



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
on the occasion of the restitution of St. Peter's and Paul's  
Cathedral to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia  
in Moscow, Russia  
on 25 October 2017**

I am truly happy and grateful to be here in Moscow today. The restitution of St. Peter's and Paul's Cathedral is both the fulfilment of a long-held wish and the fruit of patient efforts by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia to reacquire this beautiful place of worship. I thank the Russian President for his generous gesture this year, during the Reformation Jubilee, and I am all the more grateful because I know how much it means to Protestants in Russia.

In his writings on travelling through this country, Rainer Maria Rilke tells us that, while other countries border on mountains, oceans and rivers, Russia borders on God. This sentence tells us a great deal about how Rilke himself saw Russia. Earlier this year, we had an opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with Rilke and Russia, thanks to a wonderful exhibition at the German Literature Archive in Marbach. Rilke's perspective on Russia tells us much about ourselves and the special relationship that we Russians and Germans have developed during a thousand years of shared history. In a way, it also speaks to the search for and nearness to God, to the space that is embodied by this search and to the value we attach to it.

We get an even clearer picture of what makes us different and unites us when we hear the words of another poet, a Russian, Fyodor Tyutchev, who declared,

"I like the service of the Lutherans.

Their worship is severe, simple yet imposing.

I understand the lofty lessons

in these bare walls, in this empty temple."

During their chequered history, the relationship between Orthodox and Lutheran Christians, and between Russians and

Germans, has been both close and distant. I dare say that, often, we didn't know ourselves what most strongly characterised this relationship – nearness or distance.

The Memorial archives, which we were able to visit this morning, contain records of the long suffering that was endured by both Orthodox and Lutheran believers. They all were Christians who actively professed their faith. We owe it to the victims of those years to recognise this fact.

Maybe this year's celebration of the achievements of the Reformation, of the recognition of each individual's dignity before God and of the promise of freedom, can be an opportunity for us to encounter each other anew. I do hope so. Just as I hope that this place of worship may remain a meeting place, a place where Orthodox and Lutheran Christians, Russians and Germans, can connect with one another. Where, despite their differences, they can establish common ground.