Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn
Der Rektor
Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Michael Hoch

Dear Dean of the Cathedral, Prof. Dr. Georges Hellinghausen

Spectabilis, dear Professor Sautermeister,

dear Professor Jean Ehret,

dear colleagues,

dear students,

distinguished guests,

dear ladies and gentlemen,

as Rector of the University of Bonn, it is a great pleasure and honor to welcome you here to the official opening of the Luxembourg School of Religion & Society as an Affiliated Institute at our University.

To our guests – or as I may say from today on – to our colleagues from Luxemburg I want to send a warm "*Härzlëch wëllkomm zu Bonn*".

A special greeting also goes to His Eminence, Cardinal Jean Claude Hollerich, who, as he has written to me, regrets his absence today, and I will gladly accept his invitation for a personal meeting in Luxembourg.

The affiliation of the LSRS is an important step for our European and international strategy, not only for the Faculty of Catholic Theology, but for the University at large and I am very happy to speak to you today.

This cooperation is of great strategic and institutional significance indeed. And I will come to this later in my short speech.

However, as is the case whenever researchers and students from two different countries come together to collaborate, this partnership also carries cultural and personal dimensions.

Allow me to address this crucial aspect first.

Bonn, the Rhineland, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg have a shared history that spans centuries.

Contact, trade, and occasionally conflicts have woven a tapestry of connections between these regions.

Traveling by train from Bonn to the city of Luxembourg, passing through the picturesque Rhine Valley and alongside the Mosel River with its renowned vineyards, one can instantly feel this shared cultural heritage.

A heritage that binds our two countries and regions together.

Hence, it is not by chance that the University of Bonn has, since its founding in 1818, attracted students from Luxembourg.

Since the early 20th century, students from Luxembourg form one of the largest groups of international students. As of today, the University of Bonn has enrolled over 120 students from Luxemburg.

I firmly believe that this connection holds historical significance, not only for the bilateral relations between our two nations but also for the broader context of Europe.

A famous example: Robert Schumann, born in Luxembourg and later a law student at the University of Bonn, enrolling in 1904.

He subsequently ascended to the role of French Foreign Minister, emerging as one of the most influential statesmen in the post-war era.

A visionary and pioneer in founding the European Communities and the Council of Europe.

His legacy, along with others, serves as a contemporary inspiration, emphasizing our capacity to shape a future that is grounded in our shared history and shared values.

Through the LSRS affiliation, the University of Bonn establishes a presence in one of the *de facto* capitals of the European Union—an environment known for its diversity, multilingualism, and multiculturalism.

This cosmopolitan spirit is beautifully mirrored by the LSRS as well.

At the LSRS, researchers from different nations, religions and world views come together, looking for ways to foster cross-cultural understanding, justice, peace and social cohesion.

The LSRS has forged robust ties with some of Europe's premier universities, including Amsterdam, Turin, and Tübingen, to name just a few.

It is with great pride that we acknowledge your choice of the University of Bonn as your closest collaborator.

However, as you may well know, the University of Bonn and the Faculty of Catholic Theology also come with their own strengths and advantages.

The Faculty of Catholic Theology is one of the founding faculties of this University in 1818. This Faculty has always been an outstanding place for excellent and responsible theological research and education.

It stands for a great intellectual tradition, formed by scholars such as Joseph Ratzinger, Franz Joseph Dölger or Franz Böckle, just to name a few.

With a great reputation worldwide.

Additionally, numerous prominent figures in the Catholic church, including bishops and archbishops, are counted among our esteemed alumni:

- Joseph Frings, Archbishop of Cologne
- Friedhelm Hofmann, Bishopf of Würzburg
- Heiner Koch, Archbishop of Berlin
- Peter Kohlgraf, Bishop of Mainz
- Norbert Trelle, Bishop of Hildesheim
- Rainer Maria Woelki, Archbishop of Köln
- and many more.

But there is more to offer than our rich history and tradition.

As the Rector of this University, I have witnessed the Faculty's remarkable and dynamic growth in recent years and we have firmly supported this development.

Elsewhere, at other Universities, theological faculties are often somewhat under pressure.

However, at the University of Bonn, we have decided to strengthen both our Theological faculties, by promoting their structural development and fostering new research initiatives.

"Ambiguities – Identities – Conceptions of Meaning" is the current research focus of the Faculty of Catholic Theology.

We also dedicated new professorships of Excellence to both of the faculties.

Thereby, we are following a clear goal, namely to develop them into the most renowned theological faculties in Germany.

We are making excellent progress, and the LSRS will play a crucial role in helping us achieve this objective.

Almost to the day one year ago, in September 2022 I had the honor to open the Affiliation of IPA, the Institute for Prevention and Investigation of Sexualized Violence.

For me, the Affiliation of IPA, just like the Affiliation of the LSRS, is yet another proof for the faculty's active engagement at the forefront of contemporary debates on challenges that face not only the Church but society at large.

I also like to point to our new center for Comparative Theology and Social Issues, founded by Professor von Stosch, which is a unique research center for the dialogue of the world religions.

These new initiatives, along with the efforts of the LSRS, serve as a powerful reminder of the enduring significance of theological scholarship in promoting social coherence, resilience, human rights and justice, interdisciplinary ethics, peace and the well-being of our societies.

For this very reason, and as I draw my remarks to a close, I am delighted that this new collaboration promises to foster even greater synergies.

These synergies will propel theological research at our university towards higher levels of excellence, unlocking new opportunities on both the European and global stages.

I am very much looking forward to learn about new projects and initiatives in the future.

Thank you for your attention.