

Lord, stay with us, for it is getting late.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear residents of Langenburg, dear guests, and above all: dear relatives of Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen – dear von Olnhausens, dear Ohlhausers.

Ohlhausen, Ohlheiser, and Ohlhäuser are also relatives whom I warmly welcome, should they have accepted my invitation.

But I especially welcome the Ohlhausers from Canada. Their ancestors, via Hungary, Bessarabia (now Ukraine), and the Dakotas, finally found a new home in Carbon, Alberta, around 1900. I welcome Fred, a descendant from the USA. And I welcome Rainer Ohlhauser, who, in the 1964/65 season, scored an incredible 49 goals to propel FC Bayern Munich into the Bundesliga.

Hohenlohe is the ancestral homeland of our forebears. Following in their footsteps, with the help of Mrs. Ruopp, we discovered the epitaph of our relative Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen here in this church last year. He was born in 1623, lived here in Langenburg, and worked as a chancery secretary in the service of the Hohenlohe-Langenburg lordship. He died in 1677 at the age of 54. His four surviving children commissioned the epitaph for him and his wife, Magdalena Elisabeth, in 1695.

Here I must also welcome someone else: Heinz-Jörg von Olnhausen from Dresden, who is a great-great-grandson three times over of this Johann Heinrich, his direct descendant in the twelfth generation.

The image on the epitaph depicts the biblical scene of the road to Emmaus: three travelers. Christ is in their midst. In the background is a town, apparently Langenburg. Above is a scroll with the inscription: **"Lord, stay with us, for it is nearly evening."**

Why this particular inscription? The epitaph does indeed contain the classic resurrection text: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live." It also contains another inscription about the fear of God as the "best capital," which bears interest not only in the afterlife but also on earth. And the lower cartouche names the four children who erected this monument to their parents out of "filial gratitude."

The sentence comes from the Gospel of Luke. Two disciples are on their way to Emmaus. Jerusalem lies behind them. With it, their hopes. Jesus is dead. Everything they believed in seems to have collapsed. They tell the apparently ignorant stranger what has happened. He interprets the events for them. When they reach their destination and evening falls, they do not want him to continue on his way: **"Lord, stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over."**

This is oriental hospitality. You don't let a stranger travel on into the night. You offer him food and lodging. Stay with us. Eat with us. Stay overnight with us. Only at the breaking of the bread do the disciples realize whom they have welcomed. Then the risen Christ vanishes from their sight.

From this phrase of hospitality, in the 17th century, a plea to the Lord for support becomes, no, a cry for help: **Lord, stay with us. Do not forsake us. For it is getting dark...** because darkness is falling, as it would later be called in Johann Sebastian Bach's Cantata No. 6.

In 1627, in the midst of the Thirty Years' War, the Lutheran theologian Josua Stegmann published his hymn "Ach abigkeit mit deiner Gnade" (Ah, abide with your grace). Rinteln, where he taught, had previously been attacked, plundered, and occupied for months; then came the plague. His recurring "Ach abigkeit... mit uns" directly echoes the Emmaus motif.

The hymn spread rapidly—there is hardly anything more comforting than singing it together. As a plea for assistance, it also found its way to Langenburg and onto the epitaph. *The organist plays the hymn until everyone recognizes it. EG 347 Abide with Your Grace.*

Paul Gerhardt wrote his hymns of comfort in the same era. He is the great comforter of those years. He is among the most important German-language hymn writers. His approximately 140 surviving hymns remain an integral part of the Protestant hymnal and many other hymnals. Indeed, many of our hymns originate from the Thirty Years' War.

And after the war, he rebuilt the survivors with such well-known settings as Go forth, my heart, and seek delight. EG 503. *The organist plays the hymn until everyone recognizes it.*

Singing together brings order, for a moment, to a world that has lost all order. Hospitality has become comfort. And comfort has become hope for survival.

And with that, we arrive at the Thirty Years' War. 1618 to 1648. Thirty years. In history books, an era. For a person back then, a lifetime.

The war began as a conflict between Catholic and Protestant powers within the Holy Roman Empire. But it didn't stop there. Dynastic interests, the power struggle between the emperor and the imperial princes, and ultimately the major European powers became intertwined. Catholic France ended up fighting against the Catholic Habsburgs.

