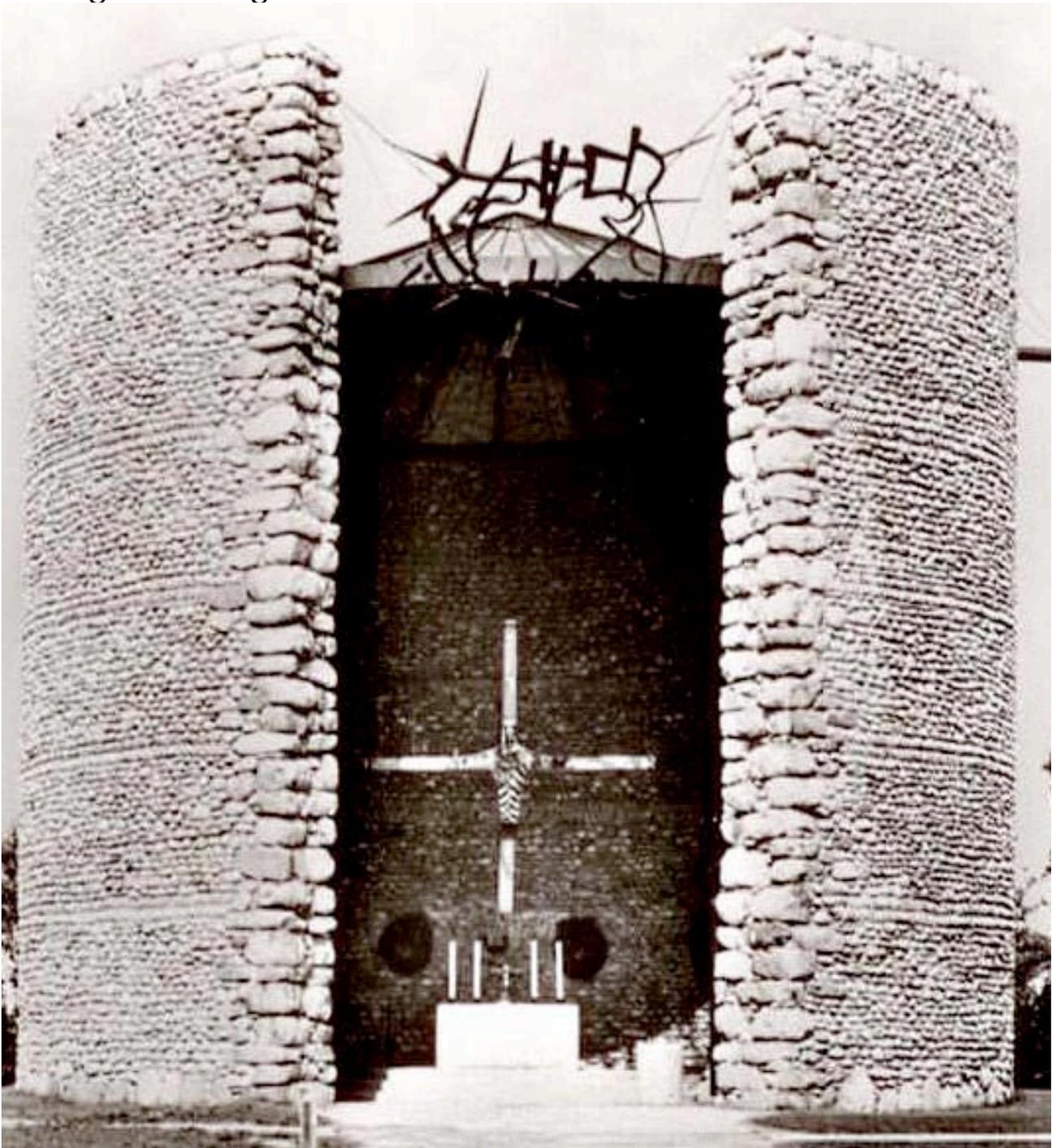


The way of German society to remember: the example of Dachau.
Ludwig Schmidinger



I bring a Symbol: a picture of the Chapel of Mortal Agony of Christ (Todesangst-Christ-Kapelle) in the concentration camp memorial site in Dachau.

Last Sunday (8. August 2010) we had a mass in this chapel with our archbishop Dr. Reinhard Marx in remembering the day of its consecration 50 years ago on 5th August 1960.

When this chapel was built and consecrated, over 15 years had passed since the day of liberation of the concentration camp of Dachau on the 29th of April in 1945. 15 years it had taken, until it was possible to build a chapel as a symbol for remembering at first to the victims of violence and murder and as a symbol on this place to think about guilt and the sins, with those were connected men during the 12 years of the Nazi terror system. These 15 years after 1945 for the main part seem to be characterised by the German people struggling and working to reach normal social situations at the one hand, and to come not into a need to think about the past at the other hand.

The situation of the former concentration camp in Dachau - maybe – can illustrate this in another way:

After the days of liberation until 1949 this camp was used as a prison for former SS-Men, until they were judged in the “Dachauer Prozesse” (similar to the “Nürnberger Prozesse”).

From 1949 until up to the beginning (19)60s the former KZ-barracks were used as flats for refugees and resettled people in the most part from Sudetenland (Czechoslovakia).

So even in that time, when the chapel was consecrated, in the former barracks of the KZ there lived some few thousand people almost from Sudetenland.

In this time the most people in Dachau and probably in Bavaria were not at all interested in a memorial site, no most of them were strictly against a project like that.

At least only continuing to remember to the history of the place through the former prisoners made it possible, to plan and at least realise an international memorial site. But this should take further five years.

