



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

4th Dialogue on Science – 28 to 30 September 2005
in Engelberg, Switzerland

Welcome 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



Ladies and Gentlemen

Engelberg has been making the headlines. Martha Bächler has been making the headlines. The disastrous storms during August wreaked havoc in Engelberg. Traces of this can still be seen wherever you turn, as we discovered on our way here. Engelberg resisted, struggled, the Abbey as an island of salvation, the Mayor and Councillor Martha Bächler as kind spirit and rescuing hand.

We wanted to hold the conference despite the logistical problems created by the storms, were even more determined to do so in fact because of these problems, as a signal that we stand by Engelberg, our traditional conference venue, even when the going gets tough and comforts are diminished, but our solidarity is needed all the more.

We thank everyone who did, and are still doing, their utmost for Engelberg, and we thank Martha for her exemplary commitment, of which the whole of Switzerland has taken note.

And so on behalf of the Foundation I welcome you all most warmly to this Baroque hall, to the hospitality of Engelberg Abbey, to the security and challenge of a community of inquisitive and argumentative people in discourse who for 3 days battle it out - and hopefully work things out - together. Or as Prof. Jakob Nüesch put it in his preface to the conference: "It is all about developing a culture which, despite the polarization within society, seeks dialogue, accepts opposing arguments a priori and thus affirms the inalienable concession of trust as the basis for a further development that will overcome the polarization". Oh how nice it would be to see these words applied not only to scientific discussion, but also to politicians, who behave in a contrary manner in almost every sphere of political life in their sheer determination to hold on to power.

Academia Engelberg has thus again adopted an interesting, new and hopefully successful approach to address this year's highly topical theme of healthcare in the year 2010. We are always trying out new approaches, even if they are not always completely without risk. We need to dismantle forbidden ideas, break down taboos, swap roles. But:

I recently read the funeral oration which the German poet and film director Alexander Kluge gave on 12 September at the funeral ceremony for Peter Glotz in Wald (AR). I would like to quote a passage from this which, while it relates to the deceased, can also be applied in general terms: "Around 1600 we see the emergence of the 'new man'. Galileo who watches the stars, Leuwenhoek who observes liquids and discovers microbes under the microscope, Monteverdi who discovers the opera, the anatomists, Madame de Lafayette who



researches questions of attachment and human love relationships. We call this *homo novus* civil man. He makes a lot of mistakes. But he is the only innovation of humanity since the agricultural revolution 6000 years ago. The positive characteristics of this type of person are: I am not the spectator of my life, I am the producer of my life, I am responsible for the text of my life, for my commitments, and also for my country. I draw a clear distinction between what I consider inalienable and what I am prepared to exchange. I am incorruptible, says the civil character in his positive origins”.

In any role play, with any kind of exchange – the intellectual game is intended not to alter anything as to the incorruptibility of one’s own opinion, but to encourage a willingness to embrace new ideas.

The health service in every industrialized nation is sick. The current debate in our parliament shows once again how difficult it is to find solutions. The classic card game Old Maid is celebrating a come-back here. The card that no one wants is passed from one actor to another, from the federal government to the cantons, from health insurance companies to hospitals, from hospitals to doctors, from doctors to patients, from patients to the pharmaceutical industry, or the other way around, in a wild game of “ring a ring o’ roses”.

It would be presumptuous to believe that the *spiritus loci* of Engelberg could cut through this Gordian knot. What we can and want to do is at least to make a useful contribution to the discussion, sensitizing participants to the problems and encouraging them to leave the mental carriageway they have grown accustomed to travelling along and to change lanes as it were.

I wish to extend my warmest thanks to the Programme Committee under the leadership of Prof. Georg Kohler for its preparatory work, in advance to all the speakers taking part, to you ladies and gentlemen for your participation, to the Benedictine Abbey and to Abbot Berchtold for his hospitality which traditionally extends far beyond what is defined by the rules of Saint Benedict.

Karl Popper once wrote: “But we must never be afraid of problems; and the best way of avoiding irrationalism, in my opinion, is to return to the ancient demand that we always try to understand”.

With these words, which also constitute a wish on my part, I release you into the arms of the 4th Engelberg conference, which is hereby now open.