



## **Lukas Vischer:**

### **The Legacy of John Calvin**

### **Some actions for the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

#### **1. Place and Date of Publication**

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the John Knox International Reformed Center (ed.), Geneva 2008. Lukas Vischer is the unofficial author of the booklet (cf. Foreword and Editor's remarks).

#### **2. Historical Context**

John Calvin's 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009 (\*July 10, 1509) offered a good occasion to search his legacy for sources of inspiration for Christians and churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In collaboration with the John Knox Center in Geneva, Lukas Vischer organised two international consultations:

- November 3-7, 2004: "Calvin's Social and Economic Thought"
- April 15-19, 2007: "Why and how do we celebrate the Legacy of John Calvin?"

The discussions concentrated on two issues: "the quest for communion" and "social justice in a time of environmental threats." The booklet on hand which Lukas Vischer initiated in 2007 and which he compiled in cooperation with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches leadership, deals with both aspects. The author departed this life a few months before the publication (†March 11, 2008). So, in a way, this booklet has become his legacy as well.

#### **3. Summary**

1. "Making manifest the gift of communion" deals with Calvin on the unity of the church: the church as mother of all believers, *Pia Conspiratio*, the witness of reconciliation in a world torn apart, and – last not least – the divisions within the "family of Reformed churches" today.

2. "Covenanting for Justice" looks into Calvin's call to social justice and respect for God's creation. The Accra Confession (World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2004) articulates a Reformed understanding of God's demands in the areas of economic justice and care of creation.

3. "Addressing violence and destruction in times of war and armed conflict" deals with Calvin's warning against violence and war, with mercenary service and the call for restraint, as well as with the sanctity of life and the protection of the environment in times of war.

The "What can be done?" sections at the end of each chapter propose concrete actions to be implemented in the readers' communities.

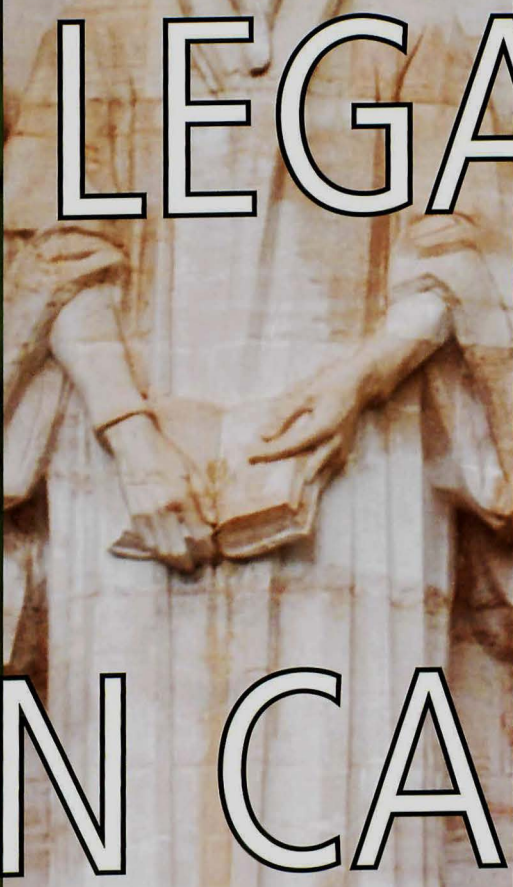
Appendix 1 recalls the stories of the Reformation Monument and of the Michael Servet Memorial in Geneva which stands for the dark side of the Reformation.

Appendix 2 recommends some companies providing compensation of CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions.

#### **4. Editor's Remarks**

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The World Alliance of Reformed Churches & The John Knox International Reformed Center



# THE LEGACY OF JOHN CALVIN

Some actions for the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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Published by

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches & The John Knox International Reformed Center

THE LEGACY OF JOHN CALVIN  
Some actions for the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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# Foreword

June 10, 2009, marks the 500<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the birth of Jean Calvin – known in the Anglophone world as John Calvin. Born in Noyon, France, on July 10, 1509, John Calvin has had an impact that reaches far beyond Geneva, Switzerland, where he gave most of his life ministry, and France, his native land.

As we celebrate this anniversary, we are well aware that John Calvin inspired a movement that had no tolerance for placing a human being on a pedestal for reverence. A commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth done in a manner that simply glorifies one human being, John Calvin, would be against his principles, and if he were alive, he would be totally against it.

It is therefore for this reason that this book seeks to draw readers into the kinds of actions that the Calvin legacy inspires Christians living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to engage in.

This project is undertaken by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the John Knox International Reformed Center in Geneva as a resource for Reformed churches and others to engage in life-giving actions consistent with the values of the reign of God as proclaimed by John Calvin.

Both WARC and the John Knox International Reformed Center offer this resource in gratitude to God. We are especially grateful for the one who initiated the project, Dr. Lukas Vischer. In the year 2007, Lukas Vischer suggested to WARC that a project of this kind could be a major contribution to how churches and Christians could use the Calvin 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary jubilee year to make a difference in the world. The WARC Executive Committee enthusiastically embraced this idea. A similar response was received from the John Knox International Reformed Center. Thus the project began. When this project was initiated in 2007, there was no reason to think that the one who initiated it would depart this life just a few months before its publication. Sadly, Lukas left this world in March 2008. It is appropriate to give thanks to God for his life and for the tireless contributions that Lukas has made to the Reformed family and the ecumenical movement.

The main research into Calvin's works, from which we can lift up insights that inform life-giving action in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was done by Lukas Vischer. Lukas worked very closely with the WARC leadership to come up with the text now before us. So committed was Lukas that even five days before his death an editorial meeting was held in his home to put the final touches to this work. That meeting was attended by leaders from both WARC and the John Knox International Reformed Center.

As this book is used, we implore readers to pause at this point and give thanks for the life of Lukas Vischer. Lukas shared his life ministry with Barbara, his wife. She has continued to inspire this project.

Among other things she helped provide the list of credible companies that provide Carbon compensation schemes. We are very grateful to Barbara Vischer.

May this book inspire you to make a difference in your part of the world.

Setri Nyomi  
General Secretary  
World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Cyril Ritchie  
President  
John Knox International Reformed Center



# Introduction

How do we celebrate the birthday of a person who did not want to draw attention to himself – especially since it has been centuries since he lived? The last thing John Calvin would have wanted is that after his death he would be an object of veneration. His life and ministry were focused on glorifying God, and he had nothing but disdain for any attempt to elevate any human being.

It is for this reason that in commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Calvin, the Reformed family is focusing on gratitude to God for the ideas, sermons and actions of Calvin which made an impact in his lifetime and continue to inspire humanity today. It is gratitude to God that leads us to select some of those key ideas around three themes to share with the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The three themes chosen, “Making manifest the gift of communion”, “Covenanting for justice” and “Addressing violence and destruction in times of war and armed conflict”, are issues around which John Calvin wrote and preached passionately. They are living issues for the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Each of these themes is covered by a chapter in this book.

There exists an urgency around each of these issues; we cannot read these words simply in order to praise John Calvin for his thoughts or to admire how their

authors put together modern-day situations in the light of Calvin’s works. That would indeed represent a limited vision of seeking to simply venerate the words of a human being – John Calvin. His words and the 21<sup>st</sup> century analyses are put together in such a manner to point to the fact that God who has spoken throughout history continues to speak to us today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And God’s messages are urgent – calling us to be transformed and to be agents of transformation.

The three chapters have a similar structure: this book on Calvin does not simply limit its scope to “a book about Calvin”; we have intentionally made it a book in which John Calvin “speaks” to us directly. Each chapter begins with several direct quotations from John Calvin on the theme treated. In this way, the book includes Calvin’s direct thoughts on the issue discussed. The quotes are then followed by an analysis and discussion of the issues in the light of the words of Calvin and modern-day challenges and situations. This is done in a manner consistent with Reformed theological reflection.

This is a book that calls for action. Therefore, each chapter concludes with some implications for churches and Christians today. This is the “What can be done?” section of each chapter.

The best celebration that we can have to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of John Calvin is in a renewed commitment to be God’s agents of transformation. We therefore urge all to create opportunities for discussing the material in this book in congregations, theological institutions and other forums. Please pay particular attention



to the “What can be done?” sections at the end of each chapter. The lists are not exhaustive. Feel free to add to the actions you and others can implement in your communities.

It is our hope that, starting from Reformation Day 2008 until the end of the Calvin jubilee year (2009), churches and theological institutions will set apart some time for such discussions as contextually appropriate. In some cases, a weekly study group could be formed in congregations. In others, a week or a month could be set aside for more intense discussions. One could also use this book as a resource for sermon ideas. While it is meant for the Calvin jubilee year, the material in it is not time bound. Therefore it can be used by this generation and generations yet to come in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

In the appendices, we also have some resources that could be helpful as you contemplate what you can do. The first is on the Reformation monument in Geneva. The second has some suggestions for carbon replacement schemes. The third is the Accra Confession developed by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The fourth is a 1555 sermon by John Calvin.

Dr. Cyril Ritchie of the John Knox International Reformed Center in Geneva and I repeat our gratitude to Lukas Vischer for initiating this project. We are also very thankful to those who contributed to making this book a reality. Notable among them are WARC President Clifton Kirkpatrick, Vice President Ofelia Ortega, and colleagues, Kathy Reeves, Adolfo Ham, Barbara Robra, Hartmut

Lucke, Sally Redondo, John Asling, Penny Blachut and Franziska Surber. We are also very grateful to *Fondation pour la promotion de l’unité et du témoignage des églises réformées* as well as the staff of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the John Knox International Reformed Center in Geneva.

