
The Speech of the President of the Bundestag

The victims know what November 1938 had to mean for them

by Philipp Jenninger

What follows is the full text of Bundestag President Philipp Jenninger's manuscript, as published in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and translated from the German by John Sigerson and John Chambliss.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Jews in Germany and in all the world are thinking today of the events of 50 years ago. And we Germans, too, recall that what took place in our country a half-century ago, and it is good that we do this in both the states on German soil. For our history cannot be split into the good and the evil, and the responsibility for what happened cannot be distributed according to the geographical arbitrariness of the postwar order.

I greet at this commemoration in the federal Bundestag the federal President, and the ambassador of the state of Israel; and my special greeting on this day extends to every Jewish fellow citizen, man and woman, in Germany, and in particular to those who are participating as our guests at this hour of remembrance, at their head the Central Council of Jews in Germany. My greeting and my thanks also extend to you, the honorable Mrs. Ehre.

Many of us participated yesterday, on invitation of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, at the commemoration in the synagogue in Frankfurt am Main. Today, we find ourselves together in the German Bundestag, in Parliament to remember of pogrom of Nov. 9 and 10, 1938, because, not the victims, but we ourselves, in whose midst the crimes took place, must remember and make an accounting; because we Germans want to become clear in understanding our history and on the lessons for the political organization of our present and future.

The victims, Jews everywhere in the world, know only too well what November 1938 had to mean for their future path of suffering—do we know, too?

What occurred 50 years ago in Germany hadn't happened in any civilized country since the Middle Ages. And, worse still, as far as the violence was concerned, it was not a matter of the expression of an, as ever, spontaneously motivated people's rage, but rather an action conceived, arranged, and

promoted by the leadership of the state.

The ruling party had, in the person of its highest representatives, suspended justice and law; the state itself made itself into the organizer of crime. In the place of carefully selected laws and ordinances, with the help of which over the years the creeping disenfranchisement of the Jews had been pursued, open terror now appeared. Open season was declared on a minority, which still numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and all their possessions were exposed to the destructive rage of an organized mob.

Far more than 200 synagogues were burned down or destroyed, Jewish cemeteries laid waste, thousands of businesses and homes destroyed and plundered; around 100 Jews were killed, and approximately 30,000 were dragged off to concentration camps; many of them never returned. But not to be captured in numbers was the human torment, the anguish, humiliation, mistreatment, and degradation.

Goebbels, who actually directed the entire action, had miscalculated insofar as no one, here or abroad, believed the fiction of "spontaneous people's rage." That was taken care of by the police and firemen who stood by, doing nothing, letting the synagogues burn down and only intervening if "Aryan" property was endangered.

The later Nazi Party trials confirmed with cynical openness that the uniformed SA troops and other arsonists and murderers had only transformed the "will of the leadership" into action; ultimately only those were punished who were guilty of "racial disgrace."

There is no doubt that the events, which were immediately characterized by the population as the "Reich's Night of Broken Glass," marked a decisive turning point in the Jewish Policy of the National Socialist rulers. The time of the pseudo-legal embellishments of injustice was over; now began the path of systematic annihilation of the Jews in Germany and large portions of Europe.

Most looked the other way

The population largely remained passive; that corresponded to the attitude toward anti-Jewish actions and measures in former years. Only a few participated in the vio-

lence—but there was also no opposition, no resistance worth mentioning. Reports speak of shock and shame, of pity, even of disgust and horror. But only in a very isolated way were there sympathy and practical solidarity, support, and help. Everyone saw what happened but the most looked the other way and shuddered. The churches, also, were silent.

The concept of “Reich’s Night of Broken Glass” is today quite rightly regarded as excessive. And yet, it reflects the then dominant mood and feelings rather well—a mixture of embarrassment, irony, and playing the whole thing down; but, above all, it was the expression of pain and the ambivalence of personal feelings in the face of the obvious responsibility of the party leadership and the state.

On Jan. 30, 1933, the National Socialists had taken power in Germany. The five and one-half years to November 1938 were sufficient to wipe out the assimilation attained by the Jews in one and one-half centuries. It began with the boycott of Jewish businesses in April 1933 and the simultaneous forced retirement of Jewish civil servants, and then there followed in the same year the first professional ban of Jewish artists and journalists. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 made Jews into second-class human beings without the rights of citizens; and with the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor,” the unspeakable criminal act of “racial shame” gained its introduction.

