The Accra Confession

COVENANTING FOR JUSTICE IN THE ECONOMY AND THE EARTH

Introduction - Greta Montoya Ortega

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.

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.

Why does the church need the Accra Confession?

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.

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.
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 under-valued by the current global economy.

The story of the Accra Confession

The Accra Confession is the outcome of a fifteen-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”.

The call was intensified in 1995 when the African churches at a consultation in Kirwe, 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 1997 WARC General Council in Debrecen, Hungary, called WARC member churches to engage in “a committed process of recognition, education, and confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction.” The process later became known as Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth and was implemented in the various 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 at Accra, 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 of the churches from the global North were not willing 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 injustice and ecological destruction.

**Biblical base**

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.

**Study Questions**

1. According to the text, what is the relation between justice and church?
2. Why is the current world economic order rejected in the text?
3. What is said about unity?

**Re-contextualizing Accra Confession**

Economic injustice in the world and the destruction of the environment are a reality that does not depend on whether we recognize it or not, even the name you want to identify that model, or global economic "order", its effects eventually hit the rich and the poor.

After nine years of the Assembly of the WARC in Accra, we can not say that the situations that gave rise to the call to confess our faith around the world economic order are changed, or upgraded but the opposite, which at that time appeared to us as the perfect economic order, the closest thing to God's kingdom as unsinkable, the only way for the development of peoples (the free market).

Today is presented as the most fragile, volatile, ambiguous, and full of uncertainties, all thanks to greed, avarice, and accumulation, product of dispossession and expropriation of wealth suffered by many caused by so few that subtle in some cases, violent in other, and with the
indifference of the states that incidentally lost its role. They've taken over the resources that
the earth produces.

The picture can be observed as follows:
The main and big banks both USA and European Union to avoid bankruptcies receive
multimillion injections of the state (our taxes) and still not come out of bankruptcy in which
they are (who is responsible?).

Large multinationals transferred the headquarters of its factories, from one country to another,
thus causing the loss of thousands of jobs, all with the excuse that is part of its effort to cut
spending billions worldwide. And so most of the multinationals see as the only solution to the
危机 staff cuts, in response to the decline in demand for their products. But who told these
gentlemen that humans are consumer machines.

And the big concern is that the “owners of this world” possessions are declining at a rapid pace
as their business every day lose value in the market.

This means that if the outlook is dark for those who have been enriched by the work of others,
what you can expect for that vast majority: poor expropriated and exploited.

That's why we believe that if in 2004 the assembly of the WARC considered relevant confess
our faith hearing the claims of brothers and sisters around the world and looking at the threat
to God's gift of creation, would be a mistake consider that confession played its role or its cycle
and that it is time to emphasize other issues, which we are sure would be of less relevance and
importance to the rest of the world. But also we would be like the system, creating slogans as
marketing to position our brand from period to period.

No, the Accra confession should occupy a central place in the agenda, today more than ever is
relevant and is a call to the churches to believe, confess, recognize and engage with the
difficult and prophetic task to interpret this confession, pointing out that it is a covenant we
have made in the search for justice in the economy and the land into the house of God.
Tasks are clearly defined in the various documents product of encounters in different parts of the world, our task is to emphasize them in our assemblies and local meetings.

It is true that the Accra confession of faith is not the best introduction to the WARC, if we present it as a means to raise funds, but when the voice of the prophets was well received by the status quo?

And speaking of fundraisers, most organizations and churches as well as multinationals complain that not enough resources; is that multinationals like churches need to establish priorities for resource management and awaken again in its members a sense of solidarity that seems to have no place in this world where everything is bought and sold. What happened to the gratuitousness of God's grace?

Re-contextualize Accra confession of faith is learning to read the signs of the times, is to understand that as churches we have a God-given purpose for this world, is once again believe that salvation comes from God and not of human beings, is understand that the economy is not out of the Kingdom of God, but the Kingdom of God establish economic relations differently to this model poses to us.

Questions

1 - What is our theological basis to commit as a church in the struggle for justice in the economy and the earth?

We have inherited this commitment from the Reformers and especially Calvin's theology on the economy. Calvin did not take the matter of economics as a social issue. He associated the economics with faith and ecclesiology (Body of Christ) and with the Pastoral Ministry. The Barman Declaration and Confession of Belhar and many other statements of faith have challenged the absolute powers seeking to take Sovereignty of God today. We see that economic globalization and neoliberal ideology are more threatening than other situations that preceded us in history. John Calvin developed a theology of the economy we can summarize in seven claims. Grace and love should be the spiritual foundation of economic activity.
1. Material goods and money are instruments of God's grace.
2. God has provided the material gifts for life.
3. The money can become Mammon unless under the control of God.
4. The human economy needs regulation because of the depravity of human nature.
5. The economy must serve life.
6. The economy must be a "solidarity economy" between the haves and the have-nots.
7. The economy must be "economy of friendship" with the poor.

2 - Is our commitment to the struggle for justice in the economy and the land only a social engagement or is in reality the missionary work of the church?

We often think that responsibility is only part of the church's social commitment. Of course that is part of the activity of the Church, but in a deeper way we can say that work is part of God's mission. Douglas Meek describes God as the Economist, not in the sense of the modern corporation, but in the sense that God cares for the house of God. Could it be that the churches take the commitment for covenant for justice and the economy as an essential part of the mission of God in our world?

3 - What are some ways the Accra Confession challenges the church regarding our understanding of worship in the context of neo-liberal economic globalization?

There are ways that churches can work to regain and deepen an understanding of spirituality that affirms a biblical understanding of economy and 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 neo-liberal economic globalization. The church is blessed with a vocation to regain and affirm a spirituality and view of worship to build an alternative vision for the economy.
Rescuing the Mission

We have learned from the Accra Confession: we have to achieve a transformative mission.

A. Rejecting - Say no to the forces of death and destruction.

B. Rebuilding - When working with God to establish life in its fullness

C. Rejoicing - As we celebrate the goodness of God.

The Accra Confession defines this relationship as the covenant, which has been initiated by God. Start a movement for a Pact for Justice, opens the door for all people to join in the struggle for justice of God in the economy and the earth. Accra Confession reminds us that this path will not be easy, so therefore we need the mutual solidarity. Through the encouragement and solidarity that mutually we share, we can increase our capacity, our strength and our courage to confront the principalities and powers of our time.

The main challenge of the Accra Confession for the churches of our time is to return to the true theological and biblical meaning of the activity of the economy (oikonomia), which had been distorted, even more had been contaminated by modern liberal economy.

Theological concepts such as trust, wealth, fidelity bonds, exchange, including business concept have been captured by the neoliberal economy. And it must be rescued by the churches. The neoliberal globalized economy, an economic system based primarily on individual accumulation of wealth and property, claims total and hegemonic control over all life, “demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation”.

The Accra Confession is a very clear statement that "in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is not faithful to God and causes people inevitable suffering and calls Mammon".

As churches we must reclaim the theological idea that God's economy is in direct contradiction to the current concept of neoliberal economics.