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Kraków/Poland

Speech taking leave of Dr Heinrich Pfeiffer on 6.01.2017

Dear Mrs Pfeiffer,
Heinrich's relatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Friends,

The Pastor just referred to the Magi as the Wise Men, the academics of the time. I have the honour to be a symbolic representative of the academics.

The Polish Humboldt Club, Societas Humboldtiana Polonorum, is one of the largest in the world, and it is Heinrich whom we have to thank for that.

For us in Poland, Heinrich was and is a true human being, a legend – not just because he was Secretary General of the Foundation for such a long time and the father of this Humboldt Family, but because, above all, he was a great friend of Poland as a country and Poles as people. We remember with enormous gratitude his laborious efforts in the 1970s and 1980s, when Europe was still divided by the Iron Curtain, to persuade Polish ministries to open the door for us to West German laboratories, research institutions, archives and libraries. He did it with pleading and threats (as we say in Polish) and he did it successfully.

Heinrich was also the godfather of the Societas Humboldtiana Polonorum and at its foundation in 1989, he said in a speech:

...stick together!

Be more than a bi-national association,

more than a German-Polish or Polish-German association.

Be an interconnected network for the 12,000 Humboldtians from 96 countries...

Today, the Humboldt Family embraces more than 27,000 Humboldtians in over 140 countries.

We have remained loyal to his wishes, and for everything he did for us, we are truly grateful.

This is why we had had the idea of celebrating his anniversary and his 90th birthday with him in Krakow as part of a Humboldt Kolleg on "Limits of Knowledge". We were

greatly looking forward to it, and many Humboldtians from all over the world were planning to come to Krakow, too.

Sadly, Heinrich is no longer with us in body but we are sure that he is with us in spirit, with his openness towards people, with his laughter, with his good advice.

Today, we are taking our leave of Heinrich in the words of Cicero:

Vita mortuorum in memoria vivorum est posita

The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living.

Heinrich lives on in our hearts.

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Dear Heinrich,

In Psalm 103:15 we sing,

As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth

And so were your days.

Today is our last meeting and farewell. You are no longer amongst the living, but I firmly believe that your soul and your spirit are with us. So, this is also a wonderful opportunity to express our gratitude, loud and clear, for all the good you have done for other people, especially for us, the Humboldtians from Poland.

You did not have an easy life – a war that destroyed all the hopes and dreams of a boy and then the long, difficult years of rebuilding the country. Everything had to be done new and better: particularly the relations between people both inside Germany and with other nations. To achieve that, your generation had to find great strength, make huge efforts and be willing to share with others. You managed.

You found your place at the Humboldt Foundation and spent the following years supporting researchers from all over the world in the conviction that only understanding between peoples would avoid further wars.

For your service, for the idea of the world-spanning Humboldt Family, we are immensely grateful to you.

May our thanks be with you.

And when it comes to the Day of Judgement, you may claim with humility, but also a certain pride:

***I have fought a good fight,
I have finished my course,
I have kept the faith.***

[2 Timothy 4:7]

Dear Heinrich, Rest in peace!

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Dear Edith and family,
Please accept our deepest sympathy.