

PIOTR KOPIEC

Wydział Teologii KUL

Christian Alterglobalization: How the World Council of Churches Is Inspired by the World Social Forum?¹

Abstract

Globalization becomes one of the chief issues of the activity of the World Council of Churches. As the biggest ecumenical organization, the WCC grasps globalization as being responsible for many tendencies that cause a global social and economic crisis: global poverty, global political instability, wars, economic depressions, crisis of the social institutions and a growing gap between the poor and the well-offs. As the driving force of globalization the WCC indicates the neoliberal free-market philosophy, the one, which is also assumed to be a tool of the global capital to achieve political power. This economic globalization is confronted with a so called alterglobalist vision promoted by the WCC. According to the Genevian organization, alterglobalism understands its objectives as a transformation towards more just social structures and social institutions. Many inspiration of the ecumenical interpretation of globalization is derived from the activity of the World Social Forum, the biggest platform where meet many alterglobalist organizations. Article discusses a basic components of Christian alterglobalism and inquires how they are inspired by the alterglobalist movement.

Keywords: World Council of Churches; World Social Forum; globalization; alterglobalization; AGAPE; economy of life.

Chrześcijański alterglobalizm:

Jak Światowa Rada Kościołów jest inspirowana Światowym Forum Społecznym?

Streszczenie

Od ponad dwóch dekad globalizacja stała się jednym z głównych zagadnień kształtujących działalność Światowej Rady Kościołów. Przez tą największą organizację ekumeniczną, procesy globalizacyjne definiowane i interpretowane są jako odpowiedzialne za wiele zjawisk składających się na ogólnoswiatowy kryzys społeczny i ekonomiczny: biedę, polityczną niestabilność, wojny, kryzys instytucji społecznych takich jak rodzina czy narastającą przepaść między bogatymi i biednymi. Za siłę napędzającą przy tym uznaje się neoliberalną filozofię wolnego rynku, która w rzeczywistości staje się narzędziem

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kumulacji kapitału w rękach wąskiej grupy właścicieli. Takiej neoliberalnej globalizacji przeciwstawia Światowa Rada Kościołów wizję alternatywną, opartą na założeniu o konieczności transformacji społeczeństwa globalnego w kierunku bardziej sprawiedliwych oraz solidarnych struktur i relacji społecznych. Wiele z inspiracji kształtujących ekumeniczną wizję jest zaczerpniętych przy tym z działalności Światowego Forum Społecznego, największej platformy wymiany idei antyglobalizacyjnych. Artykuł omawia podstawowe elementy chrześcijańskiego alterglobalizmu i bada, w jakim stopniu są one czerpane z ruchu antyglobalizacyjnego. Wykazuje również jego chrześcijańską specyfikę, wyrastającą z teologicznego podłoża stanowionego przez Pismo Święte.

Słowa kluczowe: Światowa Rada Kościołów; Światowe Forum Społeczne; globalizacja; alterglobalizacja; AGAPE; ekonomia życia.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) understood as a global – ecumenical organization gathering Churches from all over the world appears to be predestined to interpret how globalization processes affect today’s human and social conditions. Its teaching derives from experiences of local, indigenous churches and communities which are sharing all the same common beliefs of Christian message. The WCC is therefore a place, where various ideas, tendencies and cultural patterns are brought together and come about tools used to build a common vision of Church, society and culture; and the place where they converge both, locally and globally.

Yet it must be strongly emphasized that while interpreting globalization, the WCC looks around in order to support itself by different political and sociological conceptions as well as experiences of another actors of political life. This refers particularly to the finding, that even though globalization, grasped as an important process in the activities of the WCC, it has been discerned for decades prior to the General Assembly in Porto Allegre. It was in this Brazilian city that the issue moved forward to the center of interest. This was certainly connected to influences of the World Social Forum of which Porto Allegre is declared to be one of the headquarters. And finally, the way how globalization is interpreted by the WCC is inspired by different tendencies within the WCC itself and its structure. The most important one relies on more and more bigger impact of the Churches from the Global South, the factor which causes an organizational transformation of the WCC. Remarks mentioned above give a structure to a survey of how globalization is understood by the World Council of Churches and, on the other hand, how the WCC is affected by the globalizing world.