In the time between all barracks were taken away for different reasons: the one say, they would have been too much changed through their use after the concentration camp time, the others say, the responsible people in the town of Dachau and the Bavarian state had wanted to build on this place many new things.

(Like it was done many years after at the former “Plantage” an area directly beside the KZ, where hundreds and hundreds of prisoners suffered and been murdered – there is now a big commercial area.)

Alexander und Margarete Mitscherlich’s book “Die Unfähigkeit, zu trauern“ (The inability to mourn) has as a fundamental thesis this one: Because the Germans did not want to take true, that they themselves had taken Hitler as an ideal, and so themselves had bound to Hitler – therefore

they were unable, to get rid of him, to liberate themselves from him; instead of this, they tried to find a place in present time by refusing to recognize past. (s.a. Süddeutsche Zeitung 9. August 2010, Nr. 181, Seite 14: “Wie alle Deutschen Opfer wurden” – Buchbesprechung)

The discussion and the conflicts in Dachau were not finished in 1965, when the International memorial was opened. Both continued up to 1980 and nearly 1990, when it was planned and in the end opened the International Youth Guest House in Dachau was built (<http://www.jgh-dachau.de>) near the memorial site.

Three weeks ago this Youth guest house now has been given an new name: “International Youth Guest house – Max Mannheimer Study Center”: Max Mannheimer was born at the 6th of February in 1920 in Neutitschein in Czechoslovakia; as a Jew he was taken prisoner with all his family. He had to go through the KZ in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and Dachau in one of its external camps in the East of Munich. He lost all his family including his first wife; only his younger brother and he managed to survive. Since about 1985 he became one of the most important witnesses for almost pupils and students until today. Before this time he was not able to speak about his experience, and before he could do this, he had begun to paint.

Thinking of him it seems to me, that all these years up to 1980 or 1990 for the main art of both – survivors and the society – it was difficult to remember:

In case of the survivors for the reason for example to get rid of the bad dreams and sleepless nights and to get rid of the fear (not to be taken seriously), not to be taken true with their own stories; in case of people for the reason to see and realise, how weak and small the own standing and power had been, and how many had been fond of Hitler and his ideas. In both cases it seems not the sons and the daughters, but the grand children are able to open the door into the past without the fear to get or become overtaken through it.

An indicator for this is in now more than 130 examples the book of remember in for prisoners of the KZ Dachau (www.gedaechtnisbuch.de). In now about 11 years 130 biographies have been written about former KZ-prisoners, the most of them by pupils or students, often relatives, grandson or granddaughter.

The intention of this project has given the name: “Namen statt Nummern”. This is an individual and international project at the same time. In 2008 there was made an exhibition from it with 21 biographies; this was seen

from 10.000 people in different European countries, beginning in Germany, Poland, France, England, Ukraine, Netherlands, every in its own language.

So the building and consecration of the chapel of Mortal Agony of Christ in the former concentration camp was a beginning of remembering, and in the way of this time a trial of reconciliation.

The book of remembering and the international exhibition is another, a new way, so search and reach this.

Between both there were many steps, which were undertaken by a lot of individual people, often in very private contacts, but from the beginning of the seventies in more or less official meetings for example in Dachau too: a Polish and a German bishop, Karol Kardinal Woityla (Krakau) and Julius Kardinal Döpfner (München und Freising) met in the year 1974 – for me this is a document, which shows, how also official ways began to search an find reconciliation between Polish an German people.



Julius Kardinal Döpfner und Karol Kardinal Woityla,
ganz rechts Prälat Michael Höck, der von 1941 bis zum Schluß im KZ Dachau gewesen war;
im Hintergrund die Todesangst-Christi-Kapelle in der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau (1960)



Bronzerelief auf der Rückseite der Todesangst-Christi-Kapelle in der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau. Am 19. August 1972 von Julius Kardinal Döpfner (1913-1976) enthüllt. Gestiftet von überlebenden Priestern des KZ Dachau)

Wichtige Hintergrundinformationen und Belege in:

Lange Wege – Dokumente zur Versöhnungsarbeit der Katholischen Kirche in Deutschland
 hrsg. vom Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz. – Bonn 2009. –(Arbeitshilfen 227)

„Der angemessene Umgang mit den die Gegenwart prägenden Wunden der Vergangenheit spielt eine wichtige Rolle für den innergesellschaftlichen und internationalen Frieden. Die deutschen Bischöfe haben sich in besonderer Weise nach dem Nationalsozialismus diesen Wunden gestellt.

Sie wollten dazu beitragen, dass heilt, was heilen kann. Der Hoffnung auf Umkehr und Versöhnung sollte ein praktischer Ausdruck verliehen werden.

Die vorliegende Dokumentation macht ausgewählte Erklärungen, die wichtige Marksteine auf diesen bisweilen beschwerlichen Wegen gewesen sind, in einer systematischen Weise zugänglich. Die intensiven Dialoge mit Polen spiegeln sich ebenso darin wider wie die vielfältigen fruchtbaren Impulse, die Papst Johannes Paul II. gesetzt hat.

Die Dokumentation vermittelt einen Einblick in die kirchliche Versöhnungsarbeit und stellt zugleich Material bereit, um den heutigen Herausforderungen gerecht zu werden.“

http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/veroeffentlichungen/arbeitshilfen/AH_227.pdf

S.a. Kai Kappel, „Religiöse Erinnerungsorte in der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau“, mit einem Beitrag von Björn Mensing und Ludwig Schmidinger (Kirchliche Gedenkstättenarbeit in Dachau), Deutscher Kunstverlag, ISBN 978-3-422-02237-9 (auch in englisch erhältlich)



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