



# carme ngo

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## Lessons from COP26 in Glasgow

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*Catholic Climate March at Glasgow on November 6, 2021, headed by the Laudato Si' Movement.*

My feelings have been contradictory at this COP26. On the one hand, I was excited, because I have expectations that we can achieve the necessary transformation required to address the problems associated with anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases that are changing the Earth's climate.

However, on the other hand, after the bombastic speeches of the World Leaders in the first two days, I confirm something that I have been aware of for several COPs: that the political, economic, and financial process to achieve these necessary changes will take a long time. The fight for climate action is a long fight. The Ambitions (or NDCs - Nationally Determined Contributions) presented by the countries at this COP have been an example of the complexity and slowness. They turned out to be insufficient. (1). Each country fell short of its free and sovereign Ambition to reach the Paris Agreement targets. Together they would barely meet 25% of the CO<sub>2</sub> reductions needed. The flaccid outcome document is another example. Our governments are

still sleeping in the arms of procrastination. Six years have passed since the Paris Agreement, and we are still the same in terms of the implementation of global and binding climate policy actions (2). And there is very little time left until 2030.

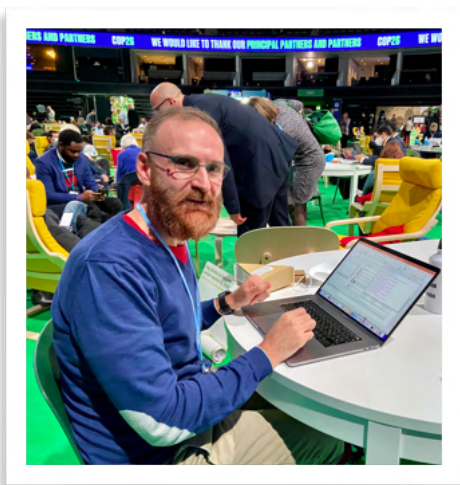
I think it may be impossible in practice to achieve the forceful transformation of the current energy matrix that drives the world's economies, which is heavily based on fossil fuels. This impossibility is mainly due to a lack of political will to reach binding agreements that stimulate the necessary investment in clean energies and innovative technologies, bringing financing where it is needed, to shorten the time of technological progress necessary for the goals of the Paris Agreement. (3). My fear now is that alternative energies and new technologies, given that they are still expensive, will be only for a few and that help will be postponed for the other poorer nations, which even today urgently need immediate help to be able to develop their societies with dignity. Some of this has happened with the unfair distri-

bution of pandemic vaccination in these almost two years of COVID-19.

In addition, I would like to emphasize the following. scientific knowledge provides a frame of reference for decision making. The limits suggested by Climate Science for action should be taken as what they technically are: climate projections and, therefore, we should not take them as blanket statements that if we do not manage to reduce CO2 emissions to 45% of what we emitted in 2010 by 2030, and we do not succeed in reaching net zero emissions by 2050 and thus achieve a warming below 2°C before the end of the century, then catastrophe, the apocalypse, is coming. This will not happen, because nature is benevolent and the climate system has adaptation, buffering and resilience mechanisms that will be able to give us a truce. (4)

However, this does not mean that we will not have costs and suffering, because, in fact, there are already populations in the Global South suffering the consequences of climate change - and immediate action is a matter of justice today.

This means that we must not despair, and always maintain a glimmer of hope. What is certain, as was the case with the pandemic, is that the problems associated with climate change as they emerge and become more frequent will force us to rethink things in order to adapt and survive.



*Fr. Eduardo at COP26 in Glasgow.*

By all this I mean that climate science does not predict an apocalyptic or catastrophic future, nor does it indicate that we should leave things as they are. (5). The future, real and concrete, in terms of its dose of uncertainty and complexity, can be said to be "in God's hands", in that the Creator has given us a wonderful Earth, with its internal laws in its dynamics, worthy of living on it; and He has given us intelligence to find just solutions and a capacity for empathy, for passion, to help us react to the suffering of others. This gives me hope.

In fact, even if we achieve the necessary CO2 reductions in the coming decades, the effects on climate

change that we are causing now and will cause in the coming years will last for a long time in the atmosphere (at least 100 years more) and, therefore, the benefits will not be immediate.

By this I mean that climate science tells us that we do need to change the direction of our cultures of over-consumption, of predatory economies and the way we think about progress, so that integral human development is more in harmony with the resilience of the Earth, with respect for it, and with justice for the Global South. These behavioral changes are primarily human and social and will surely take a long time. We must not stop working to achieve them. This is the new *Laudato Si'* culture that we want to live and share as believers.

