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PRESS RELEASE
GERMAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



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Welcoming address
of Reinhard Cardinal Marx,
President of the German Bishops' Conference,
on the opening event of the International Conference held by the
International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ),
Bonn, 2 July 2017

Dear Rabbi Skorka,
Dear Bishop Younan,
Dear Praeses, dear brother Rekowski,
Dear Vice-President Lehrer,
Dear Mayor Sridharan,
Dear Professor Cunningham,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am glad that the International Council of Christians and Jews is holding this year's Conference in Germany and I would like to welcome you on behalf of the German Bishops' Conference.

In the past decades a culture of dialogue characterized by confidence and openness has developed in Germany between Christians and Jews as well as between the Catholic and the Protestant Church. Both developments cannot be taken for granted.

For me it is still surprising that only a few years after the Shoah Jews and Christians met for talks and soon founded societies for Christian-Jewish cooperation. And it is equally remarkable that this did not only happen in Switzerland, in France or the USA but also in Germany. Could and should Jewish life be possible in Germany after the Shoah? Why should Jews reach out their hands to Christians whose personal behaviour between 1933 and 1945 was unknown to them? At that time many people were preoccupied by these questions and nevertheless societies were established in which Christians and Jews joined forces to examine the National Socialist past and its actual consequences. In this context they also confronted the anti-Judaism of the

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Churches and the theological question regarding a new relationship between Christians and Jews which is characterized by mutual respect and appreciation.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these pioneers of reconciliation – gratitude for the courage to start a dialogue the future of which nobody could foresee, gratitude also for the patience they showed when confronted with disappointments, scepticism and criticism from within their own ranks. Their courage and their patience have borne rich fruit. The Christian-Jewish dialogue has visibly changed church proclamation. Also in Germany the Catholic Church has faced its anti-Jewish traditions and the question referring to the relationship between the Church and National Socialism. The dialogue with Judaism has enriched theology, catechesis and proclamation and has led to a better understanding of the Christian faith. Not least a new and cordial relationship between Christians and Jews has developed.

Today it has almost become a matter of course that every year Rabbis meet Catholic Bishops and governing bodies of the Protestant Church for discussions which last several hours, that Bishops and Rabbis travel to Israel together or that Christian and Jewish communities are jointly committed to the integration of refugees. Rabbis are welcome guests at the Katholikentag and the Evangelische Kirchentag and Bishops are warmly attended at the Jüdischer Gemeindetag. I could mention more examples from the fields of pedagogy and science. In the meantime we can find trustful relationships making open discussions possible even in case of irritations, misunderstandings and controversies.

This year your International Conference is marked by the memory of Protestant Reformation. It is by no means a matter of course that a Catholic Bishop is greeting you today and that he will deliver a speech tomorrow. Celebrations of the Protestant Reformation in the past were marked by a theology of controversy and showed once again that Germany is a divided country as far as denominations are concerned. This year, however, it is different. For the first time the Catholic Church takes part in the celebrations in memory of the Protestant Reformation which clearly show an ecumenical character. Catholics and Protestants do not agree on all issues referring to the Reformation of the 16th century, but they agree on the reformers' basic concern that the proclamation of the Church should be guided again by the Gospel and that Christ should be the centre of ecclesiastical life. For me it is very encouraging that this year's celebrations in memory of the Reformation do not separate Catholic and Protestant Christians but that they rather bring them together. This is also reflected in the programme of the Conference and I am grateful to the organisers for this.

As a Catholic Bishop I have observed with great respect in recent years the open and critical way the Protestant Church in Germany has dealt with anti-Jewish writings by Martin Luther and that it has dissociated itself expressly from these statements. It is not easy to critically deal with one's own traditions. Also for the Catholic Church it is not easy to take its own anti-Jewish traditions into account openly. I very much respect the seriousness shown by German Protestantism when facing also the negative aspects of the Reformation.

I don't want to say that in Germany there are no conflicts, open questions or disagreements between Jews and Christians or between Catholics and Protestants. Looking back at past decades, however, we can learn that what we have achieved in dialogue deserves great appreciation and encourages us to continue patiently and persistently on this path, because the ecumenical as well as the Christian-Jewish dialogue enriches all participants and yes, it makes friendship possible.

With this in mind I wish you an intellectually stimulating Conference with many encounters which may grant you human and spiritual enrichment.