We would like to receive some feedback from you. Please send a note to

warc@warc.ch

or to

welcome@johnknox.ch.

On behalf of the John Knox International Reformed Center and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, we offer this volume to you for discussion and action. Let us make the Calvin jubilee a time of commitment to action for life in fullness for all.

Setri Nyomi  
WARC General Secretary



I.

Making manifest  
the gift of communion



# Calvin on the unity of the Church

For Calvin the church and its unity was a central (key) concern. The fourth part of his Institutes is devoted to this theme. In his eyes it is essential for all believers in Christ to be part of the church and to contribute to its life. Let us listen to five selected texts which illustrate his views on the subject.

## The church – mother of all believers

But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title “mother” how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh we become like angels. (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, 1,4).

## Christ cannot be divided

Each time we read the word “one”, let us be reminded that it is used emphatically. Christ cannot

be divided. Faith cannot be rent. There are not various baptisms, but one, which is common to all. God cannot be torn into different parts. It cannot but be our duty to cherish holy unity, which is bound by so many ties. Faith and baptism, and God the Father and Christ, ought to unite us, so as almost to become one human being (Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians 4.5, *Calvini Opera* (CO) LI, 191).

## Pia Conspiratio

If we want to prove our obedience to our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, then we must bind ourselves in a *pia conspiratio* (*Pious conspiracy*) and cultivate peace among ourselves (Preface to the Catechism and the Confession of Faith, 1538, CO V, 321).

## One and the same church throughout the world

And there shall be one fold and one shepherd. That is, that all the children of God may be gathered and united into one body; as we acknowledge that there is one holy universal church, and there must be one body with one head. There is one God, says Paul, one faith, one baptism. Therefore we ought to be one, as we are called into one hope (Ephesians 4.5). Now though this flock appears to be divided into different folds, yet they are kept within enclosures which are common to all believers who are scattered throughout the whole world: because the same word is preached to all, they use the same sacraments, they have the same order of prayer, and everything that belongs to the profession of faith (Commentary on the Gospel according to John 10.16, CO XLVII, 387).



## The unity of the church – witness of reconciliation in a world torn apart

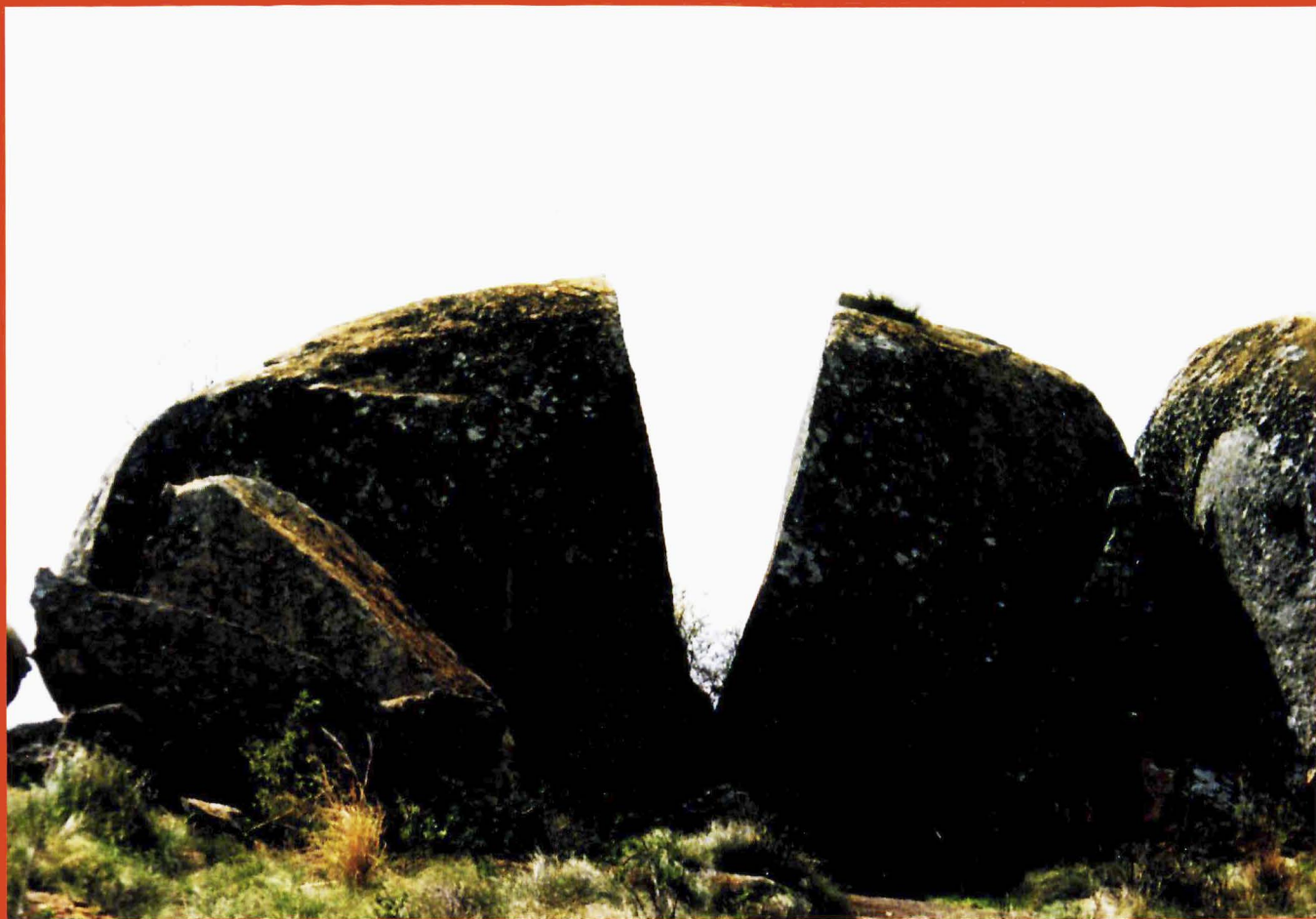
*That all may be one.* He again lays down the end of our happiness as consisting in unity, and justly; for the ruin of the human race is, that, having been alienated from God, it is also broken and scattered in itself. The restoration of it, therefore, on the contrary, consists in its being properly united in one body, as Paul declares the perfection of the Church to consist in believers being joined together in one spirit, and says that apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors, were given, that they might edify and restore the body of Christ, till it came to the unity of faith; and therefore he exhorts believers to grow into Christ, who is the head, from whom the whole body joined together, and connected by every bond of supply, according to the operation in the measure of every part, makes increase of it to edification. Wherefore, whenever Christ speaks about unity, let us remember how basely and shockingly, when separated from him, the world is scattered; and, next, let us learn that the commencement of a blessed life is, that we be all governed, and that we all live, by the Spirit of Christ alone (Commentary on the Gospel according to John 17.21, CO XLVII, 387).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more details cf. Lukas Vischer, *Pia conspiratio*, Calvin on the Unity of Christ's Church, Geneva (John Knox Series 12)

Today's divisions

Some deeper reasons  
for this trend  
towards fragmentation



# Today's divisions

The family of Reformed churches is deeply divided. Even the appropriateness of the term family can be questioned. Reformed churches are present all over the world but in almost all countries several churches have come into existence. Even at the international level several associations of Reformed churches have come into existence. Why have these divisions occurred? The reasons are, of course, as numerous as the divisions themselves; every division has its own history and profile.

In many cases disagreement about doctrine and order, about spiritual and ethical issues or political orientation has been the cause of separation. The majority of Reformed divisions originate, at least ostensibly, in disputes of this nature. But in most cases several factors are involved at the same time. In many cases, on the face of things the disagreement seems to concern a theological question, but in reality political or material interests are at work in the background. Often enough, theology serves to cover much less noble motives! Not infrequently divisions can also be traced to personal ambitions of strong personalities and disputes about property. Lust for leadership is one of the most formidable obstacles to the unity of the church.

Apart from divisions, there are other causes for the proliferation of Reformed churches. In many

countries, especially in North America and the Global South, migration and mission are responsible for the proliferation of Reformed churches. The horizon of Reformed churches tends to be bound by the national context. They feel, argue, decide and act as national churches. So, when members of one church migrate to another country it seems quite natural to them to found a church "in their own image". To take the example of the United States, a good many of the different Reformed churches there go back to the arrival of immigrants from different backgrounds - Scots, Dutch, German, and more recently, Hungarian, Korean and Chinese. Although they all share the same Reformed tradition, they are often not able, even in the second and third generation, to come together in one Reformed church.

A similar phenomenon applies to the missionary movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In many countries it led to the founding of several Reformed churches. Because each sending church carried out "its own" mission separately, the churches, which sprang up, also remained separate. Nigeria and Mozambique are good examples. The unity, which might have been achieved without too much difficulty in the early days of missionary activities, has meanwhile become practically impossible. Now that each of the Reformed churches has developed its own history, they have a long way to go if they are to come together. "Planting splits" through mission continues today.



# Some deeper reasons for this trend towards fragmentation

Why is it that Reformed churches so easily fall prey to the temptation of division? It cannot simply be a matter of outside circumstances. Out of the many possible reasons, only two are given here.

## The need for a discipline of communion

The first reason may lie in Reformed communities not taking a serious enough view of the injunction to make the efforts necessary to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4.3). Where this is not taken seriously, it leads to a distorted understanding of the church. The great discovery of the Reformation - that salvation is granted by grace to all who believe in their hearts and confess God's love - went hand in hand with a radical criticism of the medieval church. Any claim by the church to be the mediator of God's gracious presence was emphatically called into question. The liberating message of the Reformation could therefore easily lead to a feeling that fellowship follows automatically from genuine faith in Christ. The communion of the church was seen as part of the *response* to God's gift of grace.