Ever stronger restrictions on professional activities, which led to professional bans on Jewish doctors and lawyers, actors, stockbrokers, and marriage brokers came with the elimination from government and cultural life. From the spring of 1938, the National Socialist leaders concentrated more on the “aryanization” of the German economy, that is, the dis-possession and exploitation of the Jews.

Goebbels and Heydrich

Göring, as the one entrusted with the Four Year Plan, was dissatisfied with the results of the November Pogrom. In conversation with Goebbels and Heydrich, he let slip the remark, “I would have preferred if you had killed 200 Jews and not destroyed so much of value.” And yet, as if to mock the Jews even more, an “act of atonement” in the amount of a 1 billion Reichsmark fine was imposed on the Jews; they had to immediately redress the damages of the pogrom; the insurance claims went to the state. Simultaneously, decrees for the complete elimination of Jews from economic life as of Jan. 1, 1939 were announced.

What then followed were measures to completely exclude the Jews from society. The goal was their total isolation and complete elimination from all areas of public life. For all those for whom there was no possibility of escaping the regime by emigration, the path ahead was traced out: the Yellow Star, ghetto, deportation, forced labor, extermination.

In retrospect, it is clear that between 1933 and 1938 the constitutional state had been transformed into an unconsti-

tutional, criminal state, into an instrument for destruction of exactly those legal and moral norms and fundamentals the preservation of which the state—according to its concept—should actually be concerned with.

At the end of this revolution, the National Socialist leadership was decisively established, and far more had been destroyed in the human consciousness of law than might be recognizable externally.

Germany had taken leave of all the humanitarian ideals that constituted the spiritual identity of Europe; the descent into barbarianism was intended and premeditated. Among those who furnished the theoretical presuppositions for that was Roland Friesler, at that time state secretary of the Reich’s Ministry of Justice: “The foundation of the new German law,” according to Friesler, was “the German view of life, transformed by the National Socialist revolution. . . . The people’s will to justice expresses itself authoritatively in the proclamations of he who is the vehicle the people’s will, *der Führer*. When the Führer expresses principles with legal content outside the law with the will to validity and the demand for their observance, that is an equally direct source of legal findings as the law. To this in particular belongs the Party Program of the National Socialist Party of Germany.”

That simply means: The administration of justice had to follow the National Socialist ideology because the word of the Führer was law.

Hitler’s successes were still more disastrous for the German and European Jews than his atrocities and crimes. The years from 1933 to 1938 are, even looking back from a distance and in the knowledge of what followed, still fascinating insofar as there is in history hardly a parallel to Hitler’s political triumphs in those first years.

Reincorporation of the Saar, introduction of universal military service, massive rearmament, effecting of the German-English naval treaty, occupation of the Rhineland, the summer Olympic Games in Berlin, the *Anschluss* of Austria and the “Greater German Reich,” and, finally, only a few weeks before the November Pogroms, the Munich Treaty, partition of Czechoslovakia—the Versailles Treaty was really now only a scrap of paper and the German Reich suddenly the hegemonic power of the continent.

For the Germans, who had viewed the Weimar Republic as a consequence of foreign policy humiliations, all this must have seemed like a miracle. And there was still more: From mass unemployment had come full employment, from mass misery, something like prosperity for the broadest layers of the population. Rather than despair and hopelessness, optimism and self-confidence now ruled. Didn’t Hitler make true what Kaiser Wilhelm II had only promised, namely, to lead the Germans toward glorious times? Had he not truly been selected by Providence, a Führer, as Providence grants to a people only once in a thousand years?

Certainly, in free elections, Hitler had never brought a majority of the Germans behind him. But who now doubted

that a great majority of Germans stood behind him, identified with him and his policy. Certainly, some “grumbling fault-finders” (Haffner) would not be satisfied, and were persecuted by the secret police and the Gestapo, but most Germans and, indeed, from all layers, must have been convinced in 1938 that they should see in Hitler the greatest statesman in our history.

And yet, it must not be overlooked that all the astonishing successes of Hitler were overall and individually a belated slap in the face to the Weimar system. And Weimar was not only synonymous with foreign policy weakness, with party squabbles, and political disorder in the widest sense, but rather Weimar was also a synonym for democracy and parliamentarianism, for division of power and citizens’ rights, for freedom of the press and of assembly, and, finally, for the highest degree of Jewish emancipation and assimilation.