1. The World Social Forum as a global think-tank

According to Ulrich Beck, one of the most prominent contemporary sociologists, a new social and political order, which is emerging in the processes of globalization, must be explained in the image of constant “meta-play of power” between three main players: states, global capital, and finally, global civil society. The notion of meta-play implies that „social theory cannot identify any longer powerful actors who transform societies”². The “meta-play” (*das Metaspiel der Weltpolitik*), thus, determines social and political order in the common interplay of particular players who always all over again recognize each other, consequently, any social or political arrangement cannot be confirmed as whether completed or finished. After German sociologist, globalization privileges global capital of transnational organizations and multinational corporations. Yet, on the other hand, it opens a vast social space to transnational initiatives and to common responsibility for the world and a social order. Globalization, thus, can be defined reversely as well, as the corner stone on which the global civil society is being built³.

The category of global civil society manifests itself through the World Social Forum (WSF), the biggest worldwide organization of alterglobalist movement. From its inception, it was the platform where have met various groups and individuals in order to express their opposition to the neoliberal globalization. It was, intentionally, an organization without heavy structures. Rather than being another one non-governmental organization, it has pretended to be an open space where ideas and experiences would be expressed and exchanged. Its main concern is highlighted by the slogan „another world is possible”⁴.

The first spark to establish this open space was the reaction of many who were struck by an ambiance of the first meetings of the World Economic Forum, in Davos, Switzerland. The WSF was therefore founded in order to denounce the efforts of global actors as Western states, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization to introduce the neo-liberal economy on all over the world.

The idea to organize a counter-summit of Davos was sparking in the late 90’s, yet, the first three ones have taken place in 2001, 2002 and 2003 in Porto Allegre,

² S. KESSELRING, *The Mobile Risk Society*, in: S. KESSELRING, W. CANZLER, v. KAUFMANN (ed.), *Tracing mobilities: Towards a Cosmopolitan Perspective*, Burlington: Ashgate 2008, 90.

³ U. BECK, *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter. Neue weltpolitische Ökonomie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2012, 28.

⁴ T. PONNIAH, W. FISCHER, *The World Social Forum and Reinvention of Democracy*, in: *Another World is Possible. Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum*, London: Zed Books 2004, 5.

Brazil. The city was elected because of being governed since 1988 by the Workers Party, the political body that introduced successful radical reform in order to secure democratic process in relations between the capital, the government and the public. Political transformation has been realized through the specific innovative participatory budgetary process that included active participation of NGO's, small communities and individuals⁵.

Growing interest on all over the world and increasing number of participants in the meetings of WSF launched its importance for those sharing alterglobalist beliefs. Next conferences have been held in different places around the world, e.g. in Mumbai, India, in Caracas, Venezuela, in Dacar, Senegal, and Nairobi, Kenya. Figures from Nairobi illustrate how far the WSF increased itself: during the conference in the Kenyan capital met 1400 organizations from 110 countries⁶. In 2008, the forum has not taken place in one particular place, but has been organized as a global common initiative of organizations and movements that responded to the "Global Call for Action" in order to expose and share their ways of thinking on social and economic order. Consequently, WSF came about the biggest and most powerful alterglobalist network which gave a structure to movement of those opposing to the neoliberal capitalism.

Pluralistic and flexible structure of Forum reflects its cultural, social, political and ideological diversity. There is no only ideology, no only solution and no only leadership that would constitute its coherent authority structure. The WSF is rather a network of networks share a common conviction that economic globalization is a society-destructive tendency which requires global and common answer. Yet, diversity mentioned above means a struggle within the WFC itself for what is its most important concern, what method of activity should be chosen and what organizational structure would be most appropriate. According to William Fisher and Thomas Ponniah, following points enclosed in five slogans report these debates: "the Revolution versus Reform", "the Environment versus Economy", "the Human Rights or Protectionism", "the Universality of Values" and "the Local, National or Global"⁷. The first label distinguishes between two ways to attain a new alterglobalist order. The first one implies tough changes of world institutions, including delegitimization of some of them, whereas the latter prefers to improve them through the participation of global civil society. Next slogan refers to the struggle between those fighting for diminishing economic growth and con-

⁵ T. PONNIAH, W. FISCHER, *The World Social Forum and Reinvention of Democracy*, 6.

⁶ CH. WANKEL (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Business in Today's World*, Vol. 1, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications 2009, 57.