The missing link that needs to be stressed is that unity and fellowship are *parts* of God's gift - and must be cherished, cultivated and cared for by the members of the church. The body can only develop if the individual parts are prepared to be incorporated into the whole. The discipleship of Christ includes a "discipline of communion".

## A new commitment to the universal church

A second important reason for division lies in the inadequate understanding of the universal nature of the church that many in Reformed communities have. Those who have this tend to emphasize unilaterally the significance of the local church in opposition to the linkages with the one church of Christ. They often tend to interpret such biblical passages as "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" as support for their stance. Such Reformed churches have thus placed great importance on the authority of the local church. This emphasis has obvious strengths. It leads to a strong sense of responsibility and participation in the local church. But it has a blind sight and forgets that the witness required from us presupposes a fellowship which cuts across the boundaries between people, nations, languages, races and classes - not just as a pious wish but in practice.

The words of the creed "I believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church" need to be fleshed out. The "theology of the local church" needs to be supplemented by a "theology of the universal church". To bear a credible witness in today's world, Reformed churches need to accept a new commitment to one another at the world level.

How can the gift of communion  
be made more manifest?







# How can the gift of communion be made more manifest?

There are promising signs. In several countries new initiatives towards unity are under way. Some Reformed churches have united in recent times. Two world bodies – the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council – have begun a journey towards unity. This unity, which will be celebrated in 2010, will be a major contribution to Christian unity and a reversal of the trend towards fragmentation.

The anniversary of Calvin's birth provides many opportunities to strengthen the movement towards more visible unity.

Calvin had much value for the unity of the church. We need to recall Calvin's words that "Faith and baptism, and God the Father and Christ, ought to unite us, so as almost to become one human being". This is a strong statement. We cannot divide the body of Christ.

In addition, we can revisit our attitude towards the marks of a true church. In his *Institutes* Calvin stated:

"Wherever we see the Word of God rightly preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."<sup>2</sup> In Reformed worship the emphasis is on the preaching of the word. However, Calvin's thoughts on Baptism and Eucharist can also be resources for renewal consistent with being Reformed.

André Biéler pointed out that, for Calvin "Through baptism a person discovers that he or she is not only an individual with a given name who is loved and sustained by God, but is also a social being called on to fulfil his or her personality in communication with others. And the nature of the true life in community for which individuals are destined, and for which they are created, is revealed to them by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper."<sup>3</sup> Biéler quotes from the *Institutes* (Vol. IV, Chapter XV, § 6, 13, 15). We belong together as people who have been baptized and share in the same communion.

Calvin also noted that "Baptism serves as our confession ... it is the mark by which we publicly profess that we wish to be reckoned God's people; by which we testify that we agree in worshipping the same God, in one religion with all Christians, by which we finally openly affirm our faith" (*Institutes* Vol. IV, Chapter 15, § 13). Being baptized is thus an affirmation that we belong to one communion of faith.

These views of baptism ought to stimulate Reformed commitment to unity and increased *koinonia*. Similar inspiration can be received by revisiting Reformed attitudes to the Holy Communion.



In many churches, the celebration of the Eucharist occurs only a few times a year. Is this a sign that Reformed churches are rightly administering the sacraments? The regular celebration of the Lord's Supper is an essential feature of the church. Calvin was aware of this. He wrote that the Lord's Supper "could have been administered most becomingly if it were set before the church often, and at least once a week".<sup>4</sup> The Lord's Supper, as the visible sign of Christ's presence, reminds people that the communion of the church is a gift to be recognized by the members of the body. It has been there long before we became integrated into it and cannot be put at stake on account of personal opinions, interests and visions. The questions to be raised include: Can the frequency of celebrating the Holy Communion contribute to a stronger feeling of unity among Reformed churches?

We can reflect on the frequency of celebrating the Holy Communion without compromising on the strong emphasis on the word of God rightly preached. The right preaching and teaching of the word of God will lead to exposing the faulty hermeneutics from which prosperity gospels have emerged, and will strengthen Reformed commitment to God's demands on us.

The 24<sup>th</sup> General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches said about the Eucharist: "This is an aspect of our worship that can most powerfully equip us to resist, celebrate and feel for others in the midst of everything we face. How can we remember Jesus at the table, on that night, with those disciples, and not be inspired to seek fullness of life? Far from allowing communion to divide us, even within

the Reformed tradition, we see it calling us into a passionate, generous and joyful way of life together".<sup>5</sup>

The gift of communion can also be celebrated as we recognize and honour God's *charismata* to women and men. In her book, *Un Ferment dans L'Eglise Universelle*, Jane Dempsey Douglass states that Calvin not only emphasized that every single human being is made in God's image. It is out of this conviction that all humankind is made in God's image that he interprets 1 Corinthians 11.7.<sup>6</sup> In this interpretation, Calvin states that women's subordinate role is not acceptable in the areas of human order, in the political order or in marriage (CO 49, 472-475). To Calvin, women, like men are fully made in God's image and regenerated in the Holy Spirit. At the end of time in the Kingdom of God, there will be neither feminine nor masculine, nor class distinctions between the rich and the poor (CO 46, 728 cf. CO XXIII, 27). Thus when Reformed Christians take a stand for gender justice, it is consistent with our understanding of key Christian principles.

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<sup>2</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Chapter 4, § 1.9

<sup>3</sup> André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, p.238, English translation edited by Edward Dommen published by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches in 2005. The original of André Biéler's book is *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin*, p.271

<sup>4</sup> *Institutes*, Chapter 4, § 17, 43

<sup>5</sup> Accra, 2004: Proceedings of the 24<sup>th</sup> General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, p.172

<sup>6</sup> Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Ce qui demeure vivant dans la doctrine calvinienne", an article in *La Réforme: Un Ferment dans L'Eglise Universelle*, edited by Henry Mottu (Labor et Fides), pp.72-73

# What can be done?

The statements of Calvin quoted at the beginning of this chapter are only a few of his writings that demonstrate his commitment to Christian unity and greater communion in the church. All these call for Reformed Christians to develop a discipline of the church. The following are a few examples of what we can do as we celebrate the Calvin jubilee:

- ◆ At all levels of life in the church the theme of communion needs to be addressed. Accepting divisions and fragmentation must be questioned. Churches can make the issues of unity or lack of it a theme of debate in congregations, presbyteries, classes or synods.
- ◆ Churches can raise the question of the frequency of the celebration of the Lord's Supper in their congregations.
- ◆ Make the Calvin anniversary year the year to make contacts with other Reformed churches in your country. Get to know the other Reformed churches in your community and consider new mission ventures together.
- ◆ Express solidarity among the Reformed churches by supporting the witness of other Reformed churches at home and throughout the world.
- ◆ Pray for one another. Calvin wrote: "Now from this we are to understand the general doctrine that before we can be ready to pray as we ought we must have this fellowship which God commands us, and this union: for he does not want to hear each one of us separately, but wants there to be a melody resounding in the mouths of all, even if each one speaks, even if each be in his separate place and we pray to God in secret, nevertheless if our accord is to reach to heaven then we must all of us say in love and in truth, Our Father: the word "Our" must so bind us and unite us that there is but one voice, as though there were but one heart and one spirit ... (Sermon XVI on the first Letter to Timothy 2.8, CO LIII 191-192).
- ◆ Be more faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ in celebrating the Eucharist. 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 indicates a clear connection between the Eucharist and social matters; when we have full bellies "it is not the Lord's Supper that we are eating" (v.20) and when there are hungry people among us "we do not respect the community of God" (v.22) (The Jerusalem Bible).