Sisters and brothers, integral ecology is a paradigm, a worldview of how human beings should relate to the Earth, to God, to all of reality, based on the Sacred Scriptures of the Christians. In it, we see that in creation "everything is interconnected" and beings are also linked to the sacred dimension, which is God the Creator. Human beings need worldviews to develop our culture, our social patterns of coexistence, to understand what we expect and what others expect from us.

In this integrative view, what happens to the Earth or to my sister or brother, happens to me, and happens to God too, because EVERYTHING is INTERCONNECTED. That is the striking eco-theological essence of *Laudato Si'*, the pastoral letter of Pope Francis. (6)

So, creating a culture of integral ecology, of *Laudato Si'*, is like a way of understanding what it means to be a Christian today. A way of preaching the Gospel. If you are a believer, if you believe in the Resurrection, you have to work for the care of the Earth, the care of the poor, of the victims and the vulnerable, that's what social and environmental justice is all about, what we call today climate justice. There is no other way to be believers than by striving to heal human relationships with the environment, with others and with the Sacred Presence. (7)

Therefore, integral ecology must be a worldview in which humanity feels solidarity, fraternal to other creatures, because it has discovered a deep, spiritual relationship that connects it with the Earth and with its Creator. In the face of the climate crisis, the struggle in this COP26, and in the many other struggles that will continue to come, is about achieving profound changes for future generations, for what may happen in 50, 100, 200 or 300 years. Today it is about climate change, in the future it will be about other ecological transformations that will be necessary to live in harmony.

It is of no use for us to "successfully" achieve CO2 reduction in the coming decades if, at the cost of this, we have burdened the Earth and future generations with other problems as serious as anthropogenic climate change - I am thinking, for example, of the "transition to nuclear energy", or the battered biodiversity - and this because we have not touched the integral "center" of the ecological problem, which is spiritual in nature, based on respect, resilience, worldviews and values.

If we continue with the current global madness of unsustainable development, based on the mere accu-



mulation and voracious dilapidation of the Earth's goods, we will succumb as a civilization in that time because we do not feel part of the Earth and that we are Earth.

#### Notes

- 1) Cf. the NCDs Synthesis Report published by the Framework Convention on Climate Change for COP26, <https://unfccc.int/news/cop26-update-to-the-ndc-synthesis-report>.
- 2) Not so in terms of climate change: the impacts of climate change are more evident than in 2015.
- 3) "It will be impossible to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 without significant progress along many dimensions by 2030, but current progress on investments, technologies and policies is far too slow to make a pathway to net zero by 2050 feasible". Energy Transition Commission (September 20, 2020). Report "Making the mission possible. Achieving a Net Zero Economy." Executive Summary, p. 25. Available at <https://www.energy-transitions.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Making-Mission-Possible-Executive-Summary-English.pdf>.
- 4) In the technical language of the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) this is stated as follows: : "Natural drivers and internal variability will modulate human-caused changes, especially at regional and short-term scales, with little effect on secular global warming. It is important to take these modulations into account when planning for the full range of possible changes." Cf. IPCC (2021). Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S. L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M. I. Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R. Matthews, T. K. Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelekçi, R. Yu, and B. Zhou (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In press, p. 31.
- 5) A first version of this opinion piece was published on the Carmelite NGO website (CarmeliteNGO.org) at the end of COP26 (13/11/2021). My concern at this point arose from the atmosphere inside and outside the official COP26 summit, and especially among the civil society organizations present, a certain fear and discouragement, if not even despair, especially among the younger ones, about how the decisions within the summit are being delayed. In the days prior to the start of COP26, the United Nations Development Program launched the campaign "Do not choose extinction" (<https://dontchooseextinction-toolkit.undp.org/es/>) with a short video, in which Frankie the dinosaur could be seen getting into the UN assembly to alert the negotiators of the danger of extinction to which we are heading. Personally, the reckless message had the capacity to impregnate pessimism in the atmosphere and coexistence. During the same COP, publications began to circulate in social networks, or informal conversations and even in radio programs, questions related to the coming catastrophe, in an apocalyptic atmosphere. For example, a Catholic radio program in Bogota had as its theme on November 9: "Ecotheology of Extinction: Is there an alternative if COP26 fails?", a topic raised by the campaign of the famous dinosaur, cf. <https://www.facebook.com/EncuentroRadio/photos/a.831273716920785/4447255248655929/?type=3&theater>. Subsequently, the English Catholic magazine "The Tablet", in the issue of November 20, 2021, published as an edito-

