

f

BREAK THE CHAINS OF OPRESSION
AND THE YOKE OF INJUSTICE
AND LET THE OPRESSED GO FREE

Europe Covenanting for Justice

Edited by
Martina Wasserloos-Strunk

In cooperation with
Martin Engels

On behalf of
The World Alliance of Reformed Churches –
The Communion of Reformed Churches in Europe

© 2010

foedus-verlag

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Umschlaggestaltung und Lay-out-Entwurf: Gisela Blumentritt, Grafik-Design DTP

Konzept

Satz: Breklumer Print-Service

Printed in Germany/USA

ISBN 3-938180-19-6

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

CONTENTS

Preface	
There is No Unjust Communion in Christ	7
<i>Bishop Gusztáv Bölskei</i>	
Justice on the Horizon	10
<i>Martina Wasserloos-Strunk</i>	
Chapter 1	
Preaching on Justice: The Question of the Homiletic Implementation of the Accra Confession	13
<i>Peter Bukowski</i>	
Chapter 2	
Commitment after Accra: In Europe	23
<i>Jan Gerd Heetderks</i>	
Chapter 3	
Europe's Discussion about Justice: Problems – Perspectives – Visions	29
<i>Douwe Visser</i>	
Chapter 4	
Democracy – A Matter of Choice!?	37
<i>Martina Wasserloos-Strunk</i>	
Chapter 5	
Europe's Road to Justice – The Project: „Europe Covenanting for Justice“	51
<i>Martin Engels</i>	
Chapter 6	
Theology of Hope in Times of Globalization	57
<i>Sjaak van't Kruis</i>	
Chapter 7	
Empire - Provocation with a Perspective	69
<i>Martina Wasserloos-Strunk</i>	
Chapter 8	
Climate Justice and Tax Justice: Key for Global Ethics	81
<i>Christoph Stückelberger</i>	
Chapter 9	
The Liturgy of Holy Communion and Issues of Justice	97
<i>Lindsay Schluter</i>	

CONTENTS

Chapter 10	
Europe Covenanting for Justice – The Projects	111
<i>Martin Engels</i>	
Chapter 11	
The Joint Globalisation-Project – Dialogue on Basic Issues Africa and the Reformed Church in Germany	113
<i>Ahlerich Ostendorp</i>	
Dreaming a Different World Together (Draft)	118
<i>Joint Declaration of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Evangelical Reformed Church, Germany</i>	
The Further Development of the Concept of Empire – a Help to Reading	122
<i>Peter Bukowski</i>	
Chapter 12	
In the Middle of Europe: Fighting the Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children in the Czech-German Border Region	127
<i>A Project of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren (ECCB) and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)</i>	
Chapter 13	
Hope in God’s Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change	147
<i>A Report of a Joint Working Group on Climate Change and Theology Convened by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church</i>	
Chapter 14	
„Searching For What is Best For The City“	171
<i>Interview with Maria Bonafede Moderator of the Waldensian Church Italy</i>	
Chapter 15	
Learning Justice - The World is Getting Smaller – Think Large!	175
<i>Accra and the Millennium Goals with Children and Youth</i>	
Chapter 16	
Globalance - Christian Perspectives on Globalisation with a Human Face	187
<i>Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches</i>	
Chapter 17	
„Don’t Leave Us Hanging!“ – Against Child Poverty	193
<i>Campaign by the Evangelical Church of Westphalia Alfred Buss</i>	

There is No Unjust Communion in Christ

Bishop Gusztáv Bölcseki, Budapest, Hungary
President WARC-Europe

Christian faith creates an open space for responsible action in the perspective of hope in God's coming kingdom. This is a basic insight which Christian communities have had to learn throughout their histories in different places around the globe.

And this is our faith based responsibility which we failed to fulfil so many times in the past. When hope fades, God's people loose direction. This is the case in those situations when we transform the good news into human action – but also in times when we fail to hear that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Rom 8:22).

Paul reminds us that “for in hope we were saved.” (Rom 8:24) Based in this hope is the freedom of Christians who are called to share in Christ's mission and as partakers in His anointing, thus “as kings fight with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life” (Heidelberg Catechism 32)

We are called to become a community regarding and shaping the “penultimate in the light of the ultimate” (Bonhoeffer). We are called to discern our common path in the apparent alternative of radical rejection of the world and accepting its compromise rejecting the ultimate. We shouldn't confuse but we mustn't separate the two. In Christian awareness we have to discern together our hope-based responsibility, with a free and good conscience, based on our liberation in Christ. In Him we have communion, therefore we are called to build a just communion.

In Accra we recognized again that “we are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself.” In our covenanting process we are about to take a step forward together. “In our continuing journey as people of faith in a God of life toward the June 2010 Uniting General Council, under the theme Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace (Ephesians 4:3), we are reminded that the reign of God calls us into hope for justice, peace, wellness,

harmony and unity (Titus 3:13-14). Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth is a testimony to just communion with God and God's creation." (Message of the Johannesburg consultation)

The reign of God calls us into hope for justice in different contexts. But in a global world these different circumstances, I would say, the different regimes can have a common agenda: they want us to believe that they are exclusive and pretend to be without alternative. In Accra we rejected this claim of 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". As Christians we know, that no paradigm, regime or power created by men can raise such claim, "which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule" (Accra 19) In regard to the reign of God we know, that "the present form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31) - including the neo-liberal regime. We are thus free to raise our voice and set clear signs in action.