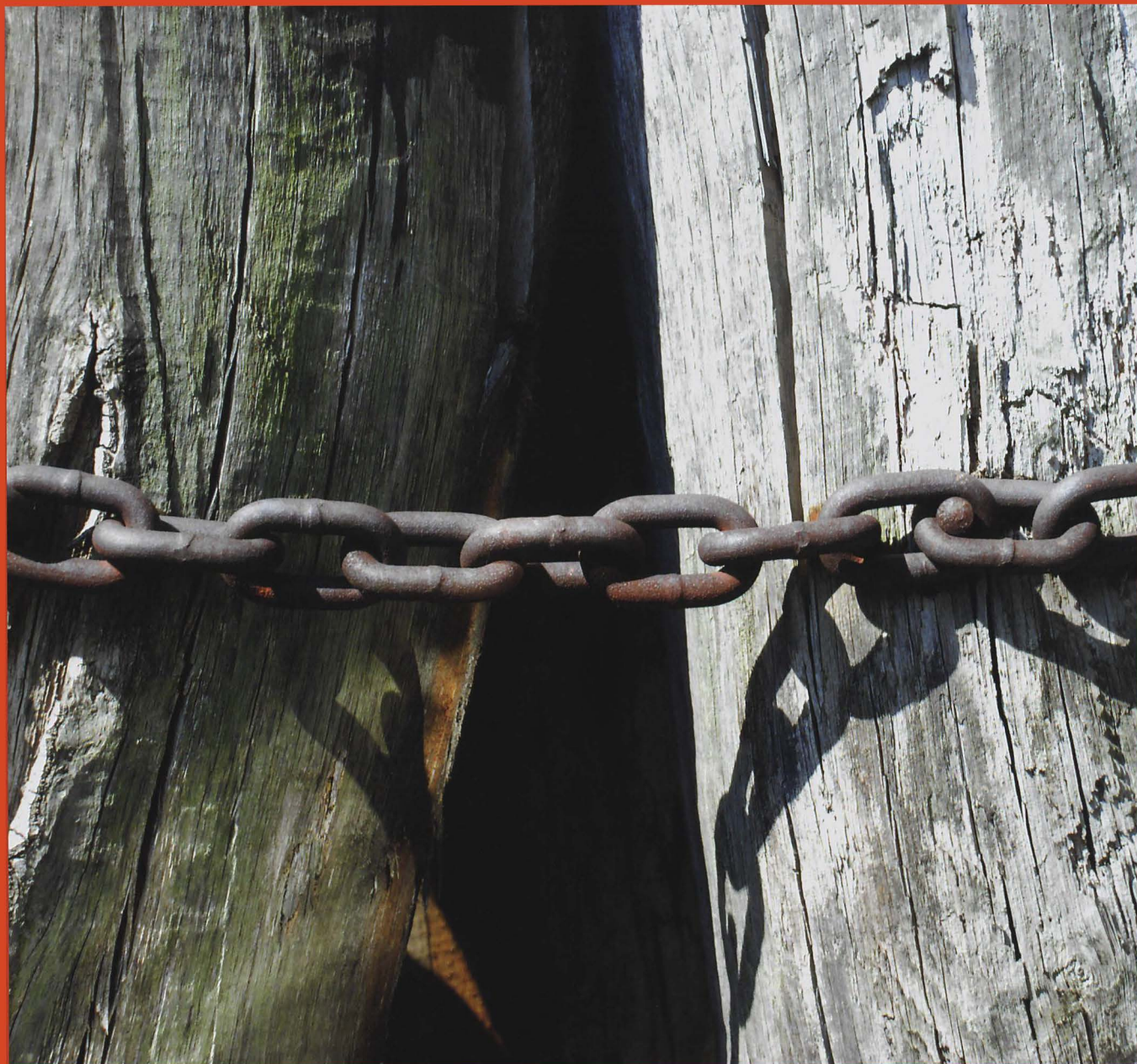
II.

# Covenanting for Justice

Calvin  
on social justice  
and respect  
for God's creation

Social justice  
in new perspective







# Calvin on social justice and respect for God's creation

The call to social justice is a recurring theme in Calvin's writings, especially in his sermons and in his actions in Geneva. At the same time he consistently praised the beauty of God's creation. The created world is like a 'theatre' reflecting God's glory. We are invited to enjoy, and to make use of, God's generosity. He provides largely what is required for life; his gifts are meant to be shared to serve the needs of all. Since it is so precious in God's sight, creation needs to be treated with care. Wasting or polluting the environment is an offence to the Creator.

## Hoarders are murderers

God could very well give each person plenty so that no-one would need from anybody else, but he wants to test the love and fraternity we have together when we thus communicate with each other as he commands us to do: that is, that the rich should not

be like wild beasts to eat and gobble up the poor and suck their blood and their substance – but should rather help them and always look on them with fairness ... For otherwise they are like murderers if they see their neighbours wasting away and yet do not open their hands to help them. In this, I tell you, they are certainly like murderers (Sermon XLIV on the harmony of the Gospels. Matthew 3, 9-10, CO XLVI, 552).

## God's gifts belong to all

(A fair distribution) can become reality if the rich do not greedily swallow up whatsoever they can get together; if they do not rake up on every side what belongs to others to satisfy their greed; if they do not gorge themselves upon the hunger and want of the poor, if they do not, as far as in them lies, stifle the blessing of God; in a word, if they do not accumulate great heaps as their intemperance drives them, but are liberal out of their present abundance, are not too anxious as to the future, and are not troubled, if need be, that their wealth should suffer diminution; nay, if they are ready to endure poverty, and glory not in their abundance, but repose upon the paternal bounty of God. And surely, we often see that what the greedy collect by theft, rapine, fraud, cruelty, trickery or meanness often becomes rotten (Commentary on the five books of Moses, Exodus 16.19).

## Slavery is against the order of creation

Soon after the deluge it happened that most of the human race lost the freedom that was by nature common to everyone. Now, whether the first enslaved humans had been crushed by conquest or compelled

by poverty, the natural order had certainly been corrupted by violence; for human beings have been created to have and sustain society to their mutual advantage. And although it is necessary for some to have stewardship over the others, we ought rather to maintain equality among brethren (Commentary on the five books of Moses, Exodus 21.1-6).

### Responsible stewards of God's creation

Whoever owns a piece of land, should harvest the fruits in such a way that the soil does not suffer any damage. He should leave the land to his children and children's children in the same state as he has received it or even improve on it. He should enjoy the revenue of the land in such a way that it does not serve luxury nor become marred or ruined by neglect. Even more: let us be guided by a sense of responsibility and respect towards all the good things God provides us with, so that everybody considers himself for the things he owns as God's steward. If we follow this line nobody will behave immoderately and destroy through misuse what God wishes to preserve (Commentary on the five books of Moses, Genesis 2.15).

### Human beings destroy the joy which God has in his own creation

Psalm 104.31 "Let the Lord rejoice in his works" is not superfluous, for he desires that the order, which God has established from the beginning, may be continued in the lawful use of his gifts. As we read in Gen 6.6 that "The Lord repented that he had made man on the earth" so when he sees that the good things which he bestows are polluted by our

corruption, he ceases to take delight in bestowing them... In the following verse it is shown that the stability of the world depends on this rejoicing of God in his works; for he did not give vigour to the earth by his gracious and fatherly regard, as soon as he looked upon it with a severe countenance, he would make it tremble, and would burn up the very mountains.

Psalm 104.35 "Let sinners perish from the earth" ... as the wicked infect the world with their pollution, the consequence is, that God has less delight in his own workmanship, and is even almost displeased with it. It is impossible, but that this uncleanness, which, being extended and diffused through every part of the world, vitiates and corrupts such a noble product of his hands, must be offensive to him ... Let us then take care so to weigh the providence of God, as that being wholly devoted to obeying him, we may rightly and purely use the benefits which he sanctifies for our enjoying them. Farther, let us be grieved, that such precious treasures are wickedly squandered away, and let us regard it as monstrous and detestable, that human beings not only forget their Maker, but also, as it were, purposely turn to a perverse and an unworthy end, whatever good things he has bestowed upon them (Commentary on Psalm 104, 31 and 35, CO XXXII, 97-98).



# Social justice in new perspective

In honouring the legacy of John Calvin, a focus on all forms of social justice is appropriate. Concrete proposals in the areas of justice in the economy and for all of creation are of primary importance.

Several decades ago, the proposal was made to launch a campaign for social justice in memory of John Calvin. In 1964, four hundred years after Calvin's death, the Swiss theologian André Biéler suggested that the rich industrialized countries should massively increase their material aid to developing countries. He drew attention to the fact that the industrialized countries spent 7% of their national revenue for armament, and proposed that 3% of this amount should be used to bridge the gap between rich and poor countries<sup>7</sup>. Although he was aware that the idea had only minimal chances of being realized, he felt that no entity was better placed to propose such an initiative than the churches. In some places, the issue was taken up by non-governmental organizations. It also found a favorable echo at the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala (1968).<sup>8</sup>

Today, the picture has changed. The expectation that justice can be attained by continuous economic

growth has turned out to be an illusion. Increasingly humanity has become aware that the resources of the planet are limited and that social justice must be achieved within these limits. Even worse, it became increasingly apparent that technological and industrial development was causing irreversible damage to the environment. Soil, water and the atmosphere suffer from pollution. In short, humanity lives beyond its means. Its ecological "footprint", i.e. its claims on the environment, is too large to be borne by the planet. The way the world is going seems to be unsustainable. The available resources need to be equally shared, and together we have to make sure that future generations will not be deprived of the resources and opportunities the planet earth offers. A new form of solidarity is called for.

The challenge is formidable. The overriding question for many who benefit from current economic systems is how to assure the continuation of what they see as models for economic growth. The common future of humankind has for such people become more and more a secondary consideration. Even confronted with the turbulence of economic and market uncertainties as well as the growing threats of the environmental crisis, industrialized nations only tend to concentrate attention on their own future. They do not seem to see clearly the dangers of climate change.

For a long time, the warnings of the scientific world have been ignored or even explicitly rejected by blind politicians and society at large. Non-governmental organizations and certain sections of the churches called in vain for action. In the first decade of the

21<sup>st</sup> century, the threat of climate change is now increasingly being seen as real. The media now regularly include information on the damage we have to expect in the coming years.

The destructive effects of changing climate conditions in all parts of the world are likely to be massive. For various reasons, the countries of the Global South will have to bear the main burden. They are likely to be hit in particular ways by floods, droughts and hurricanes. Contrary to industrialized countries, the Global South may not have the means to protect themselves, and cannot rely on an insurance system.

Today's debate in industrialized countries on the measures to be taken is disturbingly self-centred. The necessity to reduce energy supply from fossil fuels is generally recognized but the main concern seems to be how industrialized countries can ensure the same (if not a greater) production of energy for the future. Little attention is given to the common future, i.e. how to ensure an optimal energy supply for the whole of humankind.

Energy is a gift of creation, which we need to share and save. To use Calvin's language energy must be used in accordance with the purpose God has associated with it. If applied carelessly it can have destructive effects. Through the use of energy humankind has already changed the face of the earth. The last fifty years have shaken the equilibrium of nature; it is hard to imagine what fifty more years of similar changes will do to the earth. It is therefore time to reflect on the nature and the likely impact of energy. Energy

consumption must imperatively be reduced. But at the same time the needs of all should to be kept in mind.

