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COP 28, mixed feelings

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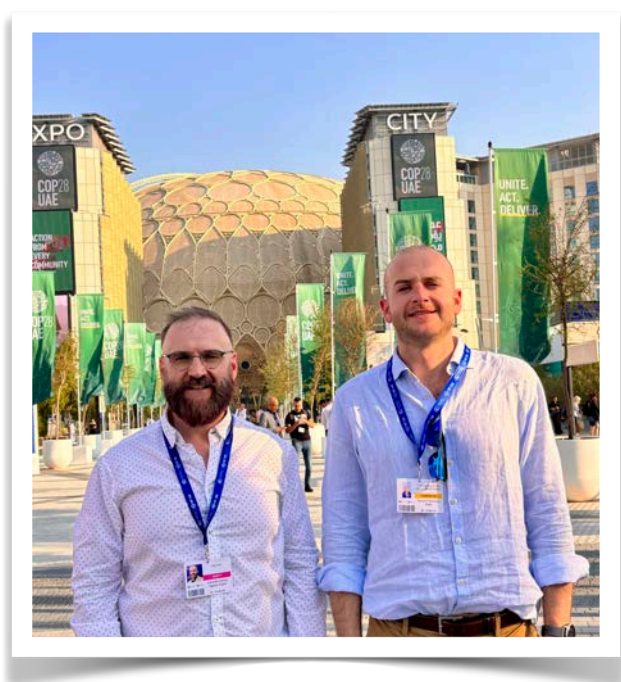
Climate Summit, COP 28, at Dubai Expo Center, 30 Nov - 12 Dec, 2023

“... just like with drugs, as long as there is a drug (fossil energy) the addict (contemporary society) cannot really decide to stop”.

The COP all in all went well, in terms of the agreement and the media result. Perhaps especially the media result, achieved after weeks or even months of very low expectations. The mere fact of having

reached an agreement, however weak in language according to some, is nevertheless very good news. And on the other hand, weakness is somewhat constitutive here, when compared to the 'strength' of the binding decisions.

At the COP everything is weak, or rather, everything is fragile. The COP is a conference of countries deciding, on a voluntary basis and without any coercive capacity on others, how to move towards a solution to climate change. Put another way, an agreement that is technically weak but is proclaimed by the media as a historic success is probably better than a good agreement that is seen by the press (and thus cascade by the population) as a failure. It sounds paradoxical but in the end it is: even if the data indicate that things are not improving, the only thing that is really forbidden is to lose the illusion that the negotiation process makes sense.



Fr. Eduardo Agosta Scarel and Renato Rallo at COP28

The text is long, the technical aspects are many, we will only underline here the main results. The Global Stocktake (also known as GST) was approved, the text on which there were greater expectations because it is the one that concretely establishes the roadmap to make the Paris agreements operational. Specifically, by 2025 countries will have to submit new national plans updating their emission reduction targets. These plans, the Dubai COP established, must be submitted between 9 and 12 months before COP30, the one to be held in Belem (Brazil) in 2025. It is important to set a clear timetable for this NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution) process because after

all, it is the heart of the whole climate negotiation: the continuous, small and incremental voluntary efforts of individual countries, and their disclosure to all other countries. So having a realistic timetable is good news. Also in the GST, the mention of 'fossil fuels' and the desire to 'transition away' appeared for the first time. There is no clear plan, but it is a symbol, and a good one.

The other news, which came on the first day of the COP, is the approval of the Loss & Damage fund, which will initially be managed by the World Bank (a UN agency, based in Washington). The funds are still very meagre compared to the actual needs, but above all here a conceptual dilemma begins to arise. In short: at climate conferences, there are two broad categories of discussion: mitigation (what we can do to reduce global warming) and adaptation (what we can do to adapt to the change that is already happening, the damage that has already occurred, etc.). You will already have realised that both topics require an economic effort, and inexorably the funds allocated to one will not be available for the other. In the cause-effect nexus, mitigation comes first: if I invest today to find a cure and prevent a problem, I will not have to spend more money tomorrow to cure its effects. On the other hand, many effects already exist, populations forced to migrate due to famine, islands forced to evacuate due to rising sea levels, etc.. Therefore, one could suggest that those who push the pedal of adaptation without first stopping the causes of change are either people who are directly affected by climate change, or those who are not very confident that anything on mitigation side can be stopped. And on the other hand, we know well, as science suggests, that if we do not bother to *mitigate* the change, all the money in the world will not be enough to *adapt* to a climate bordering on the unlivable.

Returning to the general plan of the negotiations, this COP even more than the others had a strange posture, not least because it was being held in Dubai and was chaired by the president of a huge oil company. The entire COP, and even the months leading up to it, seemed like a prayer exercise by most of the

world's countries for the producing countries (and especially the oil and gas companies) to stop extracting fossil fuels. When the conference was over and I returned to Italy, a girl asked me a question that I could not answer, a naive yet very lucid question: 'why are we begging them to stop extracting oil? Couldn't we just stop buying it?'

Here, the unfolding of this COP, with so many expectations on the oil and gas sector to make the transition itself, 'promise to change', gives a strange feeling of impotence to all the other actors. And the answer to that girl's question actually exists, and it is terrible: just like with drugs, as long as there is a drug (fossil energy) the addict (contemporary society) cannot really decide to stop. The only thing he can do, in the few moments of lucidity when he realizes that the climate outlook is unsustainable, is to beg the drug dealer to stop giving him drugs. The dynamics of the COP revealed this paradox somewhat. It showed the powerlessness of states to autonomously stop with fossil energy.

