



THE BLACK TUESDAY OF 2001 - Part 2

Just now we are witnessing how the spiral of violence gets out of control. "You are either with us or against us!" The world is again divided into "GOOD" and "BAD", into a "civilized world" and its opposite. This is a perfect example of stereotypes reaching their climax. There is no end to all kinds of negative thinking, which includes generalizations, offended pride, revenge and similar concoctions fit for a cowboy film, and calls for a crusade.

When digging deeper and asking about the causation, one has to be careful not to be mistaken as anti-American. To eliminate this idea, it should be stressed that the United States –despite some grave miscalculations - have unswervingly carried the torch of democracy and freedom right into the new millennium. Let us ask: what would Europe have been without the Marshall Plan?

There had been hopes that America would be magnanimous enough to recognize the cause of this escalation of violence and to call for dialogue and reconciliation. Instead, one sees a tendency to use military force to settle the matter. But war may not necessarily mean victory. The most likely outcome would be continuing cycle of hatred and revenge--hardly the building material for a brighter future. What we need are real bridge builders. Martin Buber anticipated our present circumstances when he said: "The future of mankind depends on the success of dialogue."

At the First Austrian Peace Museum, there is a display that shows a young girl stretching out her hand to a young boy and saying: "Let's make up again!" and the boy answers: "OK, I was foolish anyway." I wish we grown-ups could learn from these children. Above this display there is a drawing by Paul Weber, showing two former wounded enemy soldiers sitting under a torn flag and tree, engaging in dialogue. It is difficult to understand why dialogues only take place after a catastrophe. The Peace Museum believes that peace starts with the insight, courage and willingness for conversation and dialogue.

If insight and courage are missing, there has to be someone who is willing. Could it be the United Nations? Or is this organization overburdened and without efficient helpers? The poet Austrian Peter Rosegger may have had the answer when he said, "If all lovers of peace join the 'friends of peace club,' we shall be the biggest club in the world."