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Dr Dieter Graumann
President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany

Speech on the occasion of the meeting
with Pope Benedict XVI
in the Reichstag Building on 22 September 2011

Your Holiness,

It is a great honour and a pleasure for us that we have this opportunity to meet with you here today during your journey to Germany, an event following on from your remarkable, historic visit to Cologne Synagogue in 2005, which as far as I know was the first visit ever made by a Pope to a synagogue outside Italy. You certainly have a more than demanding, ambitious, and almost sporting, intensive and tightly-scheduled visiting programme today. The fact that you have nonetheless found time for this meeting, that you have taken time for us, shows us that dialogue with Judaism is a real matter of the heart for you. We would therefore like to offer you our most heartfelt welcome with the traditional Jewish greeting and the Jewish welcome blessing: "*Baruch Haba!*"

It is nice to be able to see clearly that the relationship between the Catholic Church and Judaism has really improved in recent decades in a highly dramatic manner. There are so many people on all sides who have made a major contribution towards this achievement. And we are highly aware that you in particular have personally always considered reconciliation with Judaism to be important, in fact an absolute matter of the heart. It was therefore with joy and considerable relief that we Jews in Germany also very recently heard your clear words: Your rejection of any mission work among the Jews and your more than unambiguous rejection of the centuries-old accusation of deicide. This did us all good. Jews have been persecuted, expelled and killed for centuries on the pretext of deicide. You have now put

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a final end to this. It is therefore good that you have found such clear words here.

Major steps have however already been taken by the Catholic Church in its relations with Judaism. These are steps which we greatly appreciate! However: There is still a lot to do. For all of us. And openness and friendship which are growing and are to grow further also include saying to one another and confessing frankly what hurts and burdens us. Good friendship must therefore be resilient to tension and indeed be able to sustain the headwind of occasional differences; on the understanding, naturally, that these winds are neither too strong nor too frequent. The bridges which we wish to build in order to create connections must have sound foundations. These must be foundations of trust, of reliability, of friendship, so sound that they can also stand up to open words.

Please therefore permit me to tackle those points which really hurt us in the openness that is required of friendship: The topic of the “Pius Brotherhood”^{*}, which in our view still stands for fanaticism, fundamentalism, racism, anti-Semitism, in fact simply for the darkest Middle Ages and for irreconcilability pure and simple, is one which we still find painful. The same goes for the topic of the Good Friday prayers. And the envisioned beatification of Pope Pius XII, which would further hurt our feelings and cause us disappointment. Having said all that, one thing is absolutely certain: The course of reconciliation being steered together by Judaism and the Vatican, and which we have experienced in recent decades, is so important and so valuable to all of us. The late Pope John Paul II, whom you yourself so recently beatified, pushed forward this course with such energy and warmth. His words and deeds warm our hearts to the present day. And we know full well that you yourself always supported, encouraged and contributed to his initiative with decisiveness. And we see and feel that you will continue the course of community and friendship in your own responsibility and even accelerate it.

Contacts between the Jewish community in Germany and the Catholic Church here in the country have now become highly varied, trustful, reliable and close. We feel this particularly clearly, again and again, especially in difficult situations. This is particularly when friendship needs to prove itself – and this is indeed what we experience, again and again in a really moving way. I would like to express my explicit thanks for this living solidarity and established loyalty. Our dialogue remains so important for us, but it is not to be understood in isolation. We must all be measured by its results, and by our good relationship becoming even better, closer, deeper – that is what we all hope and wish for together in our innermost hearts!

Your Holiness, I would therefore like to use today’s opportunity to affirm our desire for a lively, open, temperamental, trusting and life-affirming dialogue with one another. For a dialogue devoid of all formality, one of close friendship, of trusted partnership and deep friendship; for a dialogue in which open words are appreciated and expected and in which the deeply-established trust is to continue to grow further. I would like to see a dialogue between

^{*} Translator’s note: Society Of Saint Pius X

Jews and Christians emphasising what we have in common, which confirms and strengthens our two communities. And in a world in which, at least in Europe, the power of faith unfortunately sometimes seems to be becoming weaker and less popular, we have so many more common goals and interests, and so much more which unites us now and which must unite us forever.

I would like to see a Church which holds its “older brothers” in its heart; I would like to see us treating one another with respect, in a dialogue and in friendship, on an equal footing. I would therefore like to see fraternal relations between Judaism and Christianity becoming a matter of course, every day, everywhere and for all times. We should know in the spirit and always feel in our hearts: We have so much that joins us. We are united by much more than can ever separate us. We have such strong joint roots – perhaps we should occasionally communicate this to others together, more frequently and more strongly. We really have such strong common roots – how should they not be able to bear fruits together? And another thing we would like to see: That the fullness and the fruits of what we have in common grow and blossom. To be sure: Even then, because the world is the way it is, the trees we plant together will not yet always grow to the sky. Perhaps however we will nonetheless all come a little bit closer to Heaven. And we ourselves will perhaps grow together by what binds us – how wonderful that would be!

We are here together; we believe together – and we quite simply belong together! Let us therefore jointly bear the responsibility for this common foundation of heartfelt friendship, enhanced trust and new closeness being strengthened and established again and again. This is certainly our most heartfelt wish.