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<sup>7</sup> For a full picture of Calvin's teaching on these themes cf., André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, (World Alliance of Reformed Churches / World Council of Churches) Geneva, 2005

<sup>8</sup> André Biéler, Calvin, *prophète de l'ère industrielle*, Geneva (Labor et Fides), 1964, 62-63



# The Covenanting for Justice movement

Another area of social justice, which is inspired by the Calvin legacy, has to do with justice in the economy and how different people can more justly and equally enjoy all the gifts of God.

Through the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the churches that constitute a living legacy of the vision of John Calvin and other 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformers of like mind have in the last couple of decades stimulated a Covenanting for Justice movement which is addressing issues of justice in the economy and in the environment.

The Accra Confession developed by the WARC 24<sup>th</sup> General Council of 2004 is an instrument to help Christians articulate our understanding of God's demands in the areas of justice in the economy and taking care of creation. Based on the Reformed faith and consistent with the writings of John Calvin, the Accra Confession helps us clearly identify what contradicts God's intentions for us as we share the world's resources and as we serve as stewards of creation.

A few verses of the Accra Confession will serve to illustrate this:

**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.

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

**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.

**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).

**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.

**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.

**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.

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

**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.

The entire Accra Confession is produced here as Appendix 3. Since 2004, this document has generated debate in the different countries in which Reformed churches are found. It has provided a resource by which WARC and the Council for World Mission and other ecumenical organs have been mobilizing churches to respond to God’s call for a more just world and to the vision for social justice that is reflected in Calvin’s legacy.

# What can be done?

As we celebrate the Calvin 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary jubilee, our reading of Calvin's legacy leads us to renewed commitment to covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth. In face of the widespread economic injustice and the blatant destruction of the environment leading to speedy global warming, we cannot remain silent. As Reformed Christians, we are called upon to engage in action.

- ◆ As a counter-sign against the present trend of using more and more energy, Christians should make every effort to reduce their own energy consumption and to support all measures aiming at a society devouring less energy.
- ◆ We invite Christians in industrialized countries to reflect on their habits of consumption and make appropriate lifestyle changes. It has been calculated that the annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions should, in average, not exceed 1.8 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per person. The emissions of industrialized countries are far above this line. People in the USA are responsible for the highest per capita emissions (18 tons per person), but other industrialized countries do not lag far behind. Lifestyle changes are called for.

◆ One very important possibility is for all to consider compensating their consumption of energy, in particular their emissions of greenhouse gases, by an appropriate payment. We can offer a compensation for specific emissions, e.g. emissions caused by air-travel or in connection with a special event (a congress, a festival or a firework display). The revenue resulting from this effort can be used

- a) to build up a sound and responsible energy supply in poorer countries;
- b) to help them to protect themselves against recurring weather anomalies; and
- c) to finance measures of rehabilitation after floods or droughts. How does compensation work?

Such gestures, though of a symbolic value, would be strong signals that energy consumption needs to be reduced. A number of agencies now offer their services to "transfer" energy. The money they receive is used for projects in poorer countries. The head offices of churches can advise on such agencies. A list of reputable agencies through which you can compensate for your carbon footprint is attached as Appendix 2.

The commitment to using the Calvin jubilee year to draw attention to climate change leads us to

- ◆ challenge industries to show a clear sign of what they are doing about their consumption and depletion of energy. Airline companies, oil companies, and industries



whose production lines and services are known to be responsible for large emissions of greenhouse gases should be pressured to do much more by way of using technologies that cut down on such emissions as well as to compensate heavily for their consumption without passing this on to their customers.

- ◆ To find out and help to develop many other ideas regarding reversing the climate change so that we can truly be taking care of the earth, rather than destroying it.
- ◆ To join the Covenanting for Justice movement. Get familiar with the Accra Confession and how together we can live in solidarity with one another. This also requires lifestyle changes. It entails questioning wasteful lifestyles while some people live in poverty and suffering, and not only thinking in terms of how to give charity to “those people” – but indeed finding out how we can influence global economic arrangements so that all will be able to enjoy God’s gifts meant for all. Our actions could bring life to many of the “least of the brothers and sisters” of our Lord Jesus Christ whose suffering and poverty are a result of injustice in the global economy.
- ◆ To confess our own complicity in how we use the world’s resources and how church structures often look on silently or even aid the powers whose actions lead to suffering for many. Churches need to be at the forefront of bringing into being a new reality. This will be faithful to the Calvin legacy.





III.

Addressing violence  
and destruction  
in times of war  
and armed conflict



# Calvin warning against violence and war

Calvin regarded war as an aberration. True, there is some biblical evidence of wars endorsed by God in the Old Testament as the Israelites moved from Egypt to Canaan. There is also some evidence that John Calvin does not reject military service for the defence of the national territory. But he is aware of the senselessness of the wars conducted at his time. They are the result not of God's will but of human initiative and lead to intolerable bloodshed and suffering. In particular, Calvin clearly rejected war as a means to serve the gospel. He insisted that the French Protestants should not respond to the persecutions by violence but accept persecution as a test of their faith.

## Engaging in war is against God's will

Do wars occur on God's authority? Do humans observe what is allowed? Or do they even expect that God will be their leader? ... They go to war because they despise God. The devil leads them there (Sermon on Deuteronomy 2.1-7, CO XXVI, 12).

## Degradation caused by war

Thus we see that all these wars conducted today are little more than brigandage; cruelties and inhuman treatments are so exorbitant that extreme confusion results and it seems that all sense of equity gets lost, that no war can be conducted without forgetting righteousness, that there is no longer any law and the people become like ferocious beasts (Sermon on Deuteronomy 2.1-7, CO XXVI, 14).

## Persecutions are a test of faith

Persecutions are the true battles of Christians to test the constancy and firmness of their faith. Hence what are we to do when attacked but have no recourse to arms? But to fight well in this situation and resist the enemy our weapons are to use what God has shown us through his word to strengthen ourselves ... when tyrants breathe fire like dragons, learn to focus on contemplating the help God gives to his people, and when you see that he does not abandon them, be heartened and keep fighting against your carnal temptations until you have reached the point of trusting that we are blessed because we are in Jesus Christ, whether to die or to live ... we must hope that after he has tested his Church he will restrain the wrath of tyrants ... While we await his doing so, our task is to possess our souls in patience ... May God remind you of the armament we are given from on high. This is to find our whole refuge in him who has given us this good service and has done us the honour of keeping watch over us, thus possessing our souls in patience – because gaining the day by force is not lawful for us. You know that anything we boldly attempt



without the Master's leave cannot have a good and happy outcome (Calvin addressing the faithful in France, CO XVII, 682, 684, 6 85, 715).

### Mercenary service is an abomination

(Commenting on Luke 3.14 Calvin states) John the Baptist not only gave a rule for everyone without exception, but when tax-collectors and soldiery came to him he told them what was appropriate to their station. In the passage he refers to tax-collectors and soldiers to show that in our Lord Jesus Christ the door to life and salvation is open to all. For if there are people in the world who are depraved and from whom one can hope for little, these are the soldiers who allow themselves great liberties and are dissolute and go over the top throughout their lives. For since they sell themselves for hard cash and put their lives up for sale, one may suppose them to be halfway to being brute beasts. A man must have abandoned his humanity if instead of ruling over his household and applying himself to some honest, legitimate work, he goes and takes pay from whom so ever gives him most. And on what conditions? To kill and murder, or even to be killed himself. And several others will have been led by greed and will be people who prefer to grab everything they can, rather than content themselves with what God gives them, and making good use of it, feed themselves peaceably in their houses (Sermon on Matthew 3.11-12, CO XLVI, 553).

### Call for restraint in times of war

There is a general rule that we would do well to note. Whenever we are called to do something harmful or damaging we must remember this:

our Lord has placed us to dwell in this world and provided us with all he considered necessary for our lives. If I then rob this land of all the goodness that God has given it to provide food for human beings then, surely, that means that I am seeking to annihilate the kindness that God has poured out on the human race and render it ineffective. Am I worthy to be supported by this earth when I try in this way to abolish the goodness of God, which was meant for my neighbours as well as myself? When I am no longer willing to let it reign freely? Does this not make me a monster? This, then, is what should restrain us when we find ourselves driven by wickedness or some evil thoughts to the point of destroying trees, houses and other such things. We have to control ourselves and reflect: who are we waging war against? Not against creatures, but against the one whose goodness is mirrored here; not against one man only but against each and everyone, ourselves included. If this were properly understood, wars would not be waged in succession as they are today, for when a war is started, nothing is spared and lands are devastated (Sermon on Deuteronomy 20.16-20, for full text cf. Appendix 4).

The sanctity of life  
and protecting  
the environment  
in times of war  
or armed conflict

The sanctity of life,  
environmental protection  
and the law of war







# The sanctity of life and protecting the environment in times of war or armed conflict

Wars are bound to cause destruction and desolation. Injuries occur and people die. Whatever the reasons leading to armed conflict and war, a high price is usually paid. As Calvin puts it, wars are bound to remove “images of God” from the surface of the earth. Every effort must therefore be made to avoid wars. War can only be envisaged as an ultimate solution. But Calvin pleads for restraint even when war has broken out. Destruction and damage inflicted upon the enemy must be kept to the minimum. We must pay attention to this last aspect of Calvin’s teaching.