- rial note, a comparison of climate change with the "apocalypse" of John on the island of Patmos. It reads, "The word "apocalypse" may sound exaggerated, but it is not misused in relation to climate change..." also, "Has this truly apocalyptic horseman frightened the human race into doing what is necessary to save itself? Was Glasgow a revelation of what is to come and a moment of conversion in which the plundering of natural resources gives way to their care?" In the same issue, the second contents note titled "Glasgow, host of the world," the caption reads "The summit may not have done enough to avert catastrophe, but it had a life-changing impact on the activists who traveled to Scotland and those who hosted them." With this, I think the apocalyptic and catastrophic mood that has imbued the global experience of the Glasgow summit is evident, and as believers we should not encourage it.
- 6) Cf. Francis (2015). Laudato Si. On Care for the Common Home. The expression "everything is connected", or similar, and its consequences, appears in paragraphs nos. 16, 70, 91, 92, 117, 120, 137, 138, 142 and 240.
  - 7) Cf. Agosta Scarel, Eduardo (2021) [in press]. Climate Change in the light of Integral Ecology. Melita Theologica 71/2. ISSN 1012-9588 (print).

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### Echoes from our Delegates in Glasgow

"It is important never to send (within certain limits of honesty) the message to the public that a COP has been a failure, or even worse that COPs are useless. We are talking about the only tool we have to peacefully solve an almost impossible dilemma: to multilaterally force ourselves not to do what our "stupid" DNA would tell us to do: consume all the cheap energy we have at hand. It is very difficult but there are no other ways."



*Statements by Renato Rallo, Ph.D in Energy Engineering, a Carmelite NGO delegate at COP26.*

"Next COP27 will be hosted (or at least co-hosted) by Egypt. This venue would be a crucial point for at least two reasons: it would put at the center of the scene a country representing the "Global South" (a hardly debated issue), and whose economy is strongly based on fossil resources. It could be a further step towards a truly multilateral negotiation that contemplates the interests and difficulties of all."

“The only reality that has at heart the fate of the planet is the Catholic Church that, playing a role of driving the other religions, in the light of the Encyclical *Laudato Si* and the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, is shaking the consciences of every man to understand that the destructive effects of climate change (caused by the action of man and the use of coal in economic production activities) damage and will damage all the territories of all nations both in favor and against the limits set at COP 21 in Paris and that, with each passing day, the process of global warming will become irreversible with serious damage to all.”



*Statements by Att. Andrea Ventimiglia, Ph.D. in Canon Law, on the left, a Carmelite NGO delegate at COP26.*

“Very serious is the prediction that, since 2030 (i.e. in nine years), the territories of the temperate zone of the planet (including Italy, Spain, Greece, part of Central Europe, part of Asia, part of South America, Central America and part of North America) will suffer serious forms of drinking water supply and an increasing phenomenon of desertification with consequences in the production of food.”

“The salvation of the Planet, as the common home of the entire Humanity and the animal world, depends both on the governmental decisions that must be taken to reduce as much as possible the carbon dioxide emissions and the necessary and due transition of economic activities towards forms of productive activities with "zero" environmental impact, but also on the radical change of habits and behaviors of each of us, in our daily lives. From here, the need to spread among the people of all territories of each nation throughout the Planet, the behaviors assumed by Carmelite NGO because each man to take care of the Common Home and as summarized below.

### Opinion on the results of COP-26

1.- Once again, the political will of the main emitting countries has been lacking to make strong agreements to avoid a temperature increase of more than 1.5 degrees C. Therefore, it is not a real progress compared to the COP 21 in Paris.

Greater effectiveness is needed in the advocacy of civil society organizations and social movements. It is necessary to specify the relevant basic consensuses.

No progress has been made in outlining an effective advocacy strategy from civil society and Church organizations to achieve strong agreements of the COP member countries.

Once again, the Catholic Church has participated in a dispersed manner. There is no real political will from the Dicastery for the Service to Integral Human Development or from the representative of the Holy See for an articulated presence and the alliance of CIDSE and CI organizations has also been weakened. There is also dispersion of proposals.

#### Suggestions:

a. From the Catholic Church organizations, take up the initiatives for a common proposal based on the prophetic voice and the scientific foundation.

b. Articulate the "micro" proposals of initiatives in the face of climate change with the "macro" proposals towards greater political incidence.

c. In this sense, better prepare the initiatives of participation in the COP in alliance of Church organizations with those of the civil society.



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