



Franz Deutsch

## **Peace Leaflets A Starting point for Dialogue**

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### EUROPEAN HERITAGE

A first time visitor to Alsace–Lorraine is not only rewarded by its picturesque hamlets, art treasures, and fine wines, but possibly by some unique experiences. Years ago a certain individual made headlines when he declared himself a "World Citizen". On the strength of this, he claimed the right to cross national boundaries without a passport. He failed miserably with this argument. Today, even full tour buses don't have to go through check-points when crossing the border between France and Germany.

An object lesson for ascending Europe? Perhaps. But we still should not let Western history pass us by, unexamined.

Alsace-Lorraine was the great kingdom created with iron hand and bloody sword by Charlemagne. It was divided by his successors into East and West Franconian kingdoms, a buffer state. Alsace, a bone of contention right until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century!

Division, prejudice, chauvinist back wood-attitudes...and these only countered by sporadic feelings of unity when faced with the threat of invasion from the east. Defending the cross against the crescent...

Perhaps some learned historian will turn up his nose at such a simplistic view of Western history. But the facts remain. Despite the West's very significant and positive contributions to the world, events have often followed a disastrous course. These 2000 years of history have not always been "glorious" and should make us pause and reflect. We should question why Europeans have not learned from history, and whether we should not give peace a chance after 1000 years of war.

I experienced something unique when I visited the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar, home of the world-renowned Isenheim Altar. Strangely, it was not the marvellous altar itself (the vision of M.N. Grunewald, whose painting was way ahead of his time) that stood out for me. What was special for me were the spontaneous feelings of joy and pride I experienced about our common European heritage. Suddenly, it seemed to me, all national borders became irrelevant. It was no longer important what nationality the mysterious Mathi Nithardt Grunewald was, or which nation owned this super-European work of art. It only mattered that it had outlasted history's

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many tide turnings and found such a well-kept home in Colmar. There it gives joy and lets us and future generations marvel at its beauty.

Again, I am reminded of the motives of that first "World Citizen". My curiosity makes me question what it takes to extend national habits of thought to a united "Think Europe" state of mind and, finally, to a global one.