Wars represent today an even larger threat than in the past. On the one hand weapons have been developed which can cause lasting and irreversible damage to people and the environment. Humanity lives under the threat of nuclear, biological and

chemical weapons and must make every possible effort to avoid their use. The temptation to destroy the enemy’s infrastructure, i.e. roads, bridges, dams, power stations, etc. is great when the rage of war has the upper hand. Defoliation of forests have occurred in the Vietnam War and oil spills polluted the sea during the first Gulf War. The possible extent of destruction has considerably increased.

Planet earth has become more vulnerable. Even without armed conflicts, the environment suffers from human activity. Wars have come to aggravate the situation. Wars add, for instance, substantially to the emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. First attempts are being made to introduce rules and limits of environmental destruction during wars through international agreements.

Faced with the destruction of life and environment that wars bring, nations must develop a new approach to conflicts and conflict solution. Appeals to exercise restraint in times of war have deep roots in religious traditions. Believers are expected not only to seek peace, but also to pursue it (Psalm 34.14). Even in the time of Exodus where wars seem to be glorified as a means of taking the land of Canaan, there was environmental concern – Israel is summoned not “to wage war against trees” (Deuteronomy 20.16-20). Similar injunctions can be found also in Islamic texts.<sup>9</sup> These values have been largely forgotten in the course of centuries. Calvin belongs to the few voices insisting on their relevance for his own time. We invite Reformed churches to follow his prophetic message. Resist war, seek peace and pursue it – and where war has broken out keep

the sanctity of life and the future of the planet, God's gift of creation, in mind.

There are many war-related issues. Not all of them can be covered in a document of this size. It is sufficient to note that in recent years, the concepts of pre-emptive war and preventive war have entered into the language of justification for wars. Even some Christians have bought into these concepts. These need to be critically examined in the light of the word of God and the statements of Calvin quoted above. The irresponsible use of military might by powers who have it in order to settle scores or protect their economic interests should be exposed as flawed. Churches should be vigilant against such moves.

## The sanctity of life, environmental protection and the law of war

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century attempts were made to develop rules to reduce violence and destruction in times of war. The St. Petersburg Declaration, adopted in 1868 by the 'big powers' of that time, forbids the use of explosive and expanding bullets in wartime. The text states that "there are technical limits at which the necessities of war ought to yield to the requirements of humanity" and that "the only legitimate object which states should endeavour to accomplish during war is to weaken the military force of the enemy". Held in the Netherlands, The Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 produced a series of international agreements covering a wide spectrum of warfare. Article 22 of the Hague Convention (IV) "Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land" (1907) contains the following significant general directive: "The right of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited." The so-called "Martens clause" which was included in the preamble to the Hague Convention (IV) reinforces this rule: "The inhabitants

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<sup>9</sup> Hamed Sultan, *La conception islamique [du droit humanitaire]*, in: Institut Henry Dunant (ed.), *Les dimensions internationales du droit humanitaire*, UNESCO 1986, 59



and belligerents remain under the protection and the rule of the principles of the law of nations, as they result from the usages established among civilized peoples, from the laws of humanity and the dictates of public conscience.” Through these agreements the ground was laid for a “law of war”.

Because of the events of the Second World War a further step was taken. In 1949 the “Geneva Red Cross Conventions” were adopted. Their primary emphasis is on the protection of people in times of war and armed conflict. Convention I deals with land warfare, Convention II with sea warfare, Convention III with the protection of prisoners of war and Convention IV with the protection of civilians. They establish humanitarian rules to be respected by belligerents and expanded and strengthened the ground for Red Cross activities in times of conflict. The Vietnam War and its atrocities led to a further expansion of these conventions. In 1977 two Protocols Additional to the Geneva Red Cross Conventions were formulated. Protocol I is of particular importance in our context. Several articles refer explicitly to the protection of the environment:

Article 35, 3: It is prohibited to employ methods or means of warfare which are intended, or may be expected, to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment.

Article 55:

1. Care shall be taken in warfare to protect the natural environment against widespread, long-term and severe damage.<sup>10</sup> This protection includes a prohibition of the use of methods or means of warfare which are intended or may be expected to cause such damage to the natural environment and thereby to prejudice the health and survival of the population;
2. Attacks against the natural environment by way of reprisals are prohibited.

Article 56:

1. Works or installations containing dangerous forces, namely ... nuclear electrical generating stations, shall not be made the object of attack, even where these objects are military objectives, if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population;
2. The special protection against attack provided by paragraph 1 shall cease:
  - a) for a dam or dyke only if it is used for other than its normal function and in regular, significant and direct support of military operations and if such attack is the only feasible way to terminate such support;
  - b) for a nuclear electrical generating station only if it provides electrical power in regular, significant and direct support of military operations and if such attack is the only feasible way to terminate such support.



In addition to the Red Cross Conventions and the additional protocols a number of international treaties on particular issues have been formulated which are relevant to our subject: The International Convention for the Protection of Birds (1950), The Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), Sea-bed Disarmament Treaty (1971), Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (1972), Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (1979), Inhumane Weapons Convention (1981), Law of the Sea Convention (1982), International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness (1990).

As we can see, there are some clauses in international law calling for the protection of civilian lives and the environment. But they are scattered in different texts, incomplete and vague. What is, for instance, the precise meaning of the three adjectives “widespread, long-term and severe” which recur in Protocol I to the Geneva Red Cross Convention? In addition, several of these texts, especially Protocol I, have not been ratified by a number of leading countries. Much could be gained by a renewed effort to persuade governments to take the necessary steps towards ratification.

There are two possibilities to strengthen the present legal instruments. Many feel that it is high time to add a Fifth Red Cross Convention to the four existing Conventions, a text explicitly and exclusively dealing with the protection of the environment in times of war. After the First Gulf War Greenpeace made a proposal to this effect. Two major expert meetings were held in 1991 to examine the idea.<sup>11</sup> Though there was general agreement as to the

desirability of such a Convention, a majority felt that the elaboration of such a text was cumbersome and that it was unlikely to meet with sufficient support. Others suggested that an effort should be made to bring together in one text the existing clauses and to provide a commentary explaining and making more precise the meaning of each clause. It will be good to re-open the debate on these issues.

It is obvious that in times of war, both the sanctity of life and environmental protection are at risk. Recent wars have shown widespread killings of civilian populations and displacement of large sections of people with all accompanying hardships. Even media reports often ignore this. Existing conventions and protocols have not been adhered to and may even be said to be inadequate. Churches need to be at the forefront of proactive efforts to strengthen such international instruments for advancing the cause of peace and protecting human lives and creation.

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<sup>10</sup> When this article was negotiated, the proposal was made to introduce the term “the stability of ecosystems” as a criterion to define such damage. The proposal was rejected. Generally the damage is defined in terms of the consequences for human beings, cf. Hans Blix, *Moyens et méthodes de combat*, in: Institut Henry Dunant (ed.) *Les dimensions internationales du droit humanitaire*, UNESCO 986, 181

<sup>11</sup> Glen Plant (ed.), *Environmental Protection and the Law of War, A Fifth Geneva Convention on the Protection of the Environment in Time of Armed Conflict*, (Belhaven Press) London, 1992

# What can be done?

decade impacts the world for good. The issues discussed here should find their places on the agenda of this event, the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation being held in Jamaica in May 2011. What is your church doing to ensure this?

Reformed churches are encouraged to engage in public debates on these issues by:

- ◆ Sponsoring a symposium on the sanctity of life and the environment, involving lawyers and politicians.
- ◆ Asking your churches and governments some critical questions. Where does your church stand in terms of protecting the environment? Which of the relevant UN and Red Cross conventions and agreements has your country ratified? To what extent would your church be prepared to undertake a new initiative at the international level for a new convention?
- ◆ Other important questions to ask are: Where does your government stand in respect to pre-emptive or preventive war? Where does it stand in terms of protecting civilian lives during times of conflict and war?
- ◆ In 1998 the World Council of Churches launched a Decade to Overcome Violence. It plans to conclude this Decade by a world convocation on "Peace on earth". The World Alliance of Reformed Churches is working alongside the WCC and others to ensure the



## Appendix 1

# The Reformation Monument in Geneva

When the four hundredth anniversary of Calvin's birth was approaching, the proposal was made to erect a monument to honour the legacy and the impact of the Reformation. The suggestion was made for the first time in 1902 by Auguste Chantre, professor of church history. Two years later a committee was formed to give shape to the proposal. Charles Borgeaud, professor of history at the University of Geneva (1861-1940), was among those who contributed most to the development of the project.

A monument in honour of Calvin? For a long time the idea had been rigorously rejected. Calvin himself would certainly not have liked to be remembered in this way. He had even asked that the place of his tomb should remain unknown. The promoters of the Reformation wall were aware of this view. They proposed therefore that the monument should not simply honour Calvin and others as persons and leaders but recall the event of the Reformation and its impact in Europe and the world.

