

Grusswort von Martin Graf anlässlich der anlässlich der Eröffnung des Calvin-Kongresses vom 24. August 2014 an der theol. Fakultät der UZH

Honorary board members
dear guests,
dear ladies and gentlemen

I am very happy to be able to welcome you all to Zurich here today. That even the weather has improved for you seems to be a message from above.

My name is Martin Graf. I am – what you would call – the Minister of Justice and Interior of our canton. But – mind you – I am not here for your security. Zurich is a safe place. Neither am I here because of my professional background as an agricultural scientist. The fact is, that my Ministry is also responsible for the relationship between government and the various religious communities. You might of course wish to know, why an agricultural scientist is elected Minister of Justice and Interior. Well it is pretty simple! The youngest elected in, thus the least senior, have to choose, what is left over. So here I am, with my farmers' language, responsible for prosecution, jails, community development, culture, integration of foreigners, statistics, archives and responsible for you. I hope you can accept that.

As a matter of fact I am extremely proud of receiving so many international experts on protestant reformation. And I wish to thank Prof. Dr. Peter Opitz for enticing your board to hold the congress here in Zurich. Even though you will discuss Calvin and his contribution to the reformation process, something that we Swiss should actually know about. But often we know very little about our immediate surroundings and more about other places in the world.

The time chosen for your congress could not be more ideal. We are just about to prepare the jubilee decade for Zwingli, the Zurich reformer of that time. Over a period of ten years starting 2017 we intend to remember and explain the Reformation process of 500 years back. It is a joint effort of the Reformed Church of Zurich, the town and the canton of Zurich together with our tourism board. We hope to attract people from all over Switzerland and the entire globe to participate in the successive activities and to discuss the importance of the Reformation for us today as well as the significance and values of religious belief in our dissonant world.

I am convinced that we require a sincere and open review on the way we live religious belief globally, under what preconditions we can guarantee freedom of belief and thus freedom within and between our countries. It is actually very worrying that entire regions have fallen back into a period of crusading and conflict.

I therefore very much hope, that apart from research on the past you will also find time to discuss recommendations for today and tomorrow. Without the reformation process our world would be a different place. We therefore need to proceed with the emancipation process, started by the reformers and thus to promote self-consciousness, tolerance and respect as well as liberal and democratic values. I do thank you for your support in this matter.

Now some very few words about the canton of Zurich. It is, you may know the economic engine of Switzerland. One Swiss Franc out of five is earned here, even though the canton only amounts to 4 % of the surface of Switzerland and yet nearly half of it is farmland. Most important of course are banks and insurances, not all unfortunately having catered for a positive reputation. Life-Science and IT, however, have grown to similar importance over the years. Our pride of course is our public transport. It runs nearly 24 hours a day. Almost half a million commuters daily are channelled through Zurich Main Station.

Regarding religious affiliation about one third of the population in Zurich is member of the reformed church, 28 % are catholic, the remainder of over 40 % comprising all others.

Unfortunately both the reformed and catholic churches are losing members annually with the sole difference, that the catholic church can profit from a considerable migrant refill. Therefore the number of reformed church members has decreased from 95 % in 1850 to 32 % presently. With the effect that the reformed church once again has to reform itself regarding organization, infrastructure and finance.

You must, however, know that the reformed and catholic churches as well as the Jewish congregations are officially recognized by the canton. Therefore the Zurich taxpayer supports their social welfare activities and - in addition - the reformed and catholic churches are entitled to officially collect taxes, not only membership fees.

We recently had a referendum on the obligation of company taxation by these two churches. It was amazingly rejected by 72 % of the voting population.

So you can see, the churches still do have some considerable support in the population. Therefore your discussions are not just a waste of time, but of considerable value to us. They are a necessity for a future of tolerance and coexistence.

I do now wish you all the best for your conference.

Martin Graf
Direktor der Justiz und des Innern
25.8.2014