⁷ T. PONNIAH, W. FISCHER, *The World Social Forum and Reinvention of Democracy*, 8f.

sumption in order to protect environment, and those considering growth as a way to reduce rates of unemployment and poverty. Third label pays attention to differences between activists from the global North, who are attempting to introduce proper work standards together with trade agreements in developing economies and those from the South who consider it as a way to protect job places in rich Northern countries. The universality of values refers to the debates on cultural globalization, and asks about Westernization. And finally, last slogan considers particular levels of activity, while assessing their efficiency.

Another level of diversity, the one which is, so to say, more contextual, is to be derived from the aspects of globalization. When we consider the process of globalization as being occurred in three fields: culturally, politically and economically, we can apply this distinction to the various movement and tendencies within the WSF itself. Yet, before we will discuss how do globalizing processes reflect in our reality, we have to recall their definition examples. In an inundation of attempts a couple seems to be very relevant. For instance Anthony Giddens, remarks promisingly that globalization can be defined as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and *vice versa*”⁸. Martin Khor claims bitterly that “globalization is what we in the Third World have for several centuries called colonization”⁹. And Thomas Friedmann, understands it, perhaps most convincingly, as “the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before – in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is also producing a powerful backlash from those brutalized or left behind by this new system... Globalization means the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world”¹⁰. In the descriptions mentioned above one may perceive an ambiguity of dangers and hopes related to the globalization. Such ambiguity creates also a background of activities of the World Social Forum.

The dynamism of the organization is therefore constituted by two questions, both how to understand globalization and how to assess it. Considering the latter, the participants of the WSF as well as commentators of its work lay emphasis on the hope deriving from the conscience of community. And this could be assumed to be the sign of birth of the global civil society. On the other side, the first ques-

⁸ N. AL-RODHAN, *Definitions of Globalization: A Comprehensive Overview and a Proposed Definition*, Geneva: Center for the Security Policy 2006, 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15

¹⁰ N. AL-RODHAN, *Definitions of Globalization*, 15.

tion is related to the growing concern about how globalization manifests itself and how these manifestations should be understood. This means of course, that depending on epistemological and axiological assumptions, different phenomena of globalization will be emphasized.

According to Fisher and Ponniah, three main ideological ginger groups have emerged out of these different assumptions, mainly connected to economic, technological and cultural questions. Yet, all of them appear to declare globalization to be the “process that imposes neoclassical economic policies, consumerist cultural practices and technological risks”¹¹. Both authors distinguish between groups of socialist provenance, that derived from the identity groups and that involved in ecological movement. The first groups stress an economic impact of globalization, while tracking destructive tendencies of neoliberal economy, particularly the growing gap between those well-offs and the poor. The second ones pay attention to the processes of westernization of culture all around the world. One points at the notion of maceddonalization coined by George Ritzer, of which main factors: predictability, calculability, efficiency and control¹² profoundly influence not only human culture but also human nature. And the latter turn towards the questions related to the technological progress, not enough constrained by the human and ecological values. According to many critics, mankind faces the crisis of technology getting out of control, what was movingly expressed by David Loy when he quoted Frankenstein words from the roman of Mary Shelley: “You are my creator but I am your master – obey!”¹³ In order to clarify and depict these distinctions Fisher and Ponniah listed more meticulously a rich kaleidoscope of objective groups gathering in the WSF as social movements consisted of environmentalists, urban movements, feminism, the lesbian and gay movement, the antiracist movement, and added that in both the Global Nord and the Global South these groups were concerned with question connected to identity, culture and modernity.¹⁴

Despite these differences and fluid organization there are several reference points for those engaged in activities of the WSF. This is, not forgetting about a perception of a common adversary, an International Council of WSF and a certain amount of generally accepted documents. Variety of texts reflects diversity of organization. Yet, according to opinion of Fisher and Ponniah, this diversity

¹¹ T. PONNIAH, W. FISCHER, *The World Social Forum and Reinvention of Democracy*, 11.

¹² G. RITZER, *The McDonaldization of Society*, Thousand Oaks – California – London – New Delhi: Pine Forge Press 2000, 40.

¹³ D. LOY, *The Religion of the Market*, „Journal of the American Academy of Religion” 65 (1997) 2, 279.