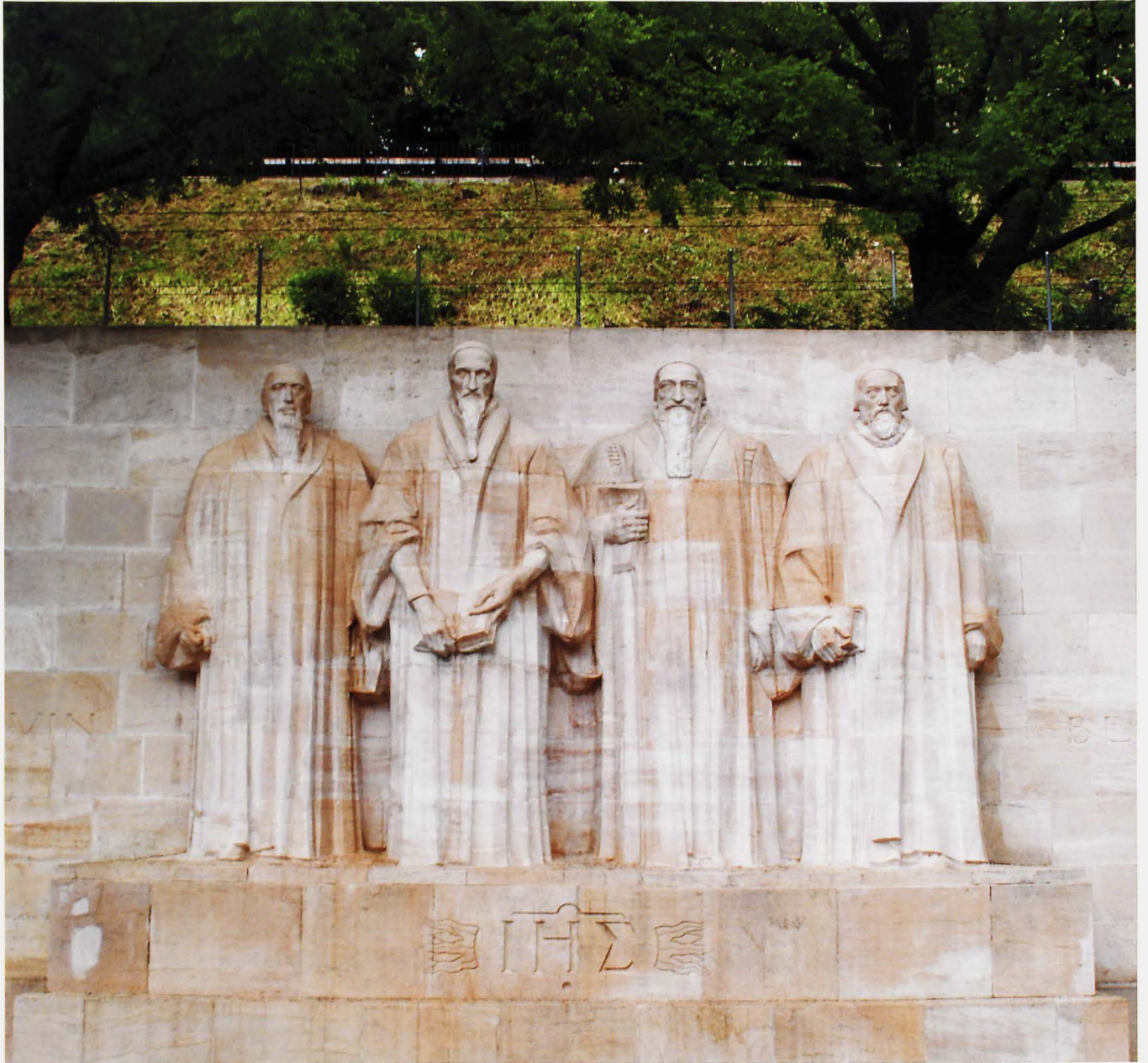
Agreement could not easily be reached on the place of the monument. Several possibilities were considered but finally in 1907 it was decided to choose the gardens behind the University of Geneva. An international competition drew an impressive response. Seventy-one projects were presented. Two of them suggested that the monument should take the form of a 'Mur des Réformateurs'. The first prize went to Alphonse Laverrière and Jean Taillens.<sup>12</sup>

The realization of the project took time. Work started too late to be completed by the time of the anniversary of Calvin's birth. The project was carefully pursued in the following years. Finally the wall could be inaugurated in 1917 in the midst of the First World War. Since the monument was conceived as a means to recall the Reformation, the date of the four hundredth anniversary of the Wittenberg Reformation was in many ways even more appropriate than a date focusing exclusively on Calvin.

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<sup>12</sup> For more details cf. Daniel Buscarlet, *Le Mur de Genève*, Genève (Labor et Fides) 1965







Fifteen years earlier another memorial had been erected in Geneva to recall the death of Michael Servet. The inscription states: "On October 27, 1553 Michael Servet died at Champel on the stake ... We sons, holding Calvin, our great Reformer, in deep respect and gratitude but condemning an error which was shared by his century and firmly attached to the liberty of conscience according to the true principles of the Reformation and the Gospel, have erected this monument of expiation on October 27, 1903."

Monuments have no doubt their legitimate places. In a time when the consciousness of historical continuity tends to vanish, it is particularly important to recall our roots in the past. They make us aware of the legacy which we have received and on which we build today. They inevitably also recall the dark sides of tradition. We live in an ambiguous world. The monument, which was erected a century ago, teaches us both faithfulness to the genuine voice of the Gospel and a realistic appreciation of what human endeavours are capable to achieve.



## Companies providing compensation of CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions

There are a number of carbon compensation schemes. While this should not be an easy excuse to encourage people to keep up unrestrained consumption of energy, it is certainly good to know these schemes exist to offset one's necessary and well-planned travel and other activities that result in emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Some of the companies that provide these schemes are not credible and may in fact be adding to the problem. In this text, we rely on the Recommendations and Company ratings of Tufts University USA. TCI (Tuft Climate Initiative) has chosen the following criteria as most important in evaluating an offset company:

- ◆ Calculator: The air travel emissions calculator should be accurate, include a multiplier for radiative forcing and account for flight variables.

- ◆ Project type: Project portfolios should have little or no bio-sequestration projects, rather they should be mainly or entirely renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.
- ◆ Project/Offset quality: Projects should be additional, permanent, account for leakage and contribute to the long-term goal of a carbon free, highly energy efficient economy. Additional benefits such as capacity building or protected biodiversity are a plus. High standard and verification requirements such as the Gold Standard and the Voluntary Gold Standard help maximize the benefits of projects implemented in non-Annex 1 countries.
- ◆ Transparency: The company should clearly state all their procedures, verification schemes, financial arrangements and partnerships.

Considering these criteria, TCI gives the highest rating to the following four companies, in alphabetical order:

### Atmosfair

www. atmosfair.com  
Vossstrasse 1, D 10117 Berlin  
Tel.: +49 30 288 83 56  
E-mail: info@germanwatch.org

atmosfair is a German offset non-profit company focusing on offsetting air travel. They charge



\$17.30 per ton of CO2 offset. TCI praises its excellent documentation, good projects and strict verification procedures.

## Climate Friendly

www.climatefriendly.com  
Suite B, Level 2, 140 William Street, East Sydney  
NSW, Australia 2011  
Tel.: +61 2 9356 3600  
E-mail: reception@climatefriendly.com

This Australian for-profit organization charges \$14.50 per ton of CO2 offset. Although it is currently a small company, it is recommended by TCI for their high standards, transparency and excellent carbon calculator.

## Myclimate

www.myclimate.org  
US site: www.my-climate.com  
Technoparkstrasse 1, CH 8005 Zurich  
Tel.: +41 44 633 77 50  
E-mail: info@myclimate.org

Myclimate was started in 2002 as an international non-profit venture at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) in Switzerland. It offers offsets for flight, car, house and business emissions. It offers two categories of projects: projects international (approximately \$15 per ton of CO2) and projects Switzerland (approximately \$45 per ton).

## Native Energy

www.NativeEnergy.com  
937 Ferry Road, P. O. Box 539, Charlotte VT 05445,  
USA  
Tel.: +1 800 924 6826  
E-mail: info@nativeenergy.com

Native Energy is a privately held native American for-profit company founded in 2000. It helps build Native America, farmer-owned, and charitable purpose renewable energy projects. Their programmes include household energy consumption( CoolHome), driving (Cool Driver), Climate Neutral Travel, climate neutral events and conferences, a CoolBusiness programme and general consulting services. Native Energy charges \$12 per ton of CO2 offset.

*The integrated prices per ton of carbon offset can vary according to the fluctuation of currency*

Other companies and more detailed information can be found at:

<http://www.tufts.edu/tie/tci/carbonoffsets/ratings.htm>

# The Accra Confession

The first two sections are introductory. The Accra Confession begins with the “Confession of faith in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction”. The last part, “Covenanting for Justice” offers some concluding remarks and calls for action.

## Introduction

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.

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

## Reading the signs of the times

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. 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.

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.

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;
- ◆ 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

**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.



**We believe** that God is sovereign over all creation. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24.1).

**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.

**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).

**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.

**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.

**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.

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

**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.

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

**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.

**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.

**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).

**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.

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

**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.

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

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

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

**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.

**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” (Luke 1.52f).

## Covenanting for Justice

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 (Deuteronomy 30.19).

# Jean Calvin: Fourth sermon on Deuteronomy 20.16-20

Delivered on Friday, 20 December 1555

...Let us look now at what Moses has to add. He says that when a city is besieged for a long time, some trees may be cut down if they are needed for the siege-works. Armies at war always have their weapons, and in those days, instead of artillery they had machines to break down the walls. If they needed wood to build these, they were not to cut down any fruit trees but use only trees that do not produce food. Trees that bear fruit and provide food are to be preserved – this is the commandment contained in this passage. But there is one sentence that is a little obscure and it is interpreted in different ways, so let me pause over it for a moment in passing. Literally this sentence reads: *Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you?* Some take this to mean that here God is mocking people who destroy trees in this way. What is this? Are the trees the enemies who will march against you and confront you? Cutting

down trees and laying waste to the land is like a childish act of vengeance. This is how some people understand this passage. They say the Lord intended to shame the people who did such damage and destroyed the inhabitants' food. These are not your enemies – who are you waging war on? Wood and inanimate objects? What brave men you are!