That is, Hitler’s successes belatedly discredited primarily the parliamentary system of freedom, the Weimar democracy itself. For many Germans, it was no longer even a question which system to prefer. They enjoyed possibly less individual freedom in separate areas of life, but things personally were going better than before, and the Reich was undoubtedly again great, indeed, greater and more powerful than before. Had not even the leaders of Great Britain, France, and Italy paid court to Hitler at Munich and helped him to a further victory, which they had not considered possible?

And as for the Jews, had they not, in the past, presumptuously assumed a role which they did not deserve? Shouldn’t they finally, for once, have to put up with some restrictions? Didn’t they perhaps deserve to be put back in their place? And above all: Didn’t the propaganda—except for the wild exaggerations which were not to be taken seriously—match essential points of their own ideas and convictions?

And if things got even worse, as they were in November 1938, one could always just say, in the words of one contemporary, “Why should we care about it? If you’re horrified, just look the other way. That’s not going to be *our* destiny” (Rauschnig).

In Germany, as well as in many other countries, anti-Semitism had been around for a long time. For centuries, the Jews had been the object of persecution by the church and the state. Church-sponsored anti-Judaism, bolstered by theological prejudice, could look back on a long tradition.

This makes us all the more thankful that, ever since the war’s end, the Christian confessions and the Jews have been able to join in open dialogue with each other.

There are other examples of this in history: Prussia, for example, which became the new home not only for French Huguenots, Salzburg Protestants, and Scottish Catholics, but also for many persecuted Jews. Virtually up to the point of Hitler’s seizure of power, German anti-Semitism had been demonstrably restrained, when compared to the militant hatred of Jews prevailing in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. It was not accidental that, ten years before the French Revolu-

tion, Lessing published his play *Nathan the Wise*, and through both the empire and the republic, our state institutions—true to the ideas of enlightened despotism—stood by their policy of Jewish emancipation and assimilation.

Aggressive nationalism

Another aspect is that German nationalism differed in a very specific way from nationalism in other countries. For reasons which can’t be gone into here, our parliamentary, liberal, and democratic components were rather underdeveloped, whereas there was a special emphasis on our common origin and heritage, on our common history, on our “Germanness.” This was evident both during the Napoleonic wars and in 1848-49, and was quite marked in the Empire. The result was—externally—an increasingly aggressive national consciousness, right alongside an acceptance of dictatorial government structures at home, where aggressivity was directed against such minorities as Catholics, Socialists, and Jews. For this reason, many historians have also lamented that Germany’s history has lacked a revolution, or at least a general evolutionary turning toward democracy, to the rights of the individual human being. Thomas Mann caustically spoke of the Germans’ “militant servility,” a wedding of “arrogance and contrition.”

Other things came on top of this. The impetuous industrialization and urbanization, especially after 1871, led to a widespread, diffuse uneasiness about all things modern. And it was precisely in this process of revolutionary change, which many people perceived as a threat, that the Jews played an outstanding, often brilliant role: in industry, in banking and in business, among doctors and lawyers, in the entire cultural realm and in the modern natural sciences. This spawned jealousy and inferiority complexes, and the immigration of Jews from the East was looked upon with extreme displeasure.

Capitalism, and the big cities with their inevitable ramifications—all this seemed to be as “un-German” as was the prominent involvement of Jews in various liberal and socialist groupings.

A flood of writings and tracts dealt with the allegedly damaging role of “the” Jew, and alongside authors unknown and well-known, such as Gobineau and Chamberlain, it was the great men of Germany’s intellectual and cultural life, such as Heinrich von Treitschke and Richard Wagner, who made anti-Jewish sentiments socially acceptable. The Jews became socially admissible hate-objects.

A particularly ominous development proved to be anti-Semitic propagandists’ adoption of the Darwinian evolutionary theory. Here they finally had the equipment they needed to give a scientific veneer to their whisperings about a Jewish world conspiracy and the eternal war of the races; here you had all that was healthy, strong, useful; there all that was sickly, cheap, damaging—the Jewish “degeneration,” the “vermin” which had to be gotten rid of through “purification”

and “destruction.”

World-view and destruction

Hitler’s so-called “world-view” contained not a single original idea. Everything had been there before him: the hatred of Jews, whipped up into biological racism, as well as the revulsion against all things modern, and the utopia of an primeval agrarian society whose realization required *Lebensraum* (“living-space”) in the East. His own contribution—outside of his further vulgarization, simplification, and brutalization of a world-view he adopted from others—lay in his fanatical obsessiveness and his gift for mass-psychological manipulation, which he used to elevate himself into the most important propagandist and promulgator of National Socialism.