In all this we have to consider that our lives are limited, determined by necessities which we cannot by-pass. We cannot stop the world passing away. But the necessity isn't an excuse for structural evils imposed by self-set limits of men. In 2004 we asked for reactions to the text adopted in Accra and published them in a special volume of our church monthly. I remember the one written by a protestant professor of economics, minister in the first free elected government in Hungary after the political changes. He wrote that the global market economy and the modern technology together were dangerous because they multiply the effects of those human sins, wickedness and mistakes which always existed. "If there is an empire, it is after all to find in the hearts of the citizens of the developed and rich countries. Thousands of toll-keepers of consumerism can only prosper, because there are millions of those dependent on consumption".

In this sense we recognized the neo-liberal capitalism as such a structural evil and we dedicated ourselves to fight against it. But we also confessed our sins, being part of the culture of consumption.

Let us remind the basic aspects of the being of the Church: koinonia, martyria and diakonia. It means, Christian witness creates and is based in communion with the Triune God and with each other, and is inseparably bound together with the responsibility for God's creation. Therefore action for justice within the church and beyond (should be) is a natural part of the community created and led by Christ. It belongs to our every day life, especially as Reformed people.

Let us remember: there should be no unjust communion Christ!

We owe thanks to those who contributed to and edited this book, which contains – pars pro toto – examples of thoughts and actions, of common witness in confessing and worshipping and covenanting in action of future European member churches of World Communion of the Reformed Churches. Thank to God, this is only a selection of the abundant every day life of the Churches enriched with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The book is designed to be a helpful tool in our discernment process in Grand Rapids, in giving an account of ideas and endeavours of the WARC member churches in Europe, which “want to be part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches after June 2010 and they want as such to be part of a Communion of Churches that sees the obedience to the call to justice as a deep part of its faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” (Douwe Visser)

I close this preface with a prayer, known as the serenity prayer, in the hope that this European contribution to the covenanting process will help us in making those differences and wise decisions in Grand Rapids. For doing so, we definitely need the wisdom granted by God which enables us to respond together to God’s salvation in a clear and accountable way, confessing and acting together as communion.

*God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
The courage to change the things that I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

Gusztáv Bölcskei (1952) is Bishop of the Reformed Church District Tiszántúl and Head of the General Synod of the Reformed Church of Hungary. He worked as a Pastor and Professor for Social Ethics in Reformed Theological Academy of Debrecen. He is currently the President of WARC-Europe.

Justice on the Horizon

Martina Wasserloos-Strunk

In the context of the reformed churches in Europe the theme of justice is not new. However, the question of the conditions of a world that is “drawing together”, and of the structures provoking an urgent cry for justice and sharing in the globalised world, were never so emphatically posed and so forcibly placed on the agenda of the reformed churches as at the General Assembly of the World Reformed Alliance in 2004 in Accra under the theme

“That all may have life in its fullness!” (John 10:10).

The discussions in Accra were dominated by the profound conviction and the firm belief that God has given us a world in which “there is enough for all”.

“Life in fullness”: what does that mean? Is it “enough to live on”? Is it an “abundance” of material goods? Is it an “even more”, a “more than enough”? Is life in fullness a pious hope for the beyond, or does there already here and now spring from this promise the challenge to distribute justly the many goods entrusted to us, to uncover structures of injustice and to name them? And does not the promise of “a life in fullness” involve at the same time the commission to create conditions diametrically opposed to the actually existing system of economic injustice?

Fullness for all? What could that mean in a globalised world? That all the children in Lesotho can go to school? That everyone in Mumbai has more than a handful of rice a day? That there would be a right to have a second child in China? That all full-time employees in Germany would earn enough to finance their living costs? That children in the rich countries of Europe would not become destitute? Is “fullness for all” really “just” a material category and not rather from the very start a spiritual issue and a matter of our confession of faith in the God of the poor?

What do we need, what can we, what must we do, how can we testify to the gracious pledge from the Gospel of John which promises us fullness for all?

John Calvin put plainly before our eyes what parameters for justice, what a vision of fullness for all should be the foundation for our confession:

“When there is no fellow-feeling for the poor,” he wrote, “who are tortured, bait-

ed, stripped bare, when there is no mercy, then everything else that we do finds only disgust with God; he rejects everything in which human sympathy is lacking for those who are in need and who are not helped in their need.”¹

Goods and property, so we have learnt in the Calvin Year, are not bad *of themselves*. But they are a great challenge, for as Calvin says: property means that something belongs to God. So our possessions are only entrusted to us and bring great responsibility with them.

“Only those make a proper use of these gifts of grace,” says the Reformer, “who freely and generously share them with others.”²

The book lying before you is a collection of theoretical reflections on the various aspects of the process of “Covenanting for Justice” since the Accra General Assembly, and on the situation of the reformed churches in Europe and the responsibility falling to them, as well as a – necessarily selective – presentation of various projects of the European sister churches.

The authors reflect on the conflicts and confusions which can arise through a globalisation oriented solely towards the multiplication of capital, and develop approaches to solutions which have in view a world in which there is “enough for all”. With this they mirror at the same time the actual lines of discussion in the various European churches.

The great number of activities is impressive in the global context – and also shows that the negative consequences of globalisation are coming to be felt by people in Europe on a scale unsuspected only a few years ago.

Homeless children, impoverished mothers and fathers, women transported and forced to prostitution – these too are realities in a wealthy Europe

It is becoming clear that the reformed churches have on their agenda the question of how the structures of the globalised world can be more justly shaped and the confession of faith in the God who promises us fullness for all be made visible in concrete structures of action – even if the Declaration of Accra did not develop the same radiant power for all.

“That all have life in its fullness...” – the motto of the 24th General Assembly of

1 Institute III, 19, 20.

2 Institute III, 7, 5.

PREFACE

the World Reformed Alliance in Accra is the promise which when applied to our thought and action in the globalised world faces us with great challenges.

Action in the churches to enable participation, responsible dealing with the goods entrusted to us in the service of others, engagement in the political sphere - these are all foundational for the action of the European reformed churches to this end.