Others think this interpretation is rather far-fetched and say it means that the trees in the field belong to human beings; trees are there for human beings. When God caused a tree to bear fruit he intended it as food for human beings and for the inhabitants of the land. For even if they are conquered they will still have enough to live on, and to pay tribute as subjects to their conquerors. Yet others take the words to mean that the trees are there to help the besiegers of the city, for what will they do if they are hungry? They would have to break off the siege and go away if there was nothing to feed the army, and the trees could be of use to them. According to this interpretation, our Lord is saying that it would be very foolish of them to deprive themselves of their own food. But because the Hebrews are fond of similes, we may take this to be saying that it is human beings, not trees, who face you under siege. This meaning is proper and natural here and we shall not discuss it at length. That would be a waste of time; let us simply note what is important for all of us and profit from it.

Having forbidden the cutting down of fruit trees even in time of war, God now adds the reason for this: it is because human beings are concerned here, not the trees of the field; attention should be directed at the former and anger should be vented



on those who are the real enemies. Why? Because they can besiege you and make war on you. In short, (we have already touched on this, speaking certainly of another literal exposition, but it all comes back to the same thing), God says that in time of war anger should not be directed against the trees of the field but against the enemy, because they are bent on doing harm. They are the ones who have to be resisted.

But let us look now at what we may draw from this commandment. It says that in time of war we shall not cut down the fruit trees. For us this means that, even when swords are drawn, we are still not permitted to do as we like and commit all kinds of cruelty. However, God is speaking here of wars that are just and of which he approves. Though he permits the killing of people, he still wants us to exercise humanity and he does not want the land to be completely devastated. Let us note therefore that wars are never so permissible that they can be allowed to destroy everything and create utter confusion. And we must remember that however much we exercise restraint, the damage done will still be too great. When even one person is killed it is, alas, an image of God that is destroyed. And when great numbers are killed, there will be many widows and orphans; and even if goods and possessions are spared, many people will be displaced from their homes and badly treated, so that some will die of cold and some of other ills. So, even if we behave as fairly as possible in time of war there will inevitably be many evils. All the more reason, therefore, to refrain from doing wrong and avoid cruelty of any kind.

While our Lord admitted such confrontations between enemies, to the extent that killing is even permitted, what happens when it comes to being friends? Then we are not allowed to lift a finger against another, nor open our lips to speak ill of those who have wronged us. For even if someone angers or insults us, our Lord does not permit us to go to war with one another, but wants us to arm our souls with patience and try to overcome evil by doing good. If we are to continue in friendship with those who wrong us or insult us, if we are to work for their salvation, if we are not permitted to retaliate in any way, I ask you, how can we be forgiven if we do harm to those who have never wronged or offended us in any way and have never done us any harm? So we can see that this commandment is not just for policemen, but that our Lord teaches all of us that we must, insofar as we are able, act with moderation so that no-one can complain of being wronged by us. This is the lesson that we can learn from this commandment.

Then again, if we are to spare the fruit trees, which are inanimate things, how much more should we spare human beings? It is true that what is said here is not said for the fruit trees but for the human beings who are nourished and sustained by them; trees should not be given more importance than human beings. But what will it mean when everything is killed and nothing spared? Is this not to scorn God? This is the second thing we have to remember.

But let us move on. When it is said here "*you must not destroy them*", this is to remind us that we must always preserve that which is instituted by



God, especially when we know his kindness and fatherly love towards the human race. God has given human beings the earth in which to dwell, he has established them there. When we cause such destruction that the poor inhabitants are driven out and when, if they are allowed to return to their homes in time of peace, they find that everything has been devastated so that the land that was once fertile and well-tended is now sterile and deserted, with not a single tree from which to pick an apple, have we not wiped out the loving-kindness that God has shown towards the human race. Surely we must indeed be blinded by anger to act in this way against the grace of God which should soften our hearts, be they as hard as stone.

There is a general rule that we would do well to note. Whenever we are called to do something harmful or damaging we must remember this: our Lord has placed us to dwell in this world and provided us with all he considered necessary for our lives. If I then rob this land of all the goodness that God has given it to provide food for human beings then, surely, that means that I am seeking to annihilate the kindness that God has poured out on the human race and render it ineffective. Am I worthy to be supported by this earth when I try in this way to abolish the goodness of God, which was meant for my neighbours as well as myself? When I am no longer willing to let it reign freely? Does this not make me a monster?

This, then, is what should restrain us when we find ourselves driven by wickedness or some evil thoughts to the point of destroying trees, houses and other such things. We have to control ourselves and reflect:

who are we waging war against? Not against creatures, but against the one whose goodness is mirrored here; not against one man only but against each and everyone, ourselves included. If this were properly understood, wars would not be waged in succession as they are today, for when a war is started, nothing is spared and lands are devastated.

Today such cruelty is even greater among those who call themselves Christians than it was in previous times in wars against poor unbelievers. For today they go about scorching and burning the land, which is worse than cutting throats. What will the poor inhabitants do when they have nothing but acres of scorched earth? They will be left to die among the hedgerows and bushes, languishing on the bare earth; it would be kinder to cut their throats at once. But this has become legitimate today because we have become accustomed to it. And where else does this custom come from but from our human failure to attend to God and his word? Human beings have distanced themselves from God and become brutish as a result. It is horrifying to see how those who call themselves Christians and Catholics, and hold themselves to be pillars of Christianity, have become so extreme that true barbarity reigns among them. It is no longer enough for them to lay waste their enemies' land, they have no mercy on their subjects, either. Today the law of the Turks holds sway among Christians: it matters nothing if a country is devastated provided they prevail. If it is feared that the enemy is advancing the order is given to burn everything. And what is burned? Even the humble subjects that the king has under his protection. Speaking of the duties of a good king in the person of Hezekiah it is said he



will be like “a covert from the tempest” (Is 32:2). The prophet Isaiah says that a good king will be a hiding place and a covert for his subjects when a tempest comes and it seems that everything will be ruined. The king will spread his wings to cover those who are in his care. He will be their protector and risk his life for them. This, I say, is how a prince must care for his subjects. Now here we have the opposite, a prince so blind that he orders everything to be burned and razed so that not a grain of corn remains. But that means the poor people are left starving. There is no help for it: spare nothing, destroy everything, so long as I prevail.

God must indeed have been forgotten if things come to such a pass. We do not need to go back sixty years to find examples, or hear about them from our ancestors. We have seen them for ourselves these last twenty years, and not very far from here. What is more, not only does this evil persist, it is spreading. And why? This is what comes of disregarding God’s word. A prince has only to make his confession and receive absolution with a cross on his back, and that is all. There will be many ceremonies, and when he has prayed a sufficient number of *agios* he is acquitted. But if anyone tries to remind him of his duties by recalling the word of God, he will hear none of it. He does not want to be reminded of his duty to God, or to human beings, still less be told how to conduct a war or to remain within the boundaries and limits set for him and not try to acquire more than God allows him. Nothing may be said about all that; it would be demeaning to his majesty. He only has to perform a few trifling actions that mock God, as though he was placating a small child.

But let us for our part point to what is permitted to us, and have nothing to do with those who bring down God’s wrath and curse upon their heads. We thank God that he has shown us the great error of these ways, and we will not return to them so as not to call down his dreadful vengeance upon ourselves. Whatever happens, and even as private citizens, he requires us to follow this rule: do no damage. We know that our Lord has disposed the earth to be our nourishing mother and when she opens her womb to feed us, it is as though God himself held out his hand to us and offered the proof of his goodness. When we bear this in mind, we will be able to benefit from this lesson, not only in times of war, but also in peacetime.

Please God that this might be well heeded. But today wrongdoing is everywhere, every day we are assailed by so many complaints that we hardly pay any attention to them. The examples are all too obvious. There are some who prefer to leave the corn in the barn to rot or be eaten by vermin rather than sell it when it is needed (because they want to starve the poor people). Is this not the same as cutting down the fruit trees? Here is corn that has been harvested. Behold, the Lord has poured out his gracious goodness and his blessing so that the poor people may have food. But this corn is piled in barns and kept locked up there, waiting for the price to rise when the famine has become so bad that the people do not know where to turn. And then what will happen? The corn will be blighted and rotten. It is true that our Lord sometimes mocks those who think they have made a fortune; he shows them that this is not the way to do things. Yet these are the very ones who do all they can to stifle God’s grace,

as if they were battling against his goodness and the fatherly love he pours out on all his people. But in doing this they pervert the whole natural order, as if they were cutting down and destroying the fruit trees.

What, then, is needed? Let us note that because our Lord wanted a measure of humanity always to be maintained in dealings between enemies, now that we have to communicate with one another in peace and in fellowship, let us try our utmost to live together in harmony and friendship. And when God enriches us with his spiritual gifts, which are more precious by far than anything we can receive from the world, let us try to make sure that our neighbours may share in them and not be denied the good God does to them through any wrong we may do. For if we have to take such care in dealing with material goods, how much more careful must we be with spiritual blessings which concern the salvation of our souls. Let us therefore take care not to uproot any fruit trees, but since the word of God is the seed of life, let us endeavour to scatter it widely so that it can put down strong roots and produce a tree that is not unfruitful, but one that produces much fruit.

This, then, is what we can learn for our good from this passage, even though we are not at war. God has chosen us for his people and here he shows us a justice that must permeate our whole lives.