While in earlier times the Jews were held responsible for plagues and catastrophes, and later for economic woes and “un-German” machinations, Hitler held them guilty of all evil in general: It was they who were behind the “November criminals” of 1918, the “bloodsuckers” and “capitalists,” the “Bolsheviks” and “Freemasons,” the “liberals” and “democrats,” the “desecrators of our culture” and “destroyers of our morals”—in short, they were the real string-pullers and initiators of all military, political, economic, and social misfortunes that had befallen Germany.

History was reduced to a struggle between races, between Aryans and Jews, between “Germanic cultural contributors” and “Jewish subhumans.” The German people could only be saved, and the corruptors of humanity overthrown, once the world were freed of Jewish blood, the source of all evil in history.

The opposite image was the warrior and the peasant, who, out in the East’s wide spaces, and in continual battle against Asiatic hordes, would extend the bounds of lands under German cultural influence, while at the same time, through breeding and refinement, would elevate the Germanic race to lonely heights. While elsewhere, people were already working on the atomic bomb, Himmler and others were preaching these ideas verging on idiocy, with the tiring monotony of a mental asylum inmate.

The same went for Hitler’s hallucination of the black-haired, hook-nosed Jew, whose blood desecrates the white, blonde-haired Germanic woman and thus steals her from her people forever. Already in *Mein Kampf*, we repeatedly come across this delusion, which continues all the way into his will, in an interminable litany about “unchastity” and “bastardization,” “rape” and “desecration of blood.”

A misery-ridden childhood, the denigrations of youth, the shattered dreams of a failed artist, the ostracism of a sexually disturbed person—in Hitler all this found a single outlet: his immeasurable and never-ending hatred of the Jews. Up to his very last moments, he was ruled by his desire to degrade, to strike, to exterminate, and to obliterate.

The attack on the Soviet Union offered an opportunity to unite two things at once: the conquest of *Lebensraum* in the East, and the “destruction of the Jewish race in Europe,” which he had already threatened publicly on Jan. 30, 1939. Already the beginning stages of the eastern campaign, under titles such as “Commissary Order” and “Special Detachment,” saw the coming of a gigantic killing spree, which was to outstrip even what had previously happened in Poland. During the months following June 22, 1941, under the pretext of fighting partisans and looters, hundreds of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children were shot by special detachments working behind the front lines. The “Final Solution” had begun—long before it was made official at the “Wannsee Conference” on Jan. 20, 1942.

In their wake came the death factories; the “gas cars” turned into gas-chambers and ovens, while the shootings continued. The innocent victims were even deprived of an executioner; the killers replaced the hangman with the methods of the roach exterminator, monstrously amplified and industrialized—in keeping with their talk of “cleaning out the vermin.”

And we do not want to close our eyes to even this ultimate horror, even to this day.

Dostoevsky coined the phrase, “If God didn’t exist, all would be permitted.” If there is no God, everything is relative and imaginary, since all is made by men. Then there is no ordering of values, no binding moral laws, no crimes, no guilt, no pangs of conscience. And since “all is permitted” of those who are in on this secret, their acts are entirely dependent on their own will alone. They are free to place themselves above all law and moral values.

In many of his works, Dostoevsky investigated these ideas—which turn up later in Nietzsche—in terms of their consequences for the individual, as well as for how human beings live with each other, for society. What might have seemed to his contemporaries as the errant speculations of a religious brooder, proved to be a prophetic anticipation of the political crimes of the 20th century.

Let us hear about this from an eyewitness of the German reality in 1942:

“The men, women, and children emerging from the trucks were ordered by an SS man, a riding- or dog-whip in hand, to undress and to lay their garments at specified places, divided up according to shoes, clothes, and underclothes. . . . These people undressed themselves without any screams or cries, stood together in family groups, kissed and said good-bye, and waited for an indication from another SS man, who stood by the open grave, likewise with whip in hand. . . . I observed one family of about eight persons—a husband and wife of about 50 years, with their children, about 1, 8, and 10 years old, as well as two adult daughters of 20 to 24 years old.

