

PRZEMYSŁAW KANTYKA

Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II, Wydział Teologii

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6571-7833>

## In the Pursuit of Degrowth Reformed Churches' Theological Critique of Capitalism<sup>1</sup>

Abstract

The article discusses the theological criticism of capitalism on the part of the Reformed Churches. The four main themes of criticism are: 1) immoderate accumulation of goods and capital and the commodification of man; 2) leading Third World countries to unpayable debt; 3) plundering of natural goods and environmental damage; 4) the trap of unrestrained growth. The idea of “degrowth” is proposed as an effective way out of these threats. This idea consists of moderation in the production of goods adapted in volume to real needs, respect for the environment by implementing the principles of sustainable development, and finally adopting the attitude of self-restraint as a necessary form of asceticism. “Degrowth” is therefore an idea that also brings together the ways to overcome the “economy of greed” and introduce the “economy of life.”

**Keywords:** degrowth, Reformed Churches, capitalism, *Accra Confession*.

## W poszukiwaniu „postwzrostu”. Teologiczna krytyka kapitalizmu ze strony Kościołów reformowanych

Abstrakt

W artykule podjęto zagadnienie teologicznej krytyki kapitalizmu ze strony Kościołów reformowanych. Cztery główne wątki krytyki to: 1) nieumiarkowana akumulacja dóbr i kapitału oraz utowarowienie człowieka; 2) doprowadzanie krajów Trzeciego Świata do niespłacalnego zadłużenia; 3) rabunkowa gospodarka dobrami naturalnymi oraz szkody wyrządzane środowisku naturalnemu; 4) pułapka niepohamowanego wzrostu. Jako skuteczny sposób wyjścia z tych zagrożeń proponowana jest droga tzw. postwzrostu, na który składa się umiarkowanie w produkcji dóbr dostosowane do rzeczywistych potrzeb, poszanowanie środowiska poprzez wdrożenie zasad zrównoważonego rozwoju, a wreszcie przyjęcie postawy samoograniczania się jako koniecznej formy ascezy. „Postwzrost” jest więc

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<sup>1</sup> The article was published as part of the project no. 2018/31/B/HS1/01254, financed by the National Science Centre [Artykuł został opublikowany w ramach projektu nr 2018/31/B/HS1/01254, finansowanego przez Narodowe Centrum Nauki].

ideą skupiającą w sobie także drogi do przezwyciężenia „ekonomii chciwości” i wprowadzenia „ekonomii życia”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** postwzrost, Kościoły reformowane, kapitalizm, Wyznanie z Akry.

The 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021 there were an online international conference “Degrowth – Living Sufficiently and Sustainably”<sup>2</sup> organized by NIFEA: The New International Financial and Economic Architecture initiative, a partnership between the Council for World Mission, Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, and World Methodist Council. The conference discussed the issue of sustainable degrowth.<sup>3</sup> The very concept of degrowth was created in opposition to the concept of economic growth, meaning in the economy continuous development through the multiplication of the production of goods, services and intensification of consumption. Yet, the term “degrowth” does not mean to reverse economic processes from the drive to multiply the production of goods and the accumulation of capital towards the reduction of production and the alienation of capital. Rather, degrowth is defined as a revaluation of the criterion of development: development is to be evidenced not so much by the multiplication of production and capital, which will be finally in the hands of the richest, but by bringing about a fair share of all people in the goods provided by our Earth. In this way, it is not growth itself that becomes a value, but a fair, sustainable share of all in the fruits of economic activity. It is obvious that such a concept does not fit into a capitalist system aimed at capital accumulation.

Economic growth, as inherent in the economy of the capitalist system, is increasingly criticized for its internal inability to provide a basis for a decent existence for all the inhabitants of the earth. For many years now, the critique of the capitalist system has been involving inter-church bodies, including the World Communion of Reformed Churches. At this point, we will be interested in the

<sup>2</sup> Phil Tanis. 2021. A Life-Affirming “Degrowth” is Possible, Economists and Theologians Find (20.10.2021). <http://wrcr.ch/news/a-life-affirming-degrowth-is-possible-economists-and-theologians-find>.

<sup>3</sup> “Sustainable degrowth is a downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet. It calls for a future where societies live within their ecological means, with open, localized economies and resources more equally distributed through new forms of democratic institutions. Such societies will no longer have to ‘grow or die.’ Material accumulation will no longer hold a prime position in the population’s cultural imaginary. The primacy of efficiency will be substituted by a focus on sufficiency, and innovation will no longer focus on technology for technology’s sake but will concentrate on new social and technical arrangements that will enable us to live convivially and frugally. Degrowth does not only challenge the centrality of GDP as an overarching policy objective but proposes a framework for transformation to a lower and sustainable level of production and consumption, a shrinking of the economic system to leave more space for human cooperation and ecosystems”. Degrowth. Definition (24.10.2021). <https://degrowth.org/definition-2/>.

theological criticism of capitalism on the part of the Reformed Churches, contained in the official documents published by this body.

There is a growing conviction in the circles of world ecumenical organizations that the capitalist system in its present form has exhausted its full potential and should be radically remodelled towards a relational vision encompassing society, global economic systems and the natural environment. In the document *Listen to the Land! Responding to Cries for Life*<sup>4</sup>, published by the Oikotree Movement<sup>5</sup>, there was a conclusion summarizing this belief: “These rich relational visions need to be further developed into structural and institutional forms in mid-term perspective, in order to counter the current social, economic and capital constructs that are leading humanity and the earth on a way of death. The dominating imperial capitalist civilization is necessarily coming to an end.”<sup>6</sup>

### 1. The *Accra Confession*: capitalism under pressure – points of criticism

The *Accra Confession* has been signed at the gathering of the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches<sup>7</sup> in Accra, Ghana, in 2004. The document denounces the injustice of commonly prevailing economic relations. While pointing to the sources of injustice, the Reformed Churches define them as “massive threats to life” which 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.”<sup>8</sup> By searching for a living God, in the *Accra Confession*, the Reformed Churches of today reach back to the original theological insights of the Calvinist and Zwingilian Reformation.<sup>9</sup> As observed Piotr Kopiec, “the *Accra Confession* reflected various processes that have taken place both in the ecumenical movement and in

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<sup>4</sup> Oikotree Movement. 2016. *Listen to the Land! Responding to Cries for Life*. Daegu (South Korea): Less Press & Life in Beauty Press.

<sup>5</sup> The Oikotree Movement has been established in 2006 as a continuation of the *Accra Confession*. The Movement is sponsored by the Council for World Mission (CWM), the World Alliance (from 2010: Communion) of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). Oikotree. 2016. About Us (19.10.2021). <https://oikotree.net/about/>.

<sup>6</sup> Oikotree Movement. 2016. *Listen to the Land!*, 111.

<sup>7</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches is the predecessor of World Communion of Reformed Churches, which was brought to life by the fusion in 2010 of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches with the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

<sup>8</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches. 2004. The *Accra Confession* (20.20.2021). <http://warc.ch/accra/the-accra-confession>, no 6.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Nico Botha, Peter Maruping. 2013. “Reformed Christianity and the Confession of Accra: A Conversation about Unavoidable Questions in the Quest for Justice.” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39 (1): 157–169.

Reformed Christianity.”<sup>10</sup> It not surprising then that they also coincided with theological concepts and inspirations born in the womb of the World Council of Churches, where the Reformed Churches play a significant role.

### 1.1. Unjust accumulation of goods and commodification of man

The world capitalist system is once again criticized in the *Accra Confession* for the unfair accumulation of goods in the hands of the richest, while leaving a small part of them at the disposal of the poorest. In a document dated in 2004, this proportion was estimated at 1 to 57, that is “annual income of the richest 1 per cent is equal to that of the poorest 57 per cent”<sup>11</sup> of humanity. Such a huge disproportion in terms of percentages does not yet provide a complete picture of the poverty of millions of people. Instead, it becomes more understandable when we apply to it the number of 240,000 people dying each day of hunger and malnutrition. And yet, God gave the Earth to all mankind, not just to a small group that was clever enough to appropriate the goods that belong to all. The amassing of goods in the hands of a small elite is contrary to God’s plan as expressed in the Book of Genesis.

The world economic system is based on a neoliberal ideology, according to which the human person is commodified, that is, a man or a woman is worth as much as their market value. This concept of man is known in literature as *homo oeconomicus*: a man who is first and foremost a producer and a consumer<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, “human life cannot be commodified, but that it is a value that exceeds all material values.”<sup>13</sup> The Reformed Churches, too, by announcing the *Accra Confession*, accurately diagnose the trap of neoliberal ideology closely related to globalization: “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

<sup>10</sup> Piotr Kopiec. 2018. “Ecumenical Criticism of Capitalism: Selected Approaches.” *Roczniki Teologiczne* 65 (7) English version: 96.