Al Jaber, in a private circumstance a few weeks before the COP, said that without fossil energy we would return to the stone age. If we look back at history, we could almost believe it: fossil energy and the industrial revolution have allowed us to make a quantum leap in our lives and in our society that is also difficult to explain, so incredible and profound at all levels. Life itself has multiplied, ever since man discovered fossil fuels, at an extraordinarily higher rate of growth, and if during millennia world population had grown very slowly, in the last two centuries we have more than quintupled.

Now, as we know, we are mature enough to have discovered renewable technologies that can allow us not to return to the Stone Age, and to live with the same prosperity we have become accustomed to. But then, if this is true, it is hard to understand why governments give so much importance to oil companies to dictate the transition agenda. The technology for the transition already exists: what is lacking is the political will to anticipate the costs of a rapid transition. But this political will

cannot be demanded of normal economic actors, as the O&G companies rightly are. And however much they may show that they invest tenths of their turnover in renewable plants, they will always be crumbs compared to their core business. In short, if it is difficult and expensive to convert the economy of a state, then imagine how difficult it would be to convert the business model of an oil company.



Observer NGOs' side event speakers

If we really want to make the transition, we must have the ambition to make it. And at that point, when the decision is made, Oil & Gas will immediately follow.

The energy transition will not be a gala lunch, that is for sure. But placing all the blame on a specific, and obviously very reluctant, sector for the transition itself will not help us to shorten the timeframe - on the contrary, it will only show our lack of ability to prevail.

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Observer NGOs' Side Event: "Global Catholic Letter to the COP28 Presidency"

As the world anticipated the COP28 summit in Dubai, a side event, coordinated by Fr Eduardo Agosta - Carmelite NGO -, titled "The Global Catholic Letter on Climate Change to the COP28 Presidency" generated not just a discussion, but also a call to action emphasizing integral ecology and demanding bold decisions from governments through the framework of seeing, judging, and acting. The

The event kicked off with Lindlyn Moma, the Global Advocacy Director of Laudato Si' Movement, setting the stage during a COP with "more fossil fuel officials than before." Following her, Jean Quinn, the Executive Director of UNANIMA International, a nurse by profes-

sion with a passion for justice and peace, added her welcoming words and set the tone for the event:

“...for COP28 to be the most inclusive COP yet decisions, discussions and the implementation of solutions must be done in collaboration with frontline communities. Today’s event seeks to uplift those voices.”

To See

The opening session unfolded with a song by Archbishop Peter Chong from the Asia Pacific region. This was performed by a powerful choir with scenes of environmental devastation and renewal. Archbishop Chong accentuated these scenes with a reflection on generative power:

“How do we speak about God and vulnerability?... Vulnerability is not a weakness. It’s a form of power that invites.”

Father Jean Germain Rajoelison, Deputy Secretary General of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), followed Archbishop Chong’s contribution by sharing SECAM’s statement for COP28:

“As Catholic communities in Africa, we ask the leaders at the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to recognise their moral duty and commit to urgently taking ambitious action to protect Our Common Home and the most vulnerable.”

Father Jean Germain Rajoelison reads the SECAM statement.

The end note for “seeing” was heralded via a video transmission from Mons. Lizardo Estrada Herra, the Secretary General of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Latin America, declaring a pentecostal spirit for the multicultural COP28 gathering.



Holy See’s COP28 Delegation with Cardinal Parolin as head of State. Fr Eduardo Agosta was part of it.

To Judge

Moving to the judgment phase, Lorna Gold, Chair of the Laudato Si Movement Board, delved into climate change financing and evaluated the extent to which COP27 addressed the issue, noting “there’s a lot more work to do on the disinvestment side” beyond making faith declarations.

Tzaporah Berman, International Program Director at Stand.earth, looked back on her lifetime of climate activism and condemned the false progress championed by governments and companies:

“I realized there was an incredible disconnect between climate science and policy. We know that fossil fuels are 86% of the carbon trapped today, and it comes from three things: oil, gas, and coal. Yet for the past 30 years... we have allowed fossil fuel production to grow.”

To Act

As the event shifted to a focus on action, Roy Ibrahim, the International Programme Coordinator at IYCS-JECI, discussed the concept of integral ecology as a holistic approach to understanding the environmental crisis.

Julia DeVoy, Liana Almony, and Roy Ibrahim gather to share their collective wisdom regarding actionable steps to move forward in the climate crisis.

Liana Almony, Executive Assistant at UNANIMA International, explored the intricate connection between climate change, women, gender, and displacements. She emphasized “women and girls are the creators of their own resilience. They just need the space and support to do so.”

Finally, Julia DeVoy, Ph.D., and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Students and Programs at Lynch School of Education and Human Development at Boston College, added to the conversation by highlighting the harmful impact of the fast fashion industry on the environment, especially in terms of textile waste generation. Julia DeVoy specifically mentioned:

“Pope Francis urges us to be responsible. Each year the fashion industry produces these 92 million tons of textile waste that fills landfills and contributes to environmental degradation...An enormous amount of it is shipped to the Global South where it creates incredible damage to eco-systems, to people, to air quality, to the environment.”

Julia DeVoy recommended taking essential steps like buying fewer clothes, opting for used items, selecting non-synthetic fibers, engaging in clothes trading and swapping, and committing to supporting a compassionate and just fashion industry.

Conclusion

The grand finale saw the presentation of the Global Catholic Letter—a culmination of the collective wisdom and urgency for action. Lindlyn Moma delivered concluding remarks and bid farewell.

Catholic Letter

<https://laudatosimovement.org/cop28/>

Side Event webinar

<https://youtu.be/8niyR4YHdTQ>

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