¹⁴ T. PONNIAH, W. FISCHER, *The World Social Forum and Reinvention of Democracy*, 8.

converges in the idea of reinvention of democracy. Militants of WSF agree that the democracy must be reinvented since the current representative democracy confirms the order imposed from above while the world calls for the grassroots democracy, “democracy from below”. The concept of reinvention of democracy is encompassing “a reinvention of society such that the mode of economic production, the structures of political governance, the dissemination of scientific innovation, the organization of media, social relation and the relation between society and nature, are subjected to a radical, participatory and living democratic process”.¹⁵ All factors mentioned above exemplify themselves in the list of demands such as: democratic public control over external indebtedness, democratic regulation of corporations, the globalization of collective bargaining, decentralized local solidarity economies, a World Water Parliament, local food sovereignty, civil society monitoring of capital and the state, free education for all, enforceable social, economic and cultural rights, and new values for a civilization of solidarity”¹⁶.

All this exemplifications are enclosed in a number of documents produced within the organization. Yet, they rather present various ideas and solutions of member groups, and they are not pretending to be an official statement of the WSF. In fact, an only generally accepted document produced by the Forum is the WSF Charter of Principles, drawn up in 2001 in Porto Allegre. The document could be declared to be a constitution of World Social Forum, as the principles contained in the text define its orientation and structure. It consists of fourteen points, that shortly and repeatedly stipulate what is the main concern and what are conditions of commitment. Two main claims of the Charter are, thus, a fluid, open platform and an opposition against the neoliberal order. Both assumptions are expressed as follows: “The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Mankind and between it and the Earth” (point 1). This formulation is somehow accomplished by the following points, of which point 4 and point 9 appear as being of special importance: „The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14f.

those corporations' interests, with the complicity of national governments. They are designed to ensure that globalisation in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens – men and women – of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples” (point 4), and, finally point 9: „ The World Social Forum will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organisations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities, providing they abide by this Charter of Principles. Neither party representations nor military organisations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity”¹⁷. These as other points of the document expound more plainly how is organization acting and what is its main goal.

It is tempting to consider the WSC as a new player in the political reality. Yet, an intention of its organizers was to establish “not an agent but instead a pedagogical and political space that enables learning, networking and political organizing”¹⁸. Now, this is rather a sort of an enormous think-tank which gives a structure to those who believe in that one must look for a more just socioeconomic relations. The objective of WSC's activities is commonly recognized and confirmed, nevertheless, there are many divergences in what are the methods to be chosen as well as what should be an order of new world.

2. The AGAPE Project. Alternative Globalization according to the World Council of Churches

Without any doubt a concern of the social justice belongs to the core activities promoted by the World Council of Churches (WCC). Ecumenical movement was from the very beginning developed together with the practical issues derived from the social challenges. Such a claim was many times proved when inquiring the history of both ecumenism and the World Council of Churches. Yet, it appears, the social commitment came recently about a chief area of ecumenical action, the one which engage the major part of the WCC's involvement. When looking

¹⁷ B. DE SOUSA SANTOS, *The Rise of the Global Left. The World Social Forum and Beyond*, London – New York: Zed Books 2006, 196f.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

for the causes of the central place of social issues one must lay emphasis on the two discoveries, both derived from the different angles. Firstly, the social commitment of the WCC is increasing while the more and more big participation as well as influences of the Churches from the Global South. Secondly, considering rather poor results of the theological dialogue conducted within various streams of the ecumenical movement, social questions are assumed to be a chance for cooperation and a common goal of Christians.

Although reflection on globalization was conducted by many ecumenical theologians of the WCC before, it was General Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1998 that launched systematic ecumenical action within the World Council of Churches in order to inquire and face many challenges derived from the globalizing world. During the conference voices from all corners of the world argued off, that poverty, inequality and injustice are driven by neoliberal globalization. In the common opinion of participants of ecumenical movement, the shape of contemporary social and economic relations compels Christians churches to look for another visions of society. This was formulated and expressed by the project of AGAPE (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth)¹⁹.

