

Rehabilitation of the victims of the witchcraft trials

We must recognize injustice in the past otherwise we will not even recognize injustice when we encounter it today.

Citizens demand exoneration

The victims of the persecution of witches in Europe (ca. 1500 - 1782) were innocent. A group of citizens demand that 25000 women, men and children executed as alleged witches in Germany should be given back their dignity as human beings and as Christians. For modern science it is evident that the convicted people could not have committed the crimes they were accused of:

- flying on a broom for bedevilment (participation in Witches' Sabbath, Hexensabbat)
- harm by magic to weather, animals or humans (evil magic, Schadenzauber)
- sexual intercourse with Satan (fornicating with the devil, Hexenbuhlschaft)

60000 people in Europe were executed because of alleged witch-craft. The verdicts of the courts never have been annihilated or revised nor the victims rehabilitated. It is long overdue to exonerate them - at least on moral grounds. It seems nearly impossible to discuss the matter on judicial grounds, as for example many historical documents have been lost.

City Councils exonerate victims of the witchcraft trials

The city councils of the following German towns / cities have expressed their deep regret and resolved upon exoneration of the victims of the witchcraft trials of their town.

1993 Winterberg/ NRW, municipality under participation of catholic and protestant church
2002 Kammerstein, 2003 Kammerstein - Barthelmesaurach/ Bayern
2007 Eschwege/ Hessen, municipality under participation of catholic and protestant church
2008 Fulda/ Hessen, mayor of municipality under participation of catholic and protestant church and inauguration of a memorial for the victims of the persecution of "witches"
2010 Hofheim a.T./ Hessen
2011 Rüthen/ NRW
2011 Hilchenbach/ NRW
2011 Hallenberg/ NRW
2011 Sundern/ NRW
2011 Menden/ NRW
2011 Werl/ NRW
2011 Suhl/ Thüringen
2012 Bad Homburg/ Hessen
2012 Detmold/ NRW
2012 Lemgo/ NRW (und 1992)
2012 Rheinbach/ NRW
2012 Köln/ NRW
2012 Meiningen/ Thüringen
2012 Osnabrück/ Niedersachsen
2012 Büdingen/ Hessen
2013 Soest/ NRW
2013 Freudenberg/ NRW
2013 Rehburg-Loccum Niedersachsen

2013 Lutherstadt Wittenberg/ Sachsen-Anhalt
2013 Datteln/ NRW
2014 Horn-Bad Meinberg/ NRW
2014 Trier/ Rheinland-Pfalz, commemoration with the Mayor Klaus Jensen
2014 Witten/ NRW
2014 Dortmund/ NRW
2014 Idstein/ Hessen (and 1996)
2014 Schleswig/ Schleswig-Holstein, commemoration under participation of catholic and protestant church and inauguration of a memorial

In other towns citizens have asked the city council for a resolution.

Rehabilitation in other countries:

17.10.1711 amnesty for most of the sentenced “witches” of Salem/ USA.
1957 Ann Pudeator rehabilitated.
2001 the last 5 victims of the witchcraft trials of Salem/ USA were exonerated.
2004 the Scottish Town Prestonpans exonerated 81 executed "witches". Descendants of the executed were present.
2008 Switzerland: Glarner Landrat rehabilitated Anna Göldi, the last victim in Europe.
2009 Switzerland: Freiburger Kantonsparlament rehabilitated Catherine Repond («Catillon»)
2012 Nieuwpoort/ Belgien

In Norway neither the government nor the Supreme Court have ever rehabilitated the victims of the witch hunts. But the victims of the Norwegian witch-hunts from 1578 to 1695 have received a national memorial monument from a private sponsoring group in Nordnes in Bergen.

2008 Scotland: unsuccessful petition to pardon Scotland's 4,000 'witches'.

Why deal with rehabilitation of victims of historic witch craft trials?

There are many parallels of persecution of witches to nowadays:

- search for scapegoats (otherization) has been going on all over history of mankind it happens in society and in everyday life today as well
- there is demonization, talking bad about people
- violence, mobbing
- torture in many countries
- persecution of witches takes place in today´s world (Saudi Arabia, India, Africa etc.)

Jesus was tortured and executed

A re-evaluation of the history books is overdue. Many of the accused in the witchcraft trials denied their guilt in spite of heavy torture but confessed their faith in God until death. Their martyrdom should finally be acknowledged by the public and by the churches. Those sentenced people should no longer be regarded as "sinners" but as "saints".

Especially the churches should raise their voice in the issue of innocently executed people, as Jesus himself was tortured and executed even though he was innocent.

Places of remembrance

Places of remembrance should give witness to the fate of the victims of the persecution of witches. A prominent example is the fate of Mayor Johannes Junius in the diocese of Bamberg (see below).

In Germany there is a memorial for the victims of the witch craft trials in some towns.

List of memorial stones in Germany:

http://www.anton-praetorius.de/downloads/hexendenkmaeler_bayern.pdf Bavaria

http://www.anton-praetorius.de/downloads/hexendenkmaeler_brandenburg.pdf Brandenburg

http://www.anton-praetorius.de/downloads/hexendenkmaeler_bw.pdf Baden Württemberg

http://www.anton-praetorius.de/downloads/hexendenkmaeler_sachsen_a.pdf Saxony

http://www.anton-praetorius.de/opfer/orte_2.htm (North Rhine Westfalia, Hesse)

Mayor Johannes Junius, persecuted in the diocese of Bamberg

Johannes Junius is a prominent example for the demand for rehabilitation of victims of the witch hunt in the diocese of Bamberg. In 1628 he was accused as sorcerer and arrested in the „Drudenhaus“ (special house for torture of the witches) in Bamberg. His wife had been executed already. During the whole trial Junius refused the charge to be a magician. He declared:

- he never took part at the witches´ sabbath
- he never betrayed God

Shortly before his execution he wrote a letter to his daughter from jail giving a description of the sufferings from the point of view of a victim. He tells his daughter how he had been tortured by thumbscrews: "blood emerged under my fingernails and everywhere so I could not use my hands for four weeks – as you can see by my handwriting." About strappado he wrote: „I thought this is the end of heaven and earth. 8 times I was pulled up. Then they let me fall down. The pain was terrible.“

He could hardly hold a pen, but accomplished to write a farewell letter to his daughter: „Good night my beloved daughter. I am innocent. I have been tortured and I must die. You can believe me: I am innocent. In this prison people are tortured until they confess things that never happened. When we were alone in the cell the hangman urged me to confess the truth or to invent something in order to escape further torture. Now I must confess that I am a sorcerer. I must negate God - I have never done that my whole life.“

The letter ends with a simple adieu: „It took me several days to write this down. Both my hands are crippled. I am in a miserable situation. Good night, your father Johannes Junius will never see you again.“

The court accepted his confession and he was sentenced to death. On August 6th 1628 he was burned at the stake.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Junius

Overdue

It is overdue for governments, local authorities and the churches to declare that the people sentenced because of witchcraft died innocently and rehabilitate the victims.