



**Address of the Saxon State Minister for Higher Education, Research,
and the Fine Arts, Sabine von Schorlemer, deputizing for Prime
Minister Stanislaw Tillich, at the Handover Ceremony for the new
Empress Auguste Victoria Foundation Empire Hall chandelier,
Jerusalem, March 27, 2010**

Dear Mr. Provost,
dear Reverend Wohlrabe,
Father Abbot,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for your warm welcome and the kind invitation to participate in this ceremony. I am here as a deputy of the Saxon Prime Minister Stanislaw Tillich and have the honourable task to convey his most cordial greetings to you. Mr. Tillich has been very much looking forward to handing over the new chandelier himself. However, to his great regret, there was urgent government business to attend to, which forced him to cancel his entire Israel trip for the time being.

For me, it is a great honour and pleasure to follow the Prime Minister's request to attend this festive handover ceremony in his stead.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This occasion is a joyful one. The new neo-Romanesque chandelier tells a story about the Holy land and German craftsmanship at the same time.

The Saxon lamp designers who recreated this chandelier according to old photographs are some of the best craftsmen in their trade. The Hall's ceiling, carefully restored by the artisan Christian Heindorf of Leipzig, exhibits the very same fine craftsmanship. It stands in an old German tradition that also comprises the time when the Auguste Victoria Foundation was set up here at the Mountain of Olives. Back then, German craftsmen applied their art at building the Church of the Ascension of Christ. The bells of the landmark bell tower, for example, were cast at Apolda in Thuringia, while the pneumatic organ was built at Frankfurt Oder at today's German Eastern border.

However, despite this proud tradition, we cannot ignore the problematic connotations brought in by Emperor William II., when he established the

Empress Auguste Victoria Foundation. He saw this as an act of reclaiming the Holy Land, and indeed he saw himself as a successor to the Holy Crusaders of the Middle Ages.

A closer look at the Empire Hall's interior design reveals that the emperor quite literally left much of Crusade history out of the picture. The botched Fourth Crusade, which ended with the ransacking of Constantinople instead of anywhere near the Holy Land, is missing, as is the Children's Crusade and the Sixth Crusade, which was not led by a German prince, but instead by the French king Louis IX.

On the other hand, the Prussian Eagle atop the Holy Cross insinuates a direct connection between Prussia and Jerusalem, German emperor and Christ.

For the first time since the 1927 earthquake, the Empire Hall has now been completely restored. After a hundred years, the hall with all its artistry and dark undertones invites to reflect on the peculiar spirit of the founding time.

Between this time and today is wedged the "Age of the Extremes", as the British historian Eric Hobsbawm so aptly called the 20th century, an era of radical change, discontinuity and, foremost, the singular German crime of the holocaust against the Jews.

It is a shameful history, one deeply rooted in the Prussian hubris displayed at the Imperial Hall. The Foundation has restored the Prussian ornaments, but not the old spirit of nationalism and chauvinism. Today, the Imperial Hall is a place devoted to the contact, understanding and reconciliation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as well as Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians.

Please allow me a personal remark on this important issue:

One of the great challenges of our time is the peaceful co-existence and indeed co-operation of the world religions. We all feel that we must discuss the great issues from a new angle, on the local, regional and international level. The aim is to strike a delicate but lasting balance between religion, society, freedom, individual responsibility, state, business, and as well the environment, a balance to be attained at a global scale.

The Empress Auguste Victoria Foundation greatly contributes to this necessary religious and cultural understanding. The Free State of Saxony wants to support this valuable commitment, as does the German Foreign Office, which has given a substantial sum for this restoration project.

This being said, it is my heartfelt wish to foster the cultural exchange between Israel and Saxony at all levels. I am, therefore, very glad that the Empire Hall is soon going to shine in the new lights from Saxony.

Today, we are also going to *hear* an example of what cultural understanding sounds like.

The Leipzig Synagogue Choir is made up of non-Jewish singers who foster the Jewish musical tradition. The choir has made a great contribution to the good cultural relations between Germany and Israel. Moreover, on its tour abroad the choir acts as an ambassador of our open-minded and tolerant Saxony. And this is what Saxony's cultural policy aims at, namely, strengthening open-mindedness and tolerance.

This in mind, I will visit the Yad Vashem memorial museum tomorrow in order to commemorate the Holocaust victims and finding out about the educational and memorial activities at the museum. Not only personally, but also as the Chairwoman of the Board of Governors of the Saxon Foundation for the Victims of Political Tyranny, this is of particular importance to me.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here at the Mount of Olives, next to the Church of the Ascension of Christ, is the headquarters of the German Evangelical Institute of the Archaeology of the Holy Land. Currently, we in Saxony are establishing a new museum of archaeology as well. It is being set up at Chemnitz, in a house closely connected to German Jewish and Israeli history. It is a former department store, designed by the famous architect Erich Mendelssohn and owned by Salman Schocken, the Jewish businessman, philanthropist and patron of the arts, after whom the building is still named. Both men were later on closely connected to the institutions of archaeological research here in Israel.

Thus, archaeology shall serve as another bridge between of cultural exchange, in this case between Chemnitz in Saxony and the state of Israel. We in Saxony are greatly interested in further strengthening these ties.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Soon, the Empire Hall is going to shine anew in a bright light. On behalf of the Saxon state government I want to emphasize once again that it was very important for us to support this restoration project. The Free State of Saxony has a great interest in good and variegated relations with the State of Israel. These good relations benefit, too, from the mediatory role of the Foundations of the German Evangelical Churches in the Holy Land. They bring the light of reconciliation to Israel, quite literally in the spirit of the 18th century Enlightenment movement: The light of reason shall dispel the

darkness of unreason.

One of these Enlightenment thinkers was the Saxon writer, poet, and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The “Parable of the Rings” in his play “Nathan the Wise” is until this day considered as exemplary for religious reason and tolerance. His play must be read against his personal background as a Saxon native and his experience of the peaceful co-existence of a Protestant majority and a Catholic prince. Lessing did not propagate blind tolerance, but stipulated a tolerance based on a humanist ideal valid for all religions.

The question posed to the eponymous Nathan is: Which is the “true” religion? Nathan is a Jew, his conversation partner Sultan Saladin, a Muslim, and there are also Christian figures in the play.

In the end he states:

“Unwarped of prejudice; let each endeavour
With gentleness, benevolence, forbearance,
With inward resignation to the godhead,
To show which religion is the only true one.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This could very well be the motto of the foundation’s work here in the Holy Land. I wish all the staff that they will always be able to achieve their great aims. And I hope that new newly donated light always illuminates your way ahead, which may not be an easy one at times. May it help you to master all the bends and slippery slopes very successfully.

Thank you very much.