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'On the future of a culture of remembrance of the SHOAH'

I am the last speaker, and all the impressions that I have experienced since entering this building this afternoon, including looking at the exhibition, which of course I have only seen excerpts of, have come flooding back to me. And then also what I heard from the guests from Great Britain and also from my dear colleague Gesine Schwan and from Mr Fürst. It was very impressive.

Shoah as a profound experience

That shows me, as you have all said in a way, that something impressive is not necessarily gained through intellectual work, but rather you have to experience it, you have to be exposed to certain impressions yourself, so to speak. And these impressions that you have gained here this afternoon or this evening are the impressions of the most diverse perspectives on the Shoah. And so I had also prepared myself inwardly.

But what was really impressive for me was that this topic of the Shoah is reflected here as a profound experience. It is not enough to simply distribute information about the terrible things that happened, but it is important to create events or experiences that make an impression on you and that also leave something behind, feelings. For example, the quote that Gesine Schwan gave about this exchange of letters with the maximum of 25 words that the parents were allowed to exchange with the children and the child with the parents. That really touched me. This was also so significant for me – I am now reflecting on this event – because I think that thinking about the right way to commemorate is on the agenda. I believe that the Cajewitz Foundation and Peter-Alexis Albrecht, who initiated and also inspired it,

have taken a very important step towards ensuring that we think about the Shoah in a contemporary way, that it doesn't fade away?

If it's just a culture of remembrance or memories, then these also fade. I have written down a few quotes in which the constant remembrance of the Shoah also expresses fatigue. Just think of what Alexander Gauland said: Hitler and the Nazis are just a "bird shit of history" in over 1000 years of successful German history. That's an attempt to play it down so that it's not worth mentioning. Or Björn Höcke. He called the Holocaust memorial in Berlin a thing, a monument of shame, which is also a defence. And even a writer like Martin Walser, who in his famous Frankfurt speech declared that he was tired of having to listen to this "permanent representation of our shame". These are all the consequences of a culture of remembrance that only tries to keep the memory alive. This event today is already the beginning of a new path, a new idea, about which I would like to make a few comments in a moment

Today's event as a 'social sculpture'

There is a famous term for this event today, coined by Joseph Beuys, who once spoke of a '*social sculpture*'. When events and interactions come together, as it were, and produce a new consciousness, a new possibility of thinking, of experiencing, then he that – at least that's how I understand him – a '*social sculpture*'. And tonight we here are also a 'social sculpture', all of us sitting here and Mr Albrecht, who has presented the various concepts and considerations as a 'whole', including the library of the house and the school. I think these are all elements that will stick. That's why I've already said that I'm still under this impression, this experience, these experiences. What I want to say – or what I came across during the preparation – is that memories fade. And new generations grow up. They can always say: I or my father or my grandfather, that may be true, but I and my neighbours and – in three generations further on – not even my father and grandfather are to be considered as suspects. Then they say: we all have nothing to do with it. Then it's only a small step to the 'bird shit of history' (Gauland). I'm not trying to denounce them now, even though what they said is impossible. But that's not my point. My point is to see this as a symptom of something we need to work on. The memory of events is

always subject to the danger that they will be forgotten again – as Friedrich Nietzsche said.

The eradication of common roots through the Shoah

I believe that we must realise – this may sound a little strange – that the victims of the Shoah were not only the Jews, but that the victims of the Shoah are also us, who have, so to speak, defiled, not to say destroyed, our own cultural past. This means that we must be aware that what happened, this genocide, this mechanised or industrialised mass murder, is something that is unique. This means that it affects us ourselves, the Christian world, but of course also Germany as part of the Christian world, and all of us and the Jewish world have common roots – and they were also exterminated.

Three elements of these

I would like to mention three elements that form the basis of these roots. The first is what the Jewish people, or Israel, have in common with the Christian world. We have in common the belief that there is only one God. Monotheism is a specific root that the Jewish people brought forth and which then helped to shape Christian culture, so to speak. And the second is the common ground, the belief that a moral law corresponding to the nature and will of this God binds the will of man absolutely. This is the idea of what we call ethics or ethos. This means that there are certain principles of behaviour that are irrevocable. If they are overturned, it is a savaging or a regression of the human being into an almost animalistic world. That is very, very important. And then there is a third element with a religious and a secular variant.

The religious version is: it is the messianic hope, the belief that this God wants to establish a kingdom on earth whose citizens will be those who rely on this God and his promises and serve him by fulfilling this law. To read something like this in a largely secularised world is perhaps a little bold or foolhardy.

But there is also a secular version of this, namely that there is an ethos that is, as it were, inherent to human beings. And this is expressed in the fact that there are human rights, that every person, regardless of what kind and where they come from, has rights, fundamental rights.

