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**Speech by  
Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at a dinner for members of the  
Order Pour le mérite for Services to Science and the Arts  
Schloss Bellevue  
31 May 2015**

I would like to invite you to join with me in reflecting on this morning's concert, at which a great artist gifted us with something like a revelation – though perhaps as a theologian I shouldn't say that –, or at least with something of an enlightenment. And I would like to tell you how what I personally experienced this morning and what the Order and you as outstanding figures in the world of science and the arts represent have come together in my mind.

I would like to start with the word "humility", because I believe something quite remarkable happened within some of us this morning. I believe we were feeling at once utterly content, or as my grandchildren would say, using the English word even in German, totally happy, but at the same time profoundly humble. How can something like that happen? Does not happiness give us such an overwhelming feeling of being alive, indeed of being more alive than alive, that the gesture of humility is incompatible with it? In this instance, however, the two emotions were entirely compatible. I am not one of those people blessed with the gift of understanding the depths and intricacies of music. At best I can enjoy it and appreciate it. Sometimes I find in it consolation or cheer.

Now I come to the next term that came into my head: "threshold". You, Sir Andrés, great master that you are, transported me, an unmusical, average German, to a threshold of understanding, and since I just said I experienced true happiness, then you will know that I actually crossed over this threshold. However, I could not get as far as you can, with your deeper understanding. And that is why I would especially like to thank you for using a medium which you did not have to use: for love of us, you used words. You found the words to describe the depths and intricacies you can hear and feel to those of

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us who cannot hear or feel them; you carried us over the threshold, deeper and deeper into that place where resides happiness, where resides the perfection we will never attain but for which we will ever yearn, for as long as our hearts beat within us.

And so I thank you for doing us this service, for revealing to us through words that, or at least a part of that, which great musicians doubtless believe everyone must automatically understand.

I know some of you have the gift of finding the right non scientific words, guiding, comforting, inviting words. I admire this gift greatly. I do not believe that everyone who is capable of creating great things is equally capable of talking about them, of making them sound attractive. That is why every university has a scholar, perhaps even a world-famous figure, known for his or her tremendous discoveries, the prizes and honours he or she has won. But it does not follow that this great scholar is also a great teacher.

That is precisely why we need those who make the effort to disseminate all the depth of their knowledge or art into our world. New generations are waiting to be woken with a kiss, to be able to achieve the greatness you have all achieved, you who are members of the Order Pour le mérite. The ability I am talking about is certainly not the be all and end all for researchers and artists. What is crucial is insight for the former, mastery for the latter. But if they can describe insight and mastery in words so that those who remain standing on the threshold can pass over it, then that too is serendipity. A second happiness. An approach towards fulfilment and depth.

And in talking about the things that might happen to us on a perfectly normal Sunday, then we are actually quite close to the secrets of life for which we scarcely have words. Those words we do have, we stammer out; and the poets and musicians perhaps get closest to them. However, we are only ever talking in abbreviations or, to quote Scripture, we depict perfection through a glass, darkly, a glass which is rather murky. But we have no other possibilities than to do this. And sometimes, in pleasant, mysterious, blissful hours, we manage to do more than we had expected. I experienced just such an hour this morning. And for that I thank you.

And a few moments ago, when I was talking about useful words and about the tremendous gifts gathered together in such a room, I was of course also talking about you. And that is why one aspect of the personal encounter between the individuals Joachim Gauck and Andrés Schiff is of course also the awareness of a cheering communion between people who at rare moments experience what might almost be called an unio mystica, but who then once again go their own way to imbue disparate aspects of the world with meaning, or to intensively question whether such meaning exists at all. So what you see before you now is a Federal President who has had a very happy day.

And who was the creator of this happiness? You!

I raise my glass in a toast to your good health, to Sir Andrés, and also to Professor Sheehan, whose birthday it is today.