FRIEDENSNOTE NR. 16

Imagining Peace

John Lennon's song „Imagine“ is the timeless expression of a great political dream.

„You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us.“ It is precisely this force – seditious and at the same time inspiring universal brotherhood – that still thrills so many people about John Lennon's most famous solo title. One may quarrel with some of its assertions – for instance, whether a world without religions would really be a better one –; but would we, after such a long time, still be talking at all about a song that no longer challenges us people of today in any way? We do not know how John Lennon would stand on today's contentious political issues, had he not fallen victim to an assassination at a relatively young age. But we can at least imagine that on questions such as Corona or war he would appear just as courageously today as he was in his lifetime.

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PERFORMER	John Lennon

As a musician and a personality, John Lennon still exerts a pull on me. I am grateful for his music, and with old film footage I notice that I enjoy watching him. I see a highly gifted and arrogant man who manages not to bog down in his success, but keeps translating it anew into forms and gestures of straightforwardness. That sets him apart from some other rock stars who arouse my suspicion today. Lennon is a different calibre than Sting. He was, however, murdered more than forty years ago. So I cannot know how he would have behaved today, in the conflicts of the present.

Would he, like Van Morrison and Eric Clapton, have sung against the Corona policy? Would he have dared, like Roger Waters, to criticise the role of the Americans in the Ukraine war? That we cannot know. What we do have is his famous pop song from 1971, in which he formulates a longing: Imagine. I sing this song in a little ukulele band, and through that I am often exposed to it.

Yes, it is a beautiful, simple song; probably the most successful he ever wrote as a soloist. But when I look at the lyrics, I start to spin. Not everything do I care to follow, but some of it I do.

Let us go through it once:

"Imagine there's no heaven ... and no religion too." To live without a heaven – as a notion of divine peace – was once a proud goal of emancipation. Today I no longer know whether I want to follow that. People who know a heaven can have a great strength to endure terrible things on earth. I mean, religion is neither good nor bad, it is part of life, and one would do better to wish for a good and peaceful religion instead of wishing for a life without religion. I am well aware that the religious notion of heaven can turn out one way or the other; after all, suicide bombers too look forward to the kingdom of heaven. But just because there are suicide bombers, I would not want to take heaven away from others who still have one.

What I do accept, on the other hand: "No hell below us". The fear of a punishing hell, as I see it, does us no good, and it makes people manipulable. "Imagine there's no countries." In globalisation we see how hard it is to rein in overpowering interests if one has no countries, no functioning states. That sounds hair-splitting, but before I wish for a world society, I would first like to be a free citizen of a sovereign state again.

After that we can see further. "It isn't hard to do:" Oh yes, it is hard and difficult. We can see that now. And if the utopias are botched, then it becomes harder still. "Nothing to kill or die for:"_ That I

find quite right and wise. One should not have to sacrifice one's own life or the life of others. No one should. __"Imagine no possessions:" In the age of the World Economic Forum and its visions of society, as stupid as they are dangerous, all my warning signals go off when there is talk of possessionlessness. I have learned that owning the foundations of life, for instance a house or a piece of farmland, gives people the chance to manage a resource sovereignly and independently.

The idea of the free farmer is far more attractive to me than the idea of the possessionless city-dweller who travels around on an e-scooter and whose fees are debited via his mobile phone. No need for greed or hunger: Yes. Yes. An ever-valid goal.
"A brotherhood of man ... Imagine all the people / Sharing all the world, you ... living life in peace:" These very rough strokes of the pen seem clear to me again, precisely because they can be filled with colour and life by the people of every generation. Brotherhood and peace across the whole world, in which everyone is to find their place and their form of participation. That shines eternally, as on the first day.
"You may say I'm a dreamer / But I'm not the only one / I hope someday you'll join us / And the world will live as one."

Is there really a minority experience embedded in this song? That is hard to verify today. In any case I am cautious, for many of the narratives of the '68ers turn out today to be inflated legends. But this is not about a judgement on the 1960s.

> *It is about the poetic motif: I speak here alone, but I am not alone, I will not remain alone. Come on, join in! Out of a few individuals a collective subject arises. And this subject will prevail.*

Although I cannot so easily endorse many of the statements in Lennon's song today, I believe that a truthful force lies within it. I simply do not believe that Lennon would have let himself be lulled by capital and a few woke ideologies. Perhaps I also do not want to believe it. But the tenderness of the song tells me that I can sing it, as an honest song for peace – and that it holds, in spite of everything.

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Kenneth Anders, Jahrgang 1969, ist Kulturwissenschaftler und lebt mit seiner Familie im Oderbruch.

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