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July 28, 2021

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Degrowth is perhaps the most undervalued insight of Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Sí*', on Care for Our Common Home." Francis promotes degrowth because the "environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces."

But what is "degrowth"? Degrowth begins with a question raised by the French scholar André Gorz in the early 1970s: "Is the earth's balance, for which no-growth — or even degrowth — of material production is a necessary condition, compatible with the survival of the capitalist system?"

The question raises the problem of a bind that a globalized world finds itself in right now: We can't pursue capitalist or even "green" growth and simultaneously reverse the breakdown of the ecological commons.

Degrowth, an alternative way of being oriented toward radical abundance, began to emerge 50 years ago with the Club of Rome's 1968 study, *The Limits to Growth*, which documented the devastating ecological implications of unabated economic growth.

While the Club of Rome found that the current myopic focus on economic growth is unsustainable, it was joined by other scholars and activists who articulated paradoxical ways of living in radical abundance and harmony with the planet without economic growth.

In his recent primer on degrowth, *Less Is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World,* economic anthropologist Jason Hickel explains:

> Degrowth begins as a process of taking less. But in the end it opens up whole vistas of possibility. It moves us from scarcity to abundance, from extraction to regeneration, from dominion to reciprocity, and from loneliness and separation to connection with a world that's fizzing with life.

Growth for its own sake, Hickel laments, creates more "illth than wealth," when the ongoing pursuit of growth in high-income nations produces more inequality and instability, stress and depression from overwork, and increasing pollution and ill health.

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In *Laudato Si*', Francis recognizes that the contradiction between economic growth and the Earth's ecological balance "cannot be considered progress" because too often "people's quality of life actually diminishes — by the deterioration of the environment, the low quality of food or the depletion of resources — in the midst of economic growth."

We need to find another way. It is time to "accept decreased growth in some parts of the world," Francis advises, "in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth."

We tend not to see how economic growth delivers diminishing returns. There are, for example, dozens of countries that attain higher life expectancy with significantly less income than the United States, including Japan, South Korea, Portugal and even the European Union, which has about a third less income than the U.S.

One of the problems of growthism is our reliance on the deceptive measure called gross domestic product (GDP). Degrowth is not negative GDP. Degrowth seeks to create a different kind of economy and an entirely different way of living. GDP erroneously counts costs — like the building of a prison, incarcerating more people, and cleaning up pollution — as benefits.

We need a different measure of well-being. The genuine progress indicator (GPI), for example, includes not only GDP, but also negative results of economic growth, such as resource degradation, to assess the overall benefit to society.

Degrowth economists employ a different visual image to convey their goal. The objective is not to make the proverbial economic elephant leaner, but to turn the elephant into a snail, as an international consortium devoted to degrowth, which includes Catholic organizations, puts it. Turning the elephant into a snail means creating an economic metabolism in harmony with diverse ecologies that serve the full flourishing of all of our human and nonhuman kin.

The term *degrowth* is employed as a way to decolonize our thinking, that is, to shift from assuming that there is only one way of thinking — growth — and turn away from values of domination and exploitation toward values of conviviality, cooperation and reciprocity.

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The French and Italian terms for degrowth, *décroissance* and *decresita,* respectively, are perhaps more helpful because they evoke an ecological imagination to French and Italian ears because these words mean "a river returning to its regular flow after a flood."

Whereas capitalism seeks to control and extract value from the web of ecological relations that make life, many cultures deemed "primitive" by the modern West celebrate radical interdependence and reciprocity within diverse webs of life.

The Anishinaabeg, whose original lands were in northeastern America (now Canada), have the word *minobimaatisiiwin*, which means "a continuous rebirth of reciprocal and cyclical relations between human and other life." In southern African regions, Bantu languages have *ubuntu*, meaning human fulfillment through togetherness, and the Shona have *ukama*, which indicates "the interrelatedness of the entire cosmos, including the biophysical world." The Chinese *shi-shi wu-ai* and Maori term *mauri* express "interrelatedness through the entire life force of the cosmos." (These terms are drawn from Raj Patel and Jason Moore, *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*.)

Perhaps paradoxically, degrowth is not about living in Scrooge-like misery — it is about living in the radical abundance of God's creation. There are scriptural visions of degrowth, principally the Hebrew law of jubilee (Leviticus 25), which calls for the cancellation of debts every seventh year. In an era of ecological devastation, Hickel celebrates the Jubilee Debt Campaign's debt cancellation proposals as a "vital step toward ecological sustainability."

The problem of living by values of consumerism and infinite economic growth is not only do our economic values violate love of God and neighbor, but growth itself destroys God's creation and all of life as we know it.

Degrowth offers a different way that celebrates the radical abundance of the whole of God's creation while caring for all of our human and nonhuman kin.