

German archbishop's comment on families offends Muslims

A German Catholic leader was forced to apologise Wednesday over comments that sparked indignation among the country's Muslim community and proponents of a multicultural society.

Cologne Archbishop Joachim Meisner, 80, had praised the high birth rate of many Catholics, telling followers: "I always say, one of your families to me makes up for three Muslim families".

Bekir Alboga of the Turkish-Islamic Union Ditib said the comments promote "fear and misunderstanding", telling broadcaster Deutsche Welle that "we need a bridge-builder, not a polariser."

Many politicians also strongly rejected the comments, among them Sylvia Loehrmann, state education minister of North Rhine-Westphalia where Cologne is located.

"Rating the relative value of families and therefore children by origin or religious affiliation not only violates our constitution, it is also anything but Christian," she said.

The archbishop - who has in the past likened abortion to Nazi crimes - later said he regretted having caused "irritation" and that "it was not my intention to offend people of other faiths".

"My choice of words in this case was perhaps unfortunate," said Meisner, who is expected to retire next month.

"I have repeatedly said that Muslim families are setting a good example in our ageing society."

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