

RELIGION AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

A public forum organized by American University's Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS) and co-sponsored by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting with generous support from the Henry Luce Foundation
September 28, 2015

This day-long workshop at American University is open to the public and co-organized by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and AU's Center for Latin American & Latino Studies (CLALS). The workshop represents a continuation of collaborations between the Pulitzer Center and American University, including with AU's School of Communication. It is also part of a Luce Foundation-funded CLALS project on Democratic Contestation in Latin America, dedicated to exploring the relationship of religion to the environment across the region.

The appearance of the papal encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si* (officially released this past June 18th) will serve as the workshop's orienting point of reference. Most generally, this meeting will assess the evolution (or lack thereof) of prevailing journalistic and media frames for reportage on the role of religion in public discussion, debate, and activism on climate change. An important concern throughout will be how the political agency of religion is represented in media coverage and to identify prevailing frames and their effects, to explore alternative frames, and to suggest what might be missing from such reportage and public debate.

The date for the workshop has been strategically chosen to allow sufficient elapsed time between the release of the papal encyclical and the workshop discussion, with the expectation that participants will by then be able critically to identify and to assess journalistic response trends. This workshop is also timed to follow directly after the visit of Pope Francis to the US, which concludes September 27th. In its assessment of prevailing and emergent trends and frames, this meeting is, finally, meant to be forward-looking, in anticipation of the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December of this year.

This workshop is organized into three panels, with each panel composed of four people representing a mix of journalistic, scholarly and policy voices. Each panel will focus on a different comparative set of questions addressing the role of journalism and the media in the circulation of public narratives around the relationship of religion to the environment. These include:

Panel 1. What sort of impact has the papal encyclical had in predominantly Catholic nations, among prominent Catholic political leaders, and in terms of influencing social conservative positions on climate change? How have journalists chosen to talk about this and to what extent have already existing and/or emergent narratives about the Church in public life informed this reportage?

Panel 2. How does *Laudato Si* compare to diverse other religious engagements with the environment? How might the encyclical inform public understandings of the influence of religion and the environment beyond the confines of the "Catholic world"? Does the Pope's authority signal anything new among religious traditions in other regions, as part of public conversations around climate change?

Panel 3. How has the papal encyclical publically influenced other kinds of discourses and approaches to the climate challenge, including secular movements and media approaches to environmental justice issues not explicitly informed by religious concerns? What kinds of new alignments and ruptures has *Laudato Si* generated within an already plural national or global public sphere?

We anticipate a format with each panelist offering a brief ten minute presentation, to be followed by Q & A with the other panelists and audience. The wrap-up will address how journalism and scholarship might better inform each other with the goal of improving our public discussion at the intersection of religion and climate change.