“An old woman with snow-white hair held a one-year-old child in her arms, and sang something to it, and tickled

it. The child squealed with pleasure. The married couple looked on, with tears in their eyes. The father held the hand of a boy about 10 years old, and spoke to him softly. The boy was fighting back tears. The father pointed to heaven, stroked him on the head, and seemed to say something to him. Then the SS man at the grave shouted something to his comrades. These separated off around 20 people, and indicated to them that they should go behind the mound of earth. . . . I went around the mound, and stood before a gigantic grave. Closely pressed against one another, the people lay on top of one another in such a way that only the heads were to be seen. Blood ran down over the shoulders from almost all the heads. Some of those who had been shot were still moving. Some raised their arms and turned their heads to show that they were still alive. The grave was about three-quarters full. In my estimation, there were already around 1,000 lying there. I looked around toward the one with the gun. He, an SS man, sat on the edge of the small side of the grave on the mound of earth, letting his legs hang down into the grave, with a machine-pistol on his knees, and was smoking a cigarette. The totally naked people went down some steps that were dug in the clay wall of the grave, slipped and slid over the heads of those lying there, to a place that the SS man indicated. They lay down before the dead and those who had been shot; some stroked those still alive, and spoke softly to them. Then I heard a series of shots. I looked into the grave, and saw how the bodies twitched or the heads, now quiet, lay on the bodies before them. . . . Then the next group came up, climbed down into the grave, arranged themselves next to the previous victims, and were shot.”

And let us now hear the Reichsführer SS [Heinrich Himmler], from his speech to the SS group leaders in Posen in October 1943:

“I want here, in all openness, to refer also to a quite difficult matter. Among us, it should be quite openly discussed, and despite that, we will never speak of it publicly. . . . I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people. It is one of those things that is easily said: ‘The Jewish people will be exterminated,’ a Party comrade said, ‘quite clearly, in our Program. Elimination of the Jews, extermination, let us do that.’ And then here, you all come along, the good 80 million Germans, and each has his decent Jew. It is clear, the other are swine, but this one is a first-rate Jew. None of those who talk like that have watched, none have gone through it. Most of you will know what it means if 100 corpses are lying together, if 500 are lying there, if 1,000 are lying there. To have gone through that and—apart from the exception of human weakness—to have remained decent, that has made us hard. This is a page of glory, never written and never to be written, of our history. . . . Overall, we can say that we have fulfilled this most difficult task in love of our people. And we have not, in so doing, suffered any harm to our inner being, to our soul, to our character.”

The hideous truth

Face to face with these statements, we are impotent, just as we are impotent face to face with the millionfold ruination. Numbers and words no longer help. Human suffering cannot be made good again, and every individual who became a victim was irreplaceable for his own. Thus something remains, against which all attempts to explain and understand are wrecked.

The end of the war in 1945 was in many respects a shock for the Germans. The collapse was total, the surrender unconditional. All efforts and sacrifices had been meaningless. In addition to the horror of the Holocaust came the knowledge, perhaps even today not fully internalized, that the planning of the war in the East and the annihilation of the Jews were indissolubly connected together, that neither could have been possible without the other.

The Germans were thrown back on their bare existence; no one knew, looking at the millions of dead and the bombed-out cities, how anything was going to continue. All values that had been believed in, all virtues and authorities were compromised. Hitler’s fall came almost lightning quick; the 12 years of the “Thousand-Year Reich” soon seemed like an apparition. In that was expressed, certainly, not only a total disillusionment with the methods and goals of National Socialism, but also a rejection of sorrow and guilt, a repulsion against a pitiless confrontation with the past.

The rapid identification with the Western victors demanded the conviction, ultimately, of being, exactly like other peoples, “occupied” by the National Socialist rulers and finally of being liberated. This also is one of the bases on which a tremendous rebuilding capacity brought forth the German economic miracle, astonishing the incredulous world.

Today, we can criticize such repressive processes for obvious reasons, and we do well to consider this criticism seriously and without reservation. Moral superiority leads, of course, no further in that respect. Perhaps the German people, in the awful position of 1945, could not have reacted otherwise, and perhaps we, in looking back, are asking too much of ourselves in our demands on that time.

In knowledge of Auschwitz

Today, all questions come up in full knowledge of Auschwitz. In 1933, no one could have imagined what the reality would be after 1941. But a hostility to Jews that had been growing for over a century had prepared the soil for a limitless propaganda and for the conviction of many Germans that the existence of the Jews did present a problem, that there really was something like a “Jewish question.” The compulsive resettlement of all Jews—perhaps to Madagascar, as the National Socialist rulers mentioned in passing—would supposedly have found agreement.

It is true that the National Socialists did make great efforts to keep the reality of the mass murder secret. But it is also true that everyone knew of the Nuremberg Laws, that every-

body could see what, now, happened over 50 years ago in Germany, and that the deportations took place completely openly. And it is true that the millionfold crimes from the acts of many individuals existed, that the work of the *Einsatzgruppen* [special units involved in the mass murder of Jews in the East] was the object of whispered conversations, not only in the army, but also at home. Our immortal colleague Adolf Arndt said, 20 years following the end of the war in this hall, "The essentials were known."

[*The following section was not read by Jennings in his speech to the Bundestag: Why didn't anyone provide resistance against the genocide? Ultimately, those in power had not been able to carry out their euthanasia murder to the originally planned extent because they encountered resistance from the relatives of the victims and the churches. But the Jews stood alone. Their fate encountered coldness of heart.*]

Many Germans allowed themselves to be blinded and seduced by National Socialism. Many made the crimes possible through their indifference. Many themselves became criminals. The question of guilt and its repression must be answered by each, for himself.

But we must all turn ourselves away from the questioning of the historical truth, the miscalculation of the number of victims, the denial of the facts. Whoever wishes to play down the guilt, whoever asserts, it wasn't really so—or entirely so—he is making the attempt to defend that which is indefensible.

Such efforts do not merely stem tendentiously from a denial of the victims; they are also quite senseless. For, whatever happens in the future or whatever may be forgotten of that which happens: Human beings, until the end of time, will think of Auschwitz as part of German history.

For that reason, it is also senseless to make the demand, to "finally be done with" the past. Our past will not be put to rest, it will also not fade away. And, indeed, quite independently of the fact that the young people cannot be blamed at all. On this point, Renate Harpprecht, a survivor of Auschwitz, said, "We cannot choose our people. Back then, I many times wished that I weren't a Jew, but then I became one in a very conscious way. Young Germans must accept that they are Germans, that they cannot slip away from this destiny."

'Thought has its leaps'

They do not want to slip away from it. They want rather to know from us, how it happened, how it could have happened. Thus, the preoccupation with the National Socialist crimes is not decreasing, despite the increasing temporal distance of those events, but rather grows in intensity. It is also true for the mind of this people that the digesting of the past is only possible in the painful experiencing of the truth. This self-liberation in the confrontation with the hideous is less tormenting than its repression: "To learn from the past for the future is the desire of many. To recognize what was

in order to understand what is, and to comprehend what will be, that seems to be the task to which historical knowledge is devoted." These sentences were written by Leo Bäck in May 1946, who escaped death in the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp.

Ladies and gentlemen, to keep fresh the memory and to accept the past as a part of our identity as Germans—this alone promises for us older people, as well as for the youth, liberation from the burden of history.

"Europe is held by its brain, by thought, but the continent trembles, thinking has its crevices"—thus Gottfried Benn. Today, these crevices lie before us as gaping fissures.

Against the background of the catastrophic errors of our recent history, we are, by virtual necessity, faced with a growing, special responsibility: a new "ethics of responsibility for the future," as taught by Hans Jonas, who was awarded the Peace Prize of the German book trade in 1987 and is himself a Jew.

In the age of grand technology, of mass society and mass consumption, the threat, not only to the individual but also to humanity as a whole, has grown. A threat that can exist for our conditions of life, but may also call into question the basis of values of our mortal order of existence.

This threat manifests in a double way: On the one hand, in a potential for catastrophe—such as a possible nuclear war, but also the creeping destruction of the environment—and, on the other hand, in a potential for manipulation that can lead, perhaps through a genetic reconstitution of our nature, but also through a grand bureaucratic form of rule, to the ethical incapacitation of human beings.

Both demand our vigilance, a vigilance in the use of human power that is as conscious of its responsibility to future generations as it is of that which man can do to man in the spirit of unbridled and fanatical misuse of power.

On the foundation of our state and our history, it is a matter of founding a new moral tradition that must evidence itself in the human and moral sensibility of our society.

Today's duties

Externally, duty means the duty to the collective responsibility for peace, to the active liberation of the world. Included in that for us is the right to existence of the Jewish people within secure borders. It means a cooperation opening up systems between West and East. And it means the duty to guarantee the survival of the Third World.

Internally, it means an openness to and tolerance of our fellow man—without regard to his race, his background, his political conviction. It means an unconditional recognition of rights. It means vigilance against injustice. And it means the uncompromising intervention against arbitrariness, against every attack on the dignity of man.

This is the most important thing: May we never again allow that our neighbor is denied the quality of being human. He deserves regard, for he, like us, has a human face.