Religion, therefore, no longer explains this war. The war developed its own logic. Mercenary armies had to be paid and fed. If their pay failed to materialize, they plundered the land. Once an area was looted, they moved on. Crops were destroyed, livestock driven away, villages burned to the ground. The enemy's supply lines were to be destroyed, but in doing so, one's own was simultaneously destroyed.

The war fed on itself. Friend and foe became increasingly indistinguishable to the population. A contemporary aptly summarized it: **"Now our enemy has abandoned us, and our friend is tormenting us."** Both sides took what they needed to survive.

The consequences were hunger, disease, devastation, and death. Entire regions lost a significant portion of their population. Even wolves, where they hadn't already been eaten, found nothing left to kill, so they preyed on human settlements. Their bad reputation, the Big Bad Wolf, originates from the Thirty Years' War.

Battles alone weren't the catastrophe. One side avoided the enemy, but destroyed their logistics. The catastrophe was a war that never ended.

Langenburg had only recently become a residence. At the beginning of the 17th century, Count Philipp Ernst had expanded the castle and its surrounding lands. Administration and a court were established, and Langenburg became the political center of a small Protestant county. Philipp Ernst died in 1628 at the age of 44. His children were still minors.

Then came 1634. On September 6, the Swedish-Protestant and the Imperial-Spanish armies faced each other near Nördlingen. Hohenlohe sided with the Protestants. And thus, after the crushing defeat, with the wrong side.

Swedish hegemony in southern Germany collapsed. The small Protestant principalities lost their military protection. Imperial troops occupied Hohenlohe. The count's family fled Langenburg. Revenues dried up, the land was burdened with quartering troops and contributions, and plundered.

Who holds a principality together under such conditions? The administration. The officials who remained behind. At their head was Chancellery Director Johann Christoph Assum. Alongside him, the von Olnhausen family.

In November 1634 – two months after the defeat at Nördlingen – Assum described the state of the county: it was "ruined to the ground," the count's houses plundered and left desolate, parts of the land burned, horses, cattle, and livestock driven away, "leaving nothing behind."

This was not a retrospective history, but a situation report.

The Lordship of Langenburg was threatened with sequestration, meaning it was to be confiscated by the Emperor. The count's heirs were minors. Their political future hung in the balance.

Assum took action, traveling to Frankfurt to the imperial headquarters – as an imperial notary, which he was.

At home, his wife had fallen ill with the plague.

Through persistent negotiation, he succeeded in preventing the confiscation of the lordship. The minor status and innocence of the children of the deceased Count Philipp Ernst were recognized, and their lordship was placed under imperial protection.

On his return journey, Assum was traveling with a delegation from the council of the Imperial City of Rothenburg. In Wertheim, he parted ways with her and visited his daughter, Beate Salome, and her husband, his son-in-law, Georg Gabriel von Olnhausen, the local bailiff.

The Rothenburgers continued their journey without him. Near Creglingen, they were ambushed and killed by Croatian horsemen. Assum escaped the attack because he had stayed with his family, the von Olnhausens. And when he finally returned, his wife had recovered from the plague.

Assum and the von Olnhausens were not equals in their official positions. Assum was chancellor and thus Assum's superior. However, the families were so closely intertwined that the image of a mere bureaucratic hierarchy is insufficient.

Georg Gabriel von Olnhausen was not only Assum's son-in-law. He is the older brother of the chancellery secretary, Heinrich von Olnhausen, whose name appears on the epitaph. The father of the two, Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen the Elder, was the Hohenlohe bailiff and cellarer of Mainhardt, a leading local administrative and financial official of the House of Hohenlohe, who worked for the chancellor whose daughter married his son. According to another source, he was even chancellery secretary in Langenburg under Assum. Another connection followed in the next generation: Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen, pastor in Kocherstetten and son of the man on our epitaph, married Eva Maria Judith Assum, a granddaughter of Johann Christoph Assum.

This was a network of familial and professional trust. And such networks have a significance in a time when institutions are collapsing that cannot be captured in any organizational chart.

The Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen of our epitaph was born in 1623. His father, Johann Heinrich the Elder, died in 1626.

Exactly 400 years ago. Precisely in the middle of the 800-year history that Langenburg is celebrating this year. **Halfway through Langenburg's history.** The son experienced the war as a child and adolescent. Later, he became a chancery secretary, registrar, imperial notary, and chamber councilor. His actual service period fell primarily in the decades after 1648. With

this, his role changed. The father belonged to the generation of survival. The son belonged to the generation of reconstruction.

After the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the war ended. But peace was far from bringing about normalcy. A devastated country had to be reorganized. A ruling class, after thirty years of war, had to relearn how to govern. Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen worked precisely on this. As late as 1672, he appears in the records in connection with negotiations and planning concerning the inheritance and division of lands within the House of Hohenlohe.

History remembers military commanders. Wallenstein was one of them. Reconstruction is being carried out by others. By people who write, calculate, negotiate, and organize. By people who take responsibility without later sitting on horseback monuments.

Yet the von Olnhausen family did indeed originally come from a horsemanship background. Our ancestor was ennobled precisely for his riding.

In the von Olnhausen family tree in the State Archives in Vienna, it states: Heinrich Otting provided escort for a crusade to the Holy Sepulchre in 1388. "Because he was an accomplished horseman and showed himself to be chivalrous on every occasion, he was knighted alongside other lords and counts under the Order of the Golden Star. At this ceremony, he was given the name von Olnhausen. Afterwards, the Counts of Hohenlohe appointed him Vogt of Adolzfurth, a position his children and grandchildren have inherited."

"Because he was an accomplished horseman." For me, riding is always an undertaking. I remember the Sunday rides in my youth. You ride, but you are also ridden. For the horse, you are the higher-ranking one, from whom it expects leadership, but it only trusts you when you adhere to equine rules, understand its world; only then does the herd animal feel safe. This demands clarity, clear, decisive, and unambiguous body language. On a journey lasting weeks or months, this had to become something essential. Rider and horse depended on each other. In danger, each had to be able to rely on the other. Only someone who understands the other can lead. Dressage shows us what a horse is capable of when it is led in harmony.

You only lead a horse if you understand it. This applies not only on horseback. It applies in a law firm. And it applies to every form of responsibility. The path from knight to civil servant may therefore not be as long as it initially seems.

And that's where the von Berlichingen family comes into play. The connection between the two families goes back a long way. Even Heinrich von Olnhausen, the aspiring knight, was married to Anna von Berlichingen as his second wife. Oswald von Olnhausen, chief forester in Unterheimbach, married Apollonia von Berlichingen, a daughter of the famous Götz von Berlichingen. The later Johann Heinrich von Olnhausens are their descendants, that is, Götz's grandsons and great-grandsons.

The two families embody two different responses to the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era.

The Berlichingens still represent the classic knightly nobility, feuding, plunder, castles, and weapons. The von Olnhausens increasingly shifted their focus to administration and government service. The knight had outlived his time.

Goethe's Götz, performed annually at the Götzenburg in Jagsthausen, thrives on precisely this conflict. A man of old freedom is thrust into a world already governed by law, administration, and territorial statehood. His last words are: "Die, Götz—you have outlived yourself [...]". He realized that his chivalric ideals no longer had a place in a new era and that the old chivalry was dying out.

The young Goethe was fascinated by Götz's yearning for freedom, by his self-determined genius. He was completely unconcerned by the overdue political changes demanded in the Peasants' War of 1525. He used Götz, this inwardly free fighter, as a role model and guiding star for his own life. "I felt [after reading his memoirs] my existence expanded immeasurably," he described the creative process—at a time when he was still struggling with the fact that he had to become a lawyer according to his father's decree. Had the young Goethe not found his ideal self in him, Götz von Berlichingen would probably be forgotten today. He transformed the battle-hungry, heavily armed, brutal, lawless knight, the cowardly traitor of the peasants, into one of the noblest Germans. Götz only became famous through Goethe, and Goethe perhaps only through his Götz. The play, published in 1773 and breaking all conventions, made the young author instantly famous. Until then, his poems had at best moved court ladies to tears. Götz opened a new, free, and impetuous existence for him. Goethe overlooked the fact that the von Olnhausen family repeatedly bailed him out of perilous situations. He was able to exchange a three-year prison sentence in Heilbronn for house arrest at the Kronenwirt inn in Böckingen—on the other side of the Neckar River—where his second cousin, Jakob von Olnhausen, was mayor. They helped him with diplomatic letters, guarantees, and legal assistance.

