

Rehabilitation of the victims of the witchcraft trials

We must recognize injustice in the past
otherwise we will not even recognize injustice
if 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 It seems nearly impossible to discuss the matter on judicial grounds, as for example many historical documents have been lost.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 there deep regret and resolved upon exoneration of the victims of the witchcraft trials of their town.

1996 Idstein/ Hessen (Hesse)
2007 Eschwege/ Hessen
2010 Hofheim a.T./ Hessen
2011 R then/ NRW (North Rhine-Westphalia)
2011 Hilchenbach/ NRW
2011 Hallenberg/ NRW
2011 D sseldorf/ NRW
2011 Menden/ NRW

In other towns citizens have asked the city council for a resolution: Cologne, Sundern, Freudenberg, Wernigerode, Rheinbach, Bad Belzig, Niemigk, Bad Homburg, Rheda-Wiedenbr ck.

Aachen: no regret burning Sinti girl alive

Aachen city council in Germany refused words of regret in November 2011. The 13 year old Sinti girl was tried and killed in 1649 in the City's last witch craft trial. She was an orphan - no one spoke up for her when she asked for mercy not to be burned alive - an easy way to dispose of unwanted immigrants.

It is disappointing that politicians declined regret for child having been burned alive. Apart from the fact that words of regret would not have cost anything it would have given Aachen even more credibility, referring to the fact that the city awards the prestigious Charlemagne Prize each year for distinguished efforts toward European unification. How can a city apply as European capital of culture and not find words of regret for a child that has been burned alive in the past?

Other countries:

17.10.1711 amnesty for most of the sentenced 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.

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'.

2008 Great Britain: Criticism was uttered in regard to the motives behind some efforts to rehabilitate people executed as British witches.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/howaboutthat/3328622/Halloween-plea-to-pardon-British-witches-presented-to-Jack-Straw.html>

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.