Yet, before the AGAPE project will be told over, one must mention the content of the Final Report of the General Assembly in Harare “Together on the Way”, that was concerning current global concerns. Globalization is here declared to be in the center of economic, cultural and social challenges Christian churches are confronting. Authors of the document claim that increasing experiences of poverty, ecological destruction and political as well as social injustice in many corners of the world find their roots in the economic globalization that is driven by the neoliberal philosophy of unfettered markets. Globalization is thus an all-embracing phenomenon, the one which manifests itself in almost every aspect of life. Consequently, Christianity must help to search new paradigm of social transformation that considers economy as as social institution. According to the WCC’s theologians three main factors of the quest for more just globalizing world shall be distinguished: the complementary vision of globalization which is not restricted to the economic area, build of the global civil society and creating institutions of global governance. These are the main objectives that are better explained when listing objectives detailed. The challenges derived from globalization compel thus ecumenical movement to strive for: 1. formulating alternative responses to the activities of transnational corporations and organizations in order to identify the harmful as well as positive impact of their policies

¹⁹ *Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth. A Background Document*, Geneva: World Council of Churches 2005, 2.

in a competent manner; 2. advocating and campaigning for the cancellation of debt and a new ethics and system of lending and borrowing; 3. cooperating with initiatives for a new financial system including a tax on financial transactions (Tobin tax) that can be used to support the development of alternative options, limits to the unregulated flow of capital, etc.; 4. supporting initiatives to address unemployment and the deteriorating conditions of work faced by workers in all regions as a result of globalization; 5. enabling and supporting local alternatives through new forms of organizing production, fair trade, alternative banking systems and, particularly in highly industrialized countries, changes in life-style and consumption patterns; 6. reviewing the churches' own dealing with land, labour, unemployment and finances as, for example, the ethical investment of pension funds and other financial resources, the use of agricultural land, etc.; 7. promoting economic literacy and leadership training on globalization and related issues; 8. reflecting on economic issues as a matter of faith²⁰. The list of aforementioned postulates reflected deep inspirations by the concepts elaborated within the World Social Forum and, in the same time, inspired future work of the WCC. It shows also, that even though an ecumenical interpretation of globalization is embedded in a theological and ethical background, it do use economic assertions²¹.

The Assembly in Harare moved forward the ecumenical reflection as well as ecumenical action regarding globalization processes. The mentioned above AGAPE project shall be understood as one of the most relevant examples of the WCC strivings. It built a bridge between two Assemblies, that in Harare and that in Porto Allegre, and in this way, that it was initiated in the Zimbabwean capital and sparked a reflection of the Brazilian conference. And, finally, it is manifested by the teaching on the economy of life.

3. The economy of life – Christian alterglobalistic vision?

When diagnosing the crisis of the globalizing world, ecumenists agree that its key factor derives from the neoliberal economy²². In order to face the crisis, they propose an entire transformation of socioeconomic paradigm. Since neoliberalism was judged to turn every human being, every society, every culture and

²⁰ D. KESSLER (ed.), *Together on the Way. Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva: WCC Publications 1999, 184.

²¹ H. OPSCHOOR, *Economic Globalization and Development*, in: B. GOLDEWIJK, *Religion, International Relation and Development Cooperation*, Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers 2007, 271.

²² *Ibid.*, 270.

the Earth into commodity to sale at a price, it was declared to be the economy of death. A new paradigm was proclaimed as the economy of life, inspired by the Gospel and, in the same time, by the experiences and reflections of people facing the challenges of poverty and deprivation. Economy of life has been announced to be the: “God’s challenge to us. Our faithfulness to God and to God’s free gift of life compels us to confront idolatrous assumptions, unjust systems, the politics of domination and exploitation in the current world economic order. Economics and economic justice are always matters of faith as they touch the very core of God’s will for creation”²³.

The proclamation of economy of life turns to the basic intuitions of Christian teaching about what is good and what is bad. It derives their key assumptions from the biblical image of God’s governance. According of the AGAPE team there are five characteristics of the God’s household of life: “1. The bounty of the gracious economy of God (*oikonomia tou theou*) offers and sustains abundance for all. 2. God’s gracious economy requires that we manage the abundance of life in a just, participatory and sustainable manner. 3. The economy of God is an economy of life that promotes sharing, globalized solidarity, the dignity of persons, and love and care for the integrity of creation. 4. God’s economy is an economy for the whole *oikoumene* and the whole earth community. 5. God’s justice and preferential option for the poor are the marks of God’s economy”²⁴.