Incidentally, the robber baron friend from whom Götz bought Hornberg Castle in 1517, Conz Schott von Schottenstein, had been involved in fierce gun battles in Langenburg in December 1507.

The von Olnhausen family had taken a different path: from "tempted horseman" to bailiff, and from bailiff to forester. From bailiff to chancellery secretary. To chamber councilor, privy councilor, and pastor. To physician. Carl von Olnhausen (1739-1827) was personal physician to the Hohenlohe princes in Öhringen. They represent the Hohenlohe service nobility.

The family's form of responsibility evolves. And the lines extend further. Through a daughter of the family, Henrike Ernestine Sophie von Olnhausen (1773-1802), the genealogical connection ultimately leads to the Weizsäcker family and thus to former German President Richard von Weizsäcker.

I don't want to make a doctrine of inheritance out of this. Responsibility isn't inherited with a title of nobility. Character isn't written in the family tree. Our ancestors weren't heroes simply because they are our ancestors.

But families do pass something on. Not just genes. Also stories. Professions. Influences. Expectations. Attitudes. And sometimes, apparently, a remarkable inclination to assume responsibility.

My ancestry includes bailiffs, mayors, a Palatine administrator, and chamberlains. My grandfather was mayor (of Dilsberg), my father was active in local government, and I myself was responsible for the design and marketing of an international corporation. My designs influenced stock market value and jobs.

Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen died in 1677. His wife, Magdalena Elisabeth, had already died the previous year. In 1695, eighteen years after his death, his four children erected this epitaph for their parents. Why so late? And why this particular image?

The children were long since grown up. Johann Heinrich, who married Eva Maria Judith Assum, was pastor in Kocherstetten and court preacher to the Prince of Hohenlohe. Heinrich Friedrich was bailiff of Schmidelfeld, most comparable to today's district administrator. Johann Ludwig was mayor of Crailsheim, and his daughter, Maria Juliane Louise, was married to a registrar, a high-ranking chancery official in Waldenburg. They had thus arrived in the very world of church and administration in which their parents had lived.

The Thirty Years' War had ended 47 years earlier in 1695. But it wasn't history in our sense. The parents had lived through it. The children had grown up in its immediate aftermath. And meanwhile, Louis XIV was waging the next great war.

The War of the Palatine Succession had been devastating large parts of southwestern Germany since 1688. Langenburg itself was spared the worst destruction, but the images from Heidelberg, the burned-down castle, the images from Mannheim, Speyer, and other places were close enough.

War was back. The epitaph was created during this war. And with that, the inscription takes on yet another meaning. **Lord, stay with us, for it is about to begin again.**

The children thank their parents. Perhaps they thank them not only for being good parents. Perhaps they thank them for an attitude that carried them through this time. An inscription calls fear of God the "best capital," a surprisingly sober, almost businesslike formulation for an epitaph. But it suits this family. Capital, interest, responsibility, passing on. What the parents invested bears fruit in their children. The fact that they mention their high-ranking positions also testifies to a certain pride in what they have become.

This slowly answers another question for me. **Why am I doing this at all?** I'm not a genealogist. My cousins Edgar and Manfred did a large part of the genealogical work. I am truly grateful to them for that. Without their groundwork, I wouldn't be standing here today.

I'm not interested in entering as many names as possible into a family tree. I'm interested in the foundation on which I stand. Engaging with one's ancestors shifts the beginning of one's own biography. My life then no longer begins with my birth. Before me stand generations of people without whom I wouldn't be here. People who have experienced wars. Who have emigrated. Who have lost their homeland and found a new one. Who have taken on responsibility.

Who have failed. Who have started again. And who have ultimately passed something on. I have coined the term **"genealogical deep time"** for this.