<sup>11</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches. 2004. *The Accra Confession*, no 7. For comparison, one can refer to the report of the British organization Oxfam, published ten years after the *Accra Confession*. The Oxfam report is about wealth in the world. It stated that in 2014, 48 percent of the world’s wealth was in the hands of just one percent of the world’s population. The remaining 52 percent was owned by the rest of the people. According to Oxfam, in next two years, one percent of the world’s population was to own more than 50 percent of the wealth existing on the globe. Wojciech Rogacin. 2015. Jeden procent populacji ma prawie tyle pieniędzy, co... pozostałe 99 procent (20.10.2021). <http://www.polskatimes.pl/artykul/3720682,jeden-procent-populacji-ma-prawie-tyle-pieniedzy-co-pozostale-99-procent,id,t.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Tomáš Sedláček, David Orrel. 2012. *Zmierzch homo oeconomicus. Rozmowa z Romanem Chłupatým*. Warszawa: Studio EMKA 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Przemysław Kantyka. 2016. *Chrześcijańska alterglobalizacja. Człowiek wobec globalizacji w antropologicznoteologicznej wizji Światowej Rady Kościołów*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 59.

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).”<sup>14</sup> It is absolutely necessary to find a way out of the trap of neoliberal ideology. Can mankind afford such a tremendous price for failing to fight the economic system that leads to the poverty of the majority and the immense wealth of the few? This price will be the real creation of a class of “superhumans” and the masses of slaves serving them, against which – as one of the two greatest threats to humanity – warned the famous astrophysicist Stephen Hawking.<sup>15</sup>

In this context, the vision presented by the Oikotree Movement can be seen in terms of utopia: “A new property order will need to be built on the commons, which sees the world as a gift to be used for life, not as privatized commodity. This starts with land, water, air, and seeds but also includes common cultural goods produced by collectives such as the internet. Consequently all basic goods and services for the satisfaction of basic needs of people, including transport, education, health etc., should be fully accessible to all and, if necessary, publicly provided.”<sup>16</sup> In reality, however, the realization of the idea of universal availability of services and the fulfillment of the vision of the earth’s servitude and its resources to every human being is nothing but the fulfillment of God’s command contained in the words of the Book of Genesis.

## 1.2. Bringing to the unpayable indebtedness of Third World countries

Another reason for criticizing the world’s economic relations shaped in contemporary capitalism is indebtedness of the countries of the so-called the Third World under the guise of aid programs. It quickly turns out that debts become unpayable and debtors are almost brought to bankruptcy. Often, despite the repayment of capital, the growing interest multiplies the debt in an unrealistic way to pay off.<sup>17</sup> For the first time, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization were mentioned in the *Accra Confession* in the context of using the “political, economic or military alliances to protect and advance the interest of capital owners.”<sup>18</sup> This problem was also highlighted in

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<sup>14</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches. 2004. *The Accra Confession*, no 14.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Marsh. 2018. Essays reveal Stephen Hawking predicted race of ‘superhumans’ (21.10.2021). <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/oct/14/stephen-hawking-predicted-new-race-of-superhumans-essays-reveal>.

<sup>16</sup> Oikotree Movement. 2016. *Listen to the Land!*, 114.

<sup>17</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches. 2004. *The Accra Confession*, no 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, no 13.

the document of the World Council of Churches: *AGAPE – Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth*, published in 2005. The same organizations were named there as the tools by which world capital introduces “economic freedom” to third world countries in its terms, which in practice means taking control over the finances of a given country by driving the country into unpayable debts.<sup>19</sup> The Reformed Churches however add to these organizations also most powerful states: the United States of America and its allies. This certainly does not inspire optimism when looking to overcome these unjust deals.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.3. Plundering the Earth and damaging the environment

The unrestrained economic growth of the industrialized countries does not take place without carrying out a destructive economy that brings enormous damage to the environment. While rich countries have introduced many environmental regulations in their territories, they no longer care at all about what the large cross-border corporations based in them do. In this way, the natural resources of poor countries are subject to abusive exploitation, which leaves behind the destruction of the natural environment. The economic growth of rich countries is thus paid for by enormous environmental losses in poor countries, which are suppliers of natural resources.<sup>21</sup> From a theological point of view, this situation is completely unacceptable, because all the earth has been entrusted to man by God under responsible management and no part of it may be subject to degradation.

The consequences of a wasteful economy of natural goods fuelling economic growth are often irreversible. In the *Accra Confession*, Reformed Churches point to the price that nature pays for meeting the needs of human consumption to increase. “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.”<sup>22</sup> This devastation, however, results from the adopted and implemented capitalist economic model. So it becomes clear that it is impossible to prevent nature from being completely devastated without substantially changing this system. Small adjustments can only soothe the conscience of consumers for a moment, but will not really help nature.

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<sup>19</sup> World Council Of Churches. 2005. *AGAPE – Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth. A Background Document*. Geneva: WCC Publications, no 1.2.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. World Alliance of Reformed Churches. 2004. *The Accra Confession*, no 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, no 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

A document from 1996, developed by the Reformed Ecumenical Council<sup>23</sup>: *The Just Stewardship of Land and Creation*, was devoted to a comprehensive discussion of the problem of the destruction of the natural environment and its resources as well as the protection of land, water and atmosphere. Although this document is already 25 years old, the diagnoses it contains regarding the comprehensive destruction of the natural environment by man have not lost any of their topicality. Likewise, a reminder of God's command to manage the created world responsibly, in which man cannot be a merciless ruler, but is to be God's collaborator in sustaining and developing God's deed of creation.

#### 1.4. Dead end of unlimited economic growth

One of the basic tenets of the neoliberal economic system on which modern capitalism is based is that "consumerism and the unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth are the best for the whole world."<sup>24</sup> However, this is an ideological assumption, not supported by facts. The centuries-old experience of mankind says something completely different: trying to "save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity"<sup>25</sup> it is an empty promise that has no coverage in the history of humanity. So why is this model still in use and, moreover, has so many staunch defenders? The answer is simple, albeit bitter: because those who could change this model are also the ones who benefit most from it. Therefore, they are not interested in changes, but only care about the PR side of their activities, and only from here comes the simulation of actions to improve the lives of the poorest and care for the natural environment.

The question, however, remains: why are powerful global corporations not subjected to the effective regulatory role of states and their governments? The answer is not optimistic in this respect. The lack of effective control stems from the earlier disarmament of states in their supervisory role in the 1980s. By adopting as economic dogma the consent to uninhibited economic activities aimed at continuous increase of production in order to multiply the profit on invested capital, states themselves allowed for the emergence of global economic and financial institutions stronger than themselves.<sup>26</sup> As today's experi-

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<sup>23</sup> Reformed Ecumenical Council. Study Committee Report. 1996. *The Just Stewardship of Land and Creation* (19.10.2021). [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcgleclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwrcr.ch%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2015%2F04%2FJust\\_Stewardship\\_of\\_Land\\_and\\_Creation.pdf&clen=464513&chunk=true](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcgleclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwrcr.ch%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2015%2F04%2FJust_Stewardship_of_Land_and_Creation.pdf&clen=464513&chunk=true).

<sup>24</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches. 2004. *The Accra Confession*, no 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, no 10.

<sup>26</sup> *Cf. Ibid*, no 12.

ence shows, attempts to force the world's giants to simply pay taxes are rather doomed to failure.<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Degrowth – a non-obvious way out

In view of all the above-mentioned critique of the capitalist system, with the desire for continuous growth (“grow or die”) as an integral part of it, the question may arise about the direct translation of economic and political issues into theology. What does economic growth have to do with theology? The answer, however, is simple: the focus of theology is man as God’s creation and the world created by God as given to man in responsible management. Hence, both the fate of man and the world, since it is closely related to economic and ecological issues, must be of interest to theology and the Christian faith. The Reformed Churches made this declaration in the *Accra Confession*: “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 neo-liberal economic globalization.”<sup>28</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that the Reformed Churches rejected an unfair political and economic system: “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.”<sup>29</sup> It is not far from this statement to determining a possible way out of the blind alley of constant economic growth, which creates the problems of the modern world and the people living in it rather than solves them. This is due to the belief that man is responsible to God for the good management of the created world and for supporting life in it. Hence, the first step is to reject the neoliberal paradigm of unregulated wealth accumulation and unrestrained growth.<sup>30</sup>