The five marks of the economy of life pose a discursive background for the further suggestions about how it is revealed in a social and economic perspective. Society that is built on the economy of life has been reflected in the list of postulates that are thought to give it a just social structure. On the top of the list is a striving to overcome social divisions. The postulate could be considered as a problematic one, since Christianity defines society after the Pauline teaching on diversity of charisms, what could be sociologically grasped as a concept of the cooperation of social statuses and social roles. Not avoiding controversy and not going into details one can claim that the economy of life lays emphasis on the increasing gap between the poor and those which are well-off when turning attention to the “unacceptable levels of poverty coexist with small pockets of wealth between and within nations”²⁵. Next points of the list move on the primary assumption. One calls for the bringing people and resources together for the good of each individual and each group in society, for an accountability for others and for the whole creation, for the overcoming separations and for developing one’s responsibility

²³ *Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5

²⁵ R. MSHANA, *Introduction*, in: *ibid.* I.

and ability to manage individual and communal livelihoods. Furthermore, people are called to chart reflexively their histories and develop their own attributes and potentials. And last postulates refer to the economic activity; as its driving forces shall be acknowledged people's work, knowledge and creativity rather than capital. Individual and social rights must be taken as the reference for development. Finally, economy of life assumes a solidarity-based globalization²⁶.

Such characteristics of the economy of life pose a conceptual milieu for the more technically grasped demands that are to be divided into three fields: just finance, just trade and transformation of societies. They are, in their majority, developing main economic and political solutions, that were rendered in Harare and are focusing on the radical change of the worldly order driven by the neoliberal paradigm. They are thus repeating, in many cases, the mainstream of the economic and social insights within the World Social Forum. The biggest anti-globalist organization was many times used as a reference point for the alterglobalist vision of the WCC, particularly, when ecumenists were developing economic aspect of social transformation. Their ideas were borrowing, sometimes directly, from the programs elaborated within the World Social Forum. A part of the objectives accepted in Harare, listed above, proves this correlation. A direct invocation to the WSF was also expressed many times by the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, as e.g.: "meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the home of the World Social Forum (WSF), we are encouraged by the constructive and positive message of the movements gathering in the World Social Forum that alternatives are possible. We affirm that we can and must make a difference by becoming transformative communities caring for people and the earth"²⁷. This general idea introduces to the social and economic interpretation of AGAPE project that has been summarized as eight "commitments" concerning 1. poverty eradication, 2. trade, 3. finance, 4. sustainable use of land and natural resources, 5. public goods and services, 6. life-giving agriculture, 7. decent jobs, emancipated work and people's livelihood and 8. churches and the power of empire²⁸. It

²⁶ R. MSHANA, *Introduction*.

²⁷ *AGAPE: A Call to Love and Action*, in: LOUIS RIVERA-PAGÁN (ed.), *God, in Your Grace... Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva: WCC Publication 2007, 221.

²⁸ List of commitments: „1. **Poverty eradication**: We recommit ourselves to work for the eradication of poverty and inequality through developing economies of solidarity and sustainable communities. We will hold our governments and the international institutions accountable to implement their commitments on poverty eradication and sustainability. 2. **Trade**: We recommit ourselves to work for justice in international trade relations through critical analyses on free trade and trade negotiations, and to collaborate closely with social movements in making those agreements just, equitable and democratic. 3. **Finance**: We recommit ourselves to campaign for responsible lending; unconditional debt cancellation and for the control and regulation of global financial markets. Investments should be redirected towards businesses that respect social and ecological justice, or in

is clearly obvious that the content of every commitment contains terminology and solutions derived from the works of the World Social Forum.

Yet, considering resemblances between World Social Forum and World Council of Churches one must ask about differences. The question is the more important, the more the ecumenical organization is being accused to be the “Christian branch” of antiglobalist movement. A certain part of Christian theologians and sociologists, particularly these representing Catholic church and various Protestant conservative denominations, clearly express their conviction that Geneva promotes a “sort of Christian socialism”. Others indicate that while the social and economic questions moved on to the heart of WCC’s activity, pure theological approach has in the same time been neglected.

