



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

1st Dialogue on Science - October 23 – 25, 2002
Engelberg, Switzerland

A view backward and forward

Prof. Dr. Klaus Ammann
Chair Programme Committee
Botanical Garden, University of Bern, Switzerland

On September 11 (the terrible and real one which is called nine-eleven here in the US) I gave a keynote at a UN workshop in Beijing, finishing with the words : If we do not succeed in organizing a better dialogue between the poor and the rich, we will glide, without really noticing it, into a third world war without frontiers. Time difference let me still start innocently the flight back to Switzerland, without knowing, that my last words will become true, sooner as we all wanted it. The horror happened, the Twin Towers collapsed to dust, killing as many people as decades ago in Pearl Harbor.

It is also becoming clear, that protest organizations, whether terrorist or not, have learned to go global, they are able to trigger off within minutes or days with mobile phones demonstrations, thus questioning the old power networks seriously. Take as an example the ban of the world beauty contest in Nigeria, which was done with minimal means, costing tragically hundreds of life's during violent demonstrations.

Control becomes more and more difficult, and resolute terrorists can subversively destroy the fragile systems of modern technology, the defenselessness has become blatant.

Even Defense Minister Rumsfeld of the Bush Administration works hard to totally restructure his army, he is in this sense certainly not one of the old guard, as he is often falsely depicted. The people of the United States start to realize the world becoming a network, Americans are terrified and baffled by the thought that Irak makes billions of profit from illegal trade – Saddam Hussein is even capable of tapping US financial sources fed by the brave US taxpayers. Lets hope that not only defensive efforts are made, but also offensive peacemaking forces are liberated.

Due to technology globalization is not only the realm of the business corporates, but it is also the real force of protest corporates, they use the system just as well and very efficiently – both in the positive and negative sense. It is very difficult to steer such mega-structures, not counting here ephemeral actionism. There is again this sense of helplessness creeping up.

The conclusion: We have every reason to rethink our possibilities of resolving conflicts on all levels. We have tried to do so in Engelberg, but time was too short to come to concrete results, success was at the best partial. Nevertheless there is hope to learn from this first event and to enhance the system used moderating the workshops, maybe even to change it radically in order to deepen debate about the topics chosen for the next years to come.

Engelberg, a magic word for everybody, who has experienced this specific atmosphere in this mountain valley with the steep mountainsides and with this massive construction of the Engelberg monastery, managed by Benedictines for centuries, who adapt to modern time with an open mind and who develop the century old system further on, welcoming innovative cultural events.

We live in a time of a spiritual vacuum, no wonder that flatland and socially indifferent esoterics are flourishing and people start questioning a stringent pietism of the reform churches. The catholic church has done well by keeping a lively liturgy and more than that. It was a very heterogeneous audience, which has then been put to work in the groups, but it was easy for all in this spiritual ambience to feel at home.

We tried hard to create a discursive atmosphere where polar views can manifest themselves, but one also felt the fundamental believe that listening is of utmost importance, a pretentious goal. This is also manifested in the text my wife has written as a philosopher about the discursive process.

It is clear, that within a event of only three days it is impossible to turn the world around, but if we have succeeded to create a new awareness that there are world views around which are different than the ones we know, which can even meet in real life, then we should not complain.

I think that we have succeeded to do so, since it would be rewarding to know that many of the participants went home with some food for thought and even more important, feel the impetus of change.

The input of the speakers at the beginning of the conference was highly important, the speakers have stimulated, and what is even more important to me, they have also provoked, and for this I am especially grateful..

I am confident, that the high level of discourse should not be lowered in the events to come and thus we should be able to invoke new solutions in technology, which are enabling us to create also solutions also for the social and personal life.

I wish the Academia Engelberg a lot of courage for its future strive for innovative solutions.

Prof. Klaus Ammann, Chair Programme Committee 2002

Personal Remarks of Dr. Dr. Biljana Papazov Ammann:

<http://www.botanischergarten.ch/Engelberg/EngelbergIntroduction20020822.doc>