What are the components of the idea of degrowth? As mentioned above, it is not about simply reversing economic processes, but about adjusting them to the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Nicole Kaeding. 2019. Why Some Corporations Pay No Income Tax (20.10.2021). <https://taxfoundation.org/why-corporations-pay-no-income-tax/>; Ryan Browne. 2021. Amazon, Google and Facebook will be hit hard by the G-7 tax deal. Here’s how they responded (19.10.2021). <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/07/g-7-tax-deal-amazon-google-and-facebook-respond-.html>.

<sup>28</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches. 2004. The Accra Confession, no 16.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, no 19.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, nos 22–23.

real needs of a human being. It is necessary to produce and consume as much as for a given population in a given area is actually needed for life. To achieve this goal, a new and better system of distribution of goods is also needed, so that there is no need or necessity for their accumulation, and that everyone's rightful needs can be effectively satisfied.<sup>31</sup> To achieve this goal, a comprehensive change in thinking about the world is needed: from perceiving it as one's property towards perceiving it as created by God and given under responsible management to man. Such a change of thinking opens the way to the implementation of the principles of sustainable development.<sup>32</sup>

Sustainable growth therefore also means keeping the natural environment intact. In the idea of sustainability, developed by the World Council of Churches, the natural environment cannot be irreparably damaged by human action. This idea does not exclude economic activity, even on a large scale, but demands that nature be left to the next generations in a state no worse than we inherited it from our ancestors. According to the definition proposed by Visser't Hooft, first General Secretary the World Council of Churches, sustainability means such a development of societies in which the world is left with such natural resources and opportunities with which it was inherited. "This means that renewable sources are consumed no faster than they can be renewed, and non-renewable sources are consumed no faster than renewable substitutes can be found, and waste is produced in an amount no greater than that which can be processed by nature or human activities."<sup>33</sup> Other suggestions for understanding the term sustainability connect its understanding with the responsibility of generations to the next generations, as the implementation of God's commandments: "If the human community respects God's commandments, God will show his faithfulness anew to each next generation: generation after generation. This is sustainability."<sup>34</sup>

No less important component of the concept of degrowth is the principle of sufficiency or restraint. This is nothing but the ability to self-limit, a form of necessary asceticism, understood as shifting the focus from the drive to increase consumption to mutual responsibility for oneself and mutual service.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Degrowth. Definition.

<sup>32</sup> "Communities in every part of the globe are organizing, struggling against immense military, governmental, and economic powers to live into a future where the Earth is understood as God's creation, not our property". Oikotree Movement. 2016. *Listen to the Land!*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> *Sustainable Growth – a Contradiction in Terms?: Economy, Ecology and Ethics After the Earth Summit: Report of the Visser 't Hooft Memorial Consultation, The Ecumenical Institute, Château de Bossey, June 14–19. 1993.* Geneva: Visser 't Hooft Endowment Fund for Leadership Development, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Dommen. 1998. Defining Terms. In *Sustainability and Globalization*. Ed. Julio de Santa Ana, 69–70. Geneva: WCC Publications.

It was Musa Panti Filibus who was one of the first to formulate the principle of sufficiency as a counterweight to the concept of unlimited growth, built into neoliberal capitalism. According to Filibus, an economy built on the principle of sufficiency “calls us to shape our thinking differently, to recognize that the Earth is not only a place of unlimited growth, but also a place of mutual service and responsibility towards one another, a place where people can live in peace and justice, and together with all creation they can rest and share God’s gifts of nature.”<sup>35</sup> The introduction of the principle of sufficiency in economic relations and in the very way of thinking about human approach to them can contribute significantly to balancing the “economy of greed” inscribed in the concept of *homo oeconomicus*.

Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, for his part, postulated the creation of a new social theology rooted in the biblical and theological tradition and at the same time supporting concrete steps of political reform.<sup>36</sup> The same thought was taken up by the Conference of European Churches, which also includes the Reformed Churches. The “sacrificial mode of existence” developed in the CEC document *Sharing God’s Earth and Its Riches Justly* refers directly to the “theology of enough” or “theology of sufficiency”: all they value “voluntary restraint (asceticism), sharing and solidarity.”<sup>37</sup> The principle of enough described there is nothing more than the ability to self-limit one’s consumption to the level of equitable satisfaction of needs, without excessive consumption resulting from greed and immoderation. The concept of “economy of sufficiency”, developed in the socio-theological reflection of the CEC, belongs to the same line of thought.<sup>38</sup>

As it turns out, the concept of degrowth discussed here goes much further and deeper than just to the level of economic management, including production. In order to be able to set the volume of production at a level sufficient for a decent living, one needs the ability to impose limits on oneself, and hence the ability to restrain one’s greed. Only then will it be possible to cease the excessive accumulation of goods, which causes the robbery of natural goods and the increase in social inequalities, leading to the impoverishment of huge numbers of people.

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<sup>35</sup> Musa Panti Filibus. 2010. Justice not Greed: Biblical Perspectives on Ethical Deficits of the Present Global Financial System. In *Justice not Greed*. Ed. Pamela Brubaker, Rogate Mshana, 54. Geneva: WCC Publications.

<sup>36</sup> Heinrich Bedford-Strohm. 2011. Poverty, Wealth and Ecology – a Call for a Social and Environmental Transformation – a Theological Perspective. In *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Europe. Call for Climate Justice*. Ed. Peter Pavlovic, 26. Brussels: WCC Publications.

<sup>37</sup> Conference of European Churches. 2018. *Sharing God’s Earth and Its Riches Justly. A Reflection Document of the Thematic Reference Group Economic and Ecological Justice*, 3. Brussels: CEC Publications.

<sup>38</sup> Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches. 2011. Budapest Call for Climate Justice Addressing Poverty and Ecology. In *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Europe. Call for Climate Justice*. Ed. Peter Pavlovic, 145–149. Brussels: CEC Publications.

## Conclusion

According to experts on the subject, the capitalist system in its present shape is in decline and cannot survive without deep modifications. As the main factor causing the inevitable collapse of the present form of the capitalist economic system, they diagnose the growing ecological crisis that will develop throughout the twenty-first century.<sup>39</sup> For the analyzes carried out above, it makes little difference whether, as Wallerstein wants, the present world-system cannot continue to exist because it has strayed too far from its equilibrium point and does not allow capitalists to unlimited capital accumulation<sup>40</sup>, or whether Calhoun is right, saying that the collapse of capitalism is not imminent, and that its prolonged and profound transformation is more likely.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of whether the global economy is on the verge of collapse or deep transformation, the game is about what will arise as a result of these inevitable changes. Christian Churches, including the Reformed Churches, are actively involved in discussing the future shape of the world economic order, first making a deep criticism of the weakness of the present capitalist system, and then pointing to ways to correct it. The points of criticisms are clear. They are: unrestrained drive to accumulate capital in the hands of a few, leaving most of humanity on the margins of poverty and leading third world countries to unpayable debt, further: the ecological crisis caused by a robbery economy and unjustified faith in achieving prosperity through unbridled economic growth.

It is clear that criticism, however useful, cannot build anything better on its own. The Reformed Churches join the work on indicating the directions in which the current economic system should evolve and indicate the means to achieve the set goals. These measures are: moderation in the volume of production and consumption, better redistribution of goods, adopting the principles of sustainable growth and finally adopting the principle of sufficiency and self-limiting skills. In this way, the “economy of greed” could be replaced with the “economy of life”, and the new world-system could finally conform to God’s command to govern the created world responsibly and be free from the threat of ecological self-destruction. In a word, it is postulated to introduce the idea of degrowth with

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<sup>39</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, Randal Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derluguian, Craig Colhoun. 2013. Collective Introduction: “The Next Big Turn”. In Eidem. *Does Capitalism Have a Future?*, 2–3. Oxford: University Press.

<sup>40</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein. 2013. Structural Crisis, or Why Capitalists May No Longer Find Capitalism Rewarding? In Immanuel Wallerstein, Randal Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derluguian, Craig Colhoun. *Does Capitalism Have a Future?*, 44. Oxford: University Press.

<sup>41</sup> Craig Colhoun. 2013. What Threatens Capitalism Now? In Immanuel Wallerstein, Randal Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derluguian, Craig Colhoun. *Does Capitalism Have a Future?*, 154. Oxford: University Press.

its components on a global scale, which is to restore the lost balance of the world economy and save the natural environment for future generations.

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