Even though accusations mentioned above may be partly justified, there are many reasons for increasing the social commitment of the WCC. Firstly, what has already been spotted, churches from the Global South play more and more important roles in the ecumenical movement and in Christianity in general. The scope of economic and social poverty in many countries in Africa, South America and Asia compel Christian churches to render systematic reflection and activity. They understand the neoliberal economic approach as a sort of contemporary colonialism and, consequently, as a destroying force launching famine, wars and crisis of social institutions. They, thus, theologically interpret neoliberal capitalism as

banks and institutions that do not engage in speculation, nor encourage tax evasion. 4. **Sustainable use of land and natural resources:** We recommit ourselves to engage in actions for sustainable and just patterns of extraction and use of natural resources, in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, who seek to protect their land, water and their communities. We recommit ourselves to challenge the excessive consumption of affluent societies so that they will shift towards self-restraint and simplicity in lifestyles. 5. **Public goods and services:** We recommit ourselves to join the global struggle against the imposed privatization of public goods and services; and to actively defend the rights of countries and peoples to define and manage their own commons. We recommit ourselves to support movements, groups and international initiatives defending vital elements of life such as bio-diversity, water and the atmosphere. 6. **Life-giving agriculture:** We recommit ourselves to work for land reforms in solidarity with landless agricultural labourers and small farm holders; to advocate in various ways for self-determination over food concerns; to oppose the production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as well as trade liberalization as the sole directive. We commit ourselves to promote ecological farming practices and to stand in solidarity with peasant communities. 7. **Decent jobs, emancipated work and people’s livelihoods:** We commit ourselves to build alliances with social movements and trade unions that advocate decent jobs and just wages. We commit ourselves to advocate for those workers and bonded labourers who work under exploitative conditions and are deprived of their rights to form trade unions. 8. **Churches and the power of empire:** We recommit ourselves to reflect on the question of power and empire from a biblical and theological perspective, and take a firm faith stance against hegemonic powers because all power is accountable to God. We acknowledge that the process of transformation requires that we as churches make ourselves accountable to the victims of the project of economic globalization. Their voices and experiences must determine how we analyze and judge this project, in keeping with the gospel. This implies that we as churches from different regions make ourselves accountable to each other, and that those of us closer to the centres of power live out our first loyalty to our sisters and brothers who experience the negative impacts of global economic injustice every day of their lives”. In: *ibid.*, 222f.

being developed on the greed. Greed transformed into value become a social sin which is extended by failure, indifference, and egoism. And the category of social sin requires that theological reflection will be also regarded to the social commitment. Such a theological perspective on society make people more responsible for the socioeconomic conditions and help them to avoid an attitude of withdrawing from the world.

Secondly, a meticulous scrutiny of the postulates that were described above reveal what is meant when telling about the economy of life. While considering the content of its discourse, one must lay emphasis on the anthropological perspective. Unlike a neoliberal approach, assuming the profit as a driving force as well as goal of the economy, the ecumenical concept puts humans in very center of entire economic activity. This is also manifested in many of the WCC's documents when one declares to reject the anthropological image of *homo oeconomicus* as a leading principle of political economy.

Theology imposes a closure on this anthropological perspective. Program in the economy of life put human beings in the center of activity because it is according to God's will and God's order. Economy of life, when torn apart from God, does not exist. It is embedded both substantially and conceptually in the truth of Christianity. And even though we discern an interreligious and political perspective as becoming more and more present in the activity of the WCC, it is the Gospel that is the only source of the concept. Human reflection and other cultural and religious inspirations appear as bricks laid on the corner stone of the Bible.

Economy of life joins with the line of Christian understanding of salvation. An outline of its history consists of several key points on the timeline running towards the salvation of universe, as creation, original sin, Jesus Christ's death on the cross, His resurrection, the Pentecost, His next Coming, the Final Judgment and the reign of the Kingdom of God. These moments, that are theologically understood, determine who is human being and what is human society and culture.

Sin and salvation are in a permanent interplay. They both manifest in the Augustinian paradigm of the struggle between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of evil. Sin is thus deeply embedded in the earthly reality. Nevertheless, this is in the same time a reality that is changed due to redemptive acting of Jesus. Because of this theological interplay, Christians are called to participate in this process of transformation. Such a theological claim let theologians gathered in the WCC Assemblies both in Harare and in Porto Alegre build an alterglobalist vision for more just social and economic order. Even though a part of solutions suggested is received by many as a theological abuse, it

sparks a discussion and opens many windows for the shaping of more sensitive social interrelations.

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