

A Letter from Rome: "Laudato Si" as a Catalyst for Societal Transformation?

Presentation

Panel discussion

Date

13 September 2016

Location

Potsdam, Germany

Panel discussion

Dr. Camilla Bausch

Laudato Si': To Care for our Common Home. Pope Francis' encyclical has created widespread conversation within and beyond the Catholic community. Camilla Bausch of Ecologic Institute along with Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Klaus Töpfer, Hartmut Graßl, Anton Losinger, Mary Evelyn Tucker and other prominent voices from science, policy and theology provided insights on this discussion at the Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) three day international workshop on the Papal Encyclical.

The Laudato Si' calls for an inclusive and international approach to creating an equitable and sustainable future. Ecologic Institute Director, Dr. Camilla Bausch contributed to this conversation by grounding aspects of the encyclical in arguments from the academic and political sphere. The "Laudato Si'" is not an academic text, but rather a reflection and an invitation to society and "every person living on this planet". In her analysis, Dr. Bausch looked at examples of how the elaborations of the encyclical tie in with political and scientific discourses. She drew comparison to the philosopher, Hans Jonas and his imperative of responsibility as well as the precautionary principle of European and international law, amongst others. She linked Pope Francis' references to the limits of planetary exploitation to the scientific and political debates on planetary boundaries (Rockström et al.). Dr. Bausch linked the Pope's critique regarding the failure of the international community to agree on a common and adequate framework for environmental protection to concrete examples of negotiating multilateral environmental agreements. In this context she also pointed to the fact that – after Laudato Si was published – the world was able to find consensus on the Paris Agreement. Dr. Bausch concluded her analysis by stating the text as a coup for global discourse and action. At a crucial moment in time, the encyclical raises fundamental questions about sustainability and equity and proposes aspects of solutions – not in all detail and certainly not without controversial elements, but all of fundamental importance for humankind. Dr. Bausch interpreted the papal call also as an appeal for science-based policy making and transdisciplinary research.

The workshop "A Letter from Rome: Laudato Si' as a Catalyst for Societal Transformation?" took a systematic approach in addressing the document. On the first day the document was introduced and the question of its adequacy and accuracy in addressing the current situation was posed. Day Two invited experts to analyze the document, looking at the question of whether the identified cultural and social phenomena are indeed responsible for the ecological crisis. The workshop then looked at the question how "integral ecology" could be interpreted and how to bring about collective behavior change (both secular and religious). In conclusion, the workshop looked at the potential of the encyclical, asking about the extent of charismatic religious figures or statements to catalyze societal transformation. Though final answers were neither expected nor found, there was agreement that the encyclical and the role of churches and believe for societal transformation merit further in-depth thinking and exchange.

Event

Workshop Pope Francis' Encyclical at the Wissenschaftsetage Potsdam

Organizer

Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), Germany

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