



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

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Welcoming Address on the Opening of the Conference

Klaus Hug, Dr.,

President of the Academia Engelberg Foundation

Contact:

Benediktinerkloster, 6390 Engelberg

E-Mail: info@academia-engelberg.ch



Welcome to the 3rd Dialogue on Science in Engelberg organized by the Academia Engelberg. I trust that over the next few hours and days you will feel both mentally and physically at ease and also a little at home.

Maybe you went through the same kind of feelings that I did. Being dragged out of what has been an extremely intensive work programme since returning from the summer holidays was initially difficult. But suddenly it becomes a liberating experience. I am submerged for a few days in a new world that can be both liberating and enriching ... But really one should only go into raptures at the end rather than right at the opening ceremony ...

When the Academia Engelberg Foundation started work three years ago to elaborate the concept of the annual Dialogue on Science conference, it became clear quite soon that the first few years would be devoted to the underlying theme of "Science and Public Trust". Indeed, there is a certain rift or a gap between science as it races on ever faster and the slower spirit of normal mortals, of a society that is beaten into submission and a sense of insecurity by a panoply of media.

But even discriminating intellectuals suffer from the problem. Let me quote the lyricist Hans Magnus Enzenberger, for example, who wrote the following provocative poem

"Fragen an die Kosmologen"

Ob zuerst das Licht da war
oder doch eher die Dunkelheit;
ob es irgendwo nichts gibt,
und ob von etwas,
wenn ihr so weitermacht,
etwas übrigbleibt,
von der guten alten Materie,
ausser einer Überdosis Mathematik?

Könnt ihr mir sagen,
ob es sein Bewenden hat
mit 22 Dimensionen,
oder sollen es ein paar mehr sein?
ob das Jenseits ein Wurmloch ist,
und auf wie viele Paralleluniversen
ich mich gefasst machen muss?



Ehfrüchtig lausche ich
euern exakten Märchen,
ihr Hohepriester.
So viele Fragen. An wen,
wenn nicht an euch,
die letzten Mohikaner
der Metaphysik,
soll ich sie richten?

This year's theme "Will Climate Change the World?" is part of the "Science and Trust" series. It cannot, and is not intended to, determine where the truth lies, because this rarely lies anywhere alone. But it is intended to help gain insights and to show the honest wrestling on all sides to consider strategies, in short, to evaluate or, better still, to strengthen trust in the other side and its messages.

This year's theme is highly topical and will remain so for a long time to come. The congress of the World Energy Council in Sydney recently addressed the threat of climate warming. And, in view of the divergent opinions of governments in Europe and those of the United States, the German weekly newspaper "Die Zeit" recently pointed out that carbon dioxide is now almost a political molecule. The edition of "Business Week" published at the end of August devoted its cover story to "Global Warming" with the introductory remark that "Consensus is growing among scientists, governments, and business that they must act fast to combat climate change". And the Swiss daily "TagesAnzeiger", precise as ever, drove the point home when it wrote that "Ever more companies are interesting themselves in the consequences of global warming – because it pays".

Even Björn Lomborg, the pugnacious young Danish scientist, who in June was only able to speak in the philosophy department at the University of Mainz when the venue was cordoned off, does not in any way dispute that climate change is taking place. And then the popular science contributions: the extensive and excellent cover story in the September issue of the "National Geographic Magazine": "Global Warning – Bulletins from a warmer world" – it is just a short leap in the current fantasies of the film industry to the disaster movie "The Day after Tomorrow"; even if most of Emmerich's doomsday scenario is complete scientific nonsense, the film is not without a certain effect. Ultimately no viewer is left untouched by the increasingly common images showing the dreadful effects of hurricanes in the Caribbean.



In the tranquil security of this high valley and the Abbey of Engelberg we want to debate the issues of climate change in the next three days “sine ira sed cum studio” with experts of different backgrounds and opinions.

I imagine that when we go our separate ways again on Friday afternoon, we shall have learned a thing or two, we shall have become a little more enlightened, maybe also wiser, possibly strengthened, possibly more insecure, disabused of fixed ideas or returned to fixed ideas, enriched by invaluable acquaintances, grateful for a relaxed time, but above all one thing: we will have seen and contributed to other views being taken seriously, even if we may not always have shared them. We hope we are a step closer not only to the answer to that famous question once posed by Pontius Pilate “Quid est veritas?”, but also to this: we have a problem, we recognize it and have to find solutions to it. And all this can only be achieved if we trust each other, since we have long found ourselves embroiled in a huge global political debate: our science, our economics, our politics, each and every one of us.

I herewith declare this 3rd Engelberg Dialogue on Science open and offer my very best wishes for a successful meeting.