We live only a comparatively short span of time. We remember our childhood. Our parents. Perhaps our grandparents. Then it becomes dark. Genealogy expands this space. Suddenly, centuries stand behind a person. Not as a burden. As a foundation. Our ancestors don't live on mystically within us. But they live on biologically in our genes, psychologically in imprints, culturally in values, linguistically in images, and socially in roles and ways of life. Not only traumas can outlive generations. So can courage, a sense of responsibility, talents, wisdom, and resilience. Modern social and psychological sciences call this unconscious transmission of experiences, attitudes, and traumas of ancestors to subsequent generations transgenerational family memory. There are indigenous cultures for whom illness means having strayed from the path of their ancestors. Health is in harmony with their ancestors. For our alternative medicine, illness means having strayed from one's own path—a path, of course, that our ancestors helped to shape.

No one starts from scratch. No one created themselves. We stand on the shoulders of others. This applies to people. And it applies to places. Langenburg, too, doesn't begin today. This town stands on a foundation of 800 years. The anniversary is therefore more than just a round number. It offers an opportunity to look back. What has sustained this town? Who has sustained it? Who has guided it through times when its survival was by no means a given? What has it passed on? Joschka Fischer and Rezzo Schlauch both come from Langenburg. They later brought the idea of "preserving" and protecting to the grand political stage and became influential figures in the Green movement in Germany.

Four hundred years ago, Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen, the father of the man on our epitaph, before whom we still stand today, died. For me, that is the true meaning of Open Monument Day. A monument is not important simply because it is old. It is important when it reveals something to us: the story of people who took responsibility. For me personally, it is the story of a foundation I knew nothing about for a long time. Those who know their reasons stand differently. The Latin word "fundare" means to found, to strengthen, to prepare the ground. Today, we stand on their foundation. And we bear responsibility for the ground on which others will one day stand. A branch of the von Olnhausen family established a family foundation to support needy and deserving family members. A descendant of the von Olnhausen family founded the Monsignor Friedrich Ohlhäuser Foundation. It supports people in difficult circumstances.

Life situations and charitable organizations in the Karlsruhe area – directly and with as little red tape as possible.

I return to the sentence with which this evening began. You already heard it before anyone even spoke. "Abide with me." Stay with me. Henry Francis Lyte wrote his evening hymn in 1847, gravely ill and nearing his own death. Almost two hundred years after Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen, the same plea. Stay. Do not leave me. Evening is coming.

And in a few moments, Bernhardt Brand-Hofmeister (our organist) will strike a completely different language with Ligeti's "Volumina." Not a comforting one. An almost unbearable one. Perhaps music can truly express what words can no longer reach. The chaos. The violence. The loss of all order. For me, this music is a metaphor for that war we have been discussing. A martial sonic chaos. Please don't be alarmed! It will only be brief.

Afterwards, the organ will continue, as it has continued time and again since 1648. The epitaph up there has survived three centuries. Johann Heinrich von Olnhausen has long since died. Johann Christoph Assum lies buried near the exit. A privilege that testifies to the great gratitude of the count's family, to whom alone the burial place in this church was reserved. His stone gravestone is located directly next to the Olnhausen epitaph. Here rests the highly noble and distinguished Johann Christoph Assum, formerly Chancellor and for over 45 years Privy Councilor to the Counts of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. The counts they served are history. But the saying remains: We cannot prevent evening from coming again and again. **Lord, stay with us, for it is getting late.**

Volumina

The Thirty Years' War cost millions of lives. An estimated 40 percent of the population. Some regions needed generations to recover from the losses.

Until the 20th century, this war was considered in the German consciousness to be the ultimate catastrophe of their own history.

Then came the World Wars. The Nazi regime. The Holocaust. One catastrophe overshadowed the memory of the next. Today, the Thirty Years' War seems a distant memory.

But wars haven't disappeared. Only our ability to wage them has increased. The most terrifying difference:

Today, wars can no longer truly be won. They can still destroy everything.

Thank you.

Gerd Ohlhauser

Langenburg, September 13, 2026

(This is an unedited machine translation.)