These three elements basically constitute the equality of Jewish and Christian culture. And that is the cultural heritage that was destroyed by what the Nazis did. So it is not a 'bird's-eye view of history', but something very, very serious, because the consequence is that the Jews are not the 'others'. You can say that you have to respect others, but they are not the others, they are basically the same. They are us, so to speak. We share the same cultural roots. And if these roots are eradicated by us, then we also hurt ourselves. And that, I believe, is the problem or the basis from which we must start to consider how we can actually communicate this. I believe that memory is important, but memory is not enough if it can fade so easily. Memory must be incorporated *as part of the cultural imprint of each generation*. This includes what Mr Fürst said, that every generation and every single member of a generation must have seen a camp like this once. That is the experiential element that is part of it.

But the experience must be combined with not just standing still in the face of this event: how terrible, how awful, how can this happen? At the same time, you have to realise that this goes to the root of my own existence, this event goes to the roots of our own culture, our Christian culture. Of course, you can no longer appeal to Christian culture in a country that is largely secularised. But you can certainly appeal to the ethics that set limits to behaviour, which you know that if you cross them, you are not a human being, but an animal. That is actually the core of the idea, the experiential nature of the cultural imprint that we allow.

You could also illustrate this with the example that we would have lost the language. Then we would no longer be what we are today. When you say, I am speechless, it is an expression, a threat, when you say, this makes me speechless. It's the same, the same status as the experience or the fact of the Shoah. Our language has been taken away from us. We still speak, but it's basically almost blasphemy that we still speak. Because basically it was an event that was so profound that it robbed us of our own culture, so to speak. That is the idea that I believe should be incorporated

into the culture of remembrance. That sounds a bit absurd. But precisely because they are ludicrous, such comparisons really have to be made in order to emphasise the significance of this event.

A word on politics

Finally, let me say a word about politics. We do not deal much with Carl Schmitt in detail. Gesine Schwan has explained that in detail. I would just like to make a small addition. You have to pay attention to how people differentiate. Whether they say I judge or evaluate a person by what they are or by what they do. And that is dangerous when someone is judged by what they are, when their identity becomes the object of judgement, as it were, and is not made a self-evident prerequisite for judgement. In this respect, it is only permissible to judge a person by what they do. And that brings me to the concept of politics, because politics is a relatively new science, i.e. new in relation to world history. Politics was only invented in the 17th century. And with Carl Schmitt? He only thought from the principle of 'friend - foe'. I would like to quote a counter-position from a founder of modern politics, whom Carl Schmitt should have known as a constitutional lawyer. Johannes Althusius was a German jurist who wrote as early as 1603: Politics is the art of uniting people so that they establish, cultivate and maintain a social life among themselves. This is why it is called the doctrine of symbiotic life. Symbiosis means living together, the Greek form. In a way, this is the opposite position to Carl Schmitt. And that is the concept of politics that we should have.

A word about Israel

And now, last but not least, the problem of Israel. There is, of course, a lot that can be said about this, as some things have only been hinted at. I would just like to point out that a term has recently been thrown back into the discussion, namely the term '*reason of state*'. And this was thrown into the discussion by our then Chancellor Angela Merkel, probably without realising what she was triggering. During a visit to Israel in 2008, I believe she declared: Israel's security is Germany's reason of state, so concern for Israel's security is Germany's reason of state. We all know that Israel,

if I understand correctly, is the only state in the world whose existence is disputed and, as it were, denied by a significant number of other states. Not denied because Israel does not exist, but that Israel must not exist. That is the background. And there is this idea that Mrs Merkel probably had in mind when she said that the connection between the German people or the German democratic state and Israel is the *raison of state*. I think the concept of *raison d'état* is rather unsuccessful, it doesn't really fit. But at least it says that we have a responsibility towards Israel. Not in the sense of a state behaving in a paternalistic manner – like an adult towards a child – but like a state acting on an equal footing.

This brings me back to the starting point of what I said at the beginning, that we have something in common with Israel. The Germans started the Shoah, and the Germans ensured that the Jews of the world had to emigrate to Israel or the Middle East in order to establish a new homeland. In doing so, they also created the threat to Israel today. And that is the reason why it is right for German politics to take responsibility, regardless of how bad or how vulnerable one considers the policies of a particular Israeli government to be. It's simple. The state, that is the home of the Jews, that is the home of those whom we wanted to destroy as a human species, so to speak. It's not a question of whether the Gaza war is unjust or just one way or the other. That is completely irrelevant to this question. And I believe that you have to keep this attitude in mind, even if it's just a feeling for the hierarchy of values. And I have to admit that tonight's event, the way it was organised, also reinforced an inner feeling that I already had.