

Religious freedom is a fