – *Shalom Seekers: Living the Call to Do Justice*. www.crcjustice.org.

Presbyterian Church in Canada – *God is Our Refuge: Security in an Insecure World, part 1*. Report of the International Affairs Committee to 129th General Assembly, 2003. Acts and Proceedings, pp. 297-309. *God is Our Refuge: Security in an Insecure World, part 2*. Report of the International Affairs Committee to 130th General Assembly, 2004. Acts and Proceedings, pp. 310-324.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – *Just Globalization: Justice, Ownership, and Accountability*. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) PDS#OGA-06-090, 2006. www.pcusa.org/acswp or www.pcusa.org/oga

Reformed Church in America – *Globalization, Ethics, and the Earth*. Minutes of the General Synod/June 2005, pp. 344-364.

United Church of Christ – *A Faithful Response: Calling for a More Just, Humane Direction for Economic Globalization*. A Pronouncement by the General Synod XXIV, 2003. www.ucc.org/justice/issues/pdfs/A-Faithful-Response-Calling-for-a-More-Just-Humane-Direction-for-Economic-Globalization.pdf.

United Church of Canada – *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*. A Preliminary Report to the 39th General Council of the United Church of Canada, August 2006.

Learn more about:

- WCRC and Covenanting for Justice at www.warc.ch.
- The regional arm of WCRC in North America and the Caribbean, CANAAC (Caribbean and North American Area Council) at www.canaac.org.

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