

Schlusswort

anlässlich der feierlichen Begründung der
„MEYER-STRUCKMANN-PROFESSUR“ für Jüdisches Recht

am 16. Juni 2001 um 18. 00 Uhr
im Senatssaal der Humboldt- Universität in Berlin.

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

Honoured Dr. Frank Eveslage, Professor Dr. Bernd Heinrich, Professor Dorothea Wendebourg!

Honoured Professor Bernhard Schlink!
Honoured Professor Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard!

May I begin my concluding address by first addressing you, honoured Professor Schlink. I would like to say very special thanks to you for the way you initiated and accomplished this institution.

Professor Blanchard, as a person standing for all those who have given talks in the years past, I would like to mention you for your wonderful profundity accompanied by your humanity. I greatly regret that I have so far had only had few opportunities to hear you speak but fortunately yesterday was one of those occasions.

Concluding addresses should always have something of the character of a summary, deduce something, draw attention to the salient points and provide an outlook – as far as possible.

Let me do things the other way around today.

Professor Schlink, the question of the future was not always easy for our cause. And for this reason, a special debt of gratitude is owed to you as you have now ensured the future of this chair with the assistance of the Dr. Meyer-Struckmann Foundation.

But it should be remembered that this was not something that was a matter of course.

Once again, I won't keep to the reverse order!

Let me go back into the past.

Ignaz Bubis and I were friends.

Ignaz Bubis was fully aware of my special interest in the academia of this city in particular regarding the development of its Jewish academic life.

At the same time, he was also deeply sceptical when it was a matter of having to respect to pay tribute. The opposite was the case!

An example worth mentioning was the staging of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's play "Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod".

It was performed in Frankfurt in 1985 (1) and he protested vehemently. He was courageous, particularly when it was a question of a certain

conception of humans, i.e. Fassbinder's conception of a Jew. He was always alert. He also stood up when – evidently the only person – he was outraged by a speech by Martin Walser while other applauded. His loneliness was clearly portrayed in the media. Painful for me personally and also for many Jews in Germany!

How truly alone Ignaz Bubis must have felt!

It was this mistrust of the intellectuals of the 1968 generation, this very mistrust that shaped his life right up to his death.

Professor Schlink, it was this same Ignaz Bubis who recommended that I become your partner in establishing this chair that you so very much wished for. That was over 14 years ago!!

I felt and still feel honoured today – particularly as I certainly understand this obligation felt by Ignaz Bubis – in the sense meant by him!

Like my father-in-law, Samuel Braun, he was a Holocaust survivor. It was difficult to pretend anything to these worldly, self-ironical, wise persons who had seen everything that hell on earth had to offer. What mattered to both of these persons was one thing: Please do what matters, come to the point now and quickly! They did not have any time to lose!

This is what characterised Ignaz even if what he said was often voluble, humorous and discursive. But when it was a question of negotiations he was, just like my close personal friend Heinz Galinski, far more difficult and generally unwilling to compromise. In fact, far less than all those who knew him – thought! It is no coincidence that these two of the Zentralrat were the most important chairman of the Central Committee of the Jews in Germany – until this day!

It is here at this faculty of law that the question is best asked. What is the fundamental nature of Jewry? No other religion reveals itself to us more consistently and clearly than the one in which the law – God's law – is at its heart.

The word of God, which we are to understand and interpret confidently and with all the clarity of our aware intellect. There are the Five Books of Moses that show us how our fathers understood God's word. And this knowledge is so rich and now so ancient! It again inspires young people as you inspire Professor Blanchard with many small stories that you take from the Bible as living interpretations of law, as the history of Joseph.

For example, as young people are inspired to study and train at the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin at Brunnenstraße 33.

What I experienced in the past thanks to your work, Professor Schlink, and the activities of your colleagues, Prof. Benöhr, Prof. Paulus, Prof. Heger, Prof. Möllers, Prof. Schieder, and also from all the guest professors including Professor Bleich, Professor Albeck, Professor Carmichael, Professor Lorberbaum, Professor Yaron, Professor Englard, Professor Jacobson, Professor Rajak, Professor Roth, is inestimable. These experiences are so wonderful and so infinitely important, for me entirely personally and for my family.

Horror ex vacui – describes a situation when developments that are unstoppable, unforeseen, without a beginning and an end, without meaning or sense take over.

This feeling must take hold of everyone who has worked in a leading position in the Jewish Community of this city, as I had the privilege of doing. The community of this city and this country had back then little to offer in opposition to those self-appointed persons who over and over spoke in the name of the Jews, but would have preferred academia in its existential form to have been banned.

Yet before the War and the mass murders there was a large and a small artillery. Who knew who they were? Who knew what this meant in the 1930s? Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary and Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, both once in Artilleriestraße and today in Tucholskystraße.

At any rate, the Jewish Community that we found did not know. Nearly all those who had taught there had been murdered. Those who had survived had no academic or religious training. Those who had and had also survived were no longer in the city. Those no longer in the city were not interested in this kind of approach to religion – insofar as it was a question of re-establishing this tradition in the city.

So much for the past!

Now for the present! The jurists at this university have – and this is thanks to you Professor Schlink – become a place and a guarantor of calls for the ability to engage in dialogue. No persons other than jurists can be the ones who contribute to bringing the authenticity of what is existential to Jewry into a fruitful, interfaith dialogue.

Not that this is an aim specific to Jewry, but certainly one that is befitting of an institution such as Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.

I would like to express my gratitude and recognition for the interest and commitment shown by the entire Faculty of Law!

Thank you for our breakfasts together at the Savoy Hotel. I came to know wonderful, dedicated and interesting teachers in these 14 years and am grateful in particular to you again, Professor Schlink for this!

My thanks also go to all who were there during the guest professorships and the seminars!

They were teachers of a special calibre, with great dedication, committed to the law and its interpretation to the utmost and enthusiastic about their work.

Who, if not they, can be role models for judges, lawyers and also role models for the teachers of the future!

Ensuring the existence of this chair is vital for the restoration of a certain legal tradition in this city.

It will continue to live and have to live from lively intellectual exchange as in particular the mainstream of intellectual development in Jewry has long since left this city and is now much more at home in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, New York or London than here.

But a city whose development in the Jewish communities is as fast as ours is must from time to time also keep an eye on the development of its academia.

All that remains to say is that we have all understood that the time has come and for this I congratulate you and us – from the bottom of my heart!

May the “Berlin Studies of Jewish Law” remain the foundation of a building at this university within whose walls the greatness, the uniqueness, the grace, the justice, the face and countenance of God, whose worthy representatives we are to be, may always be manifest.

Socher lewi`at goel zedeck bimhera bejamenu w`umein!

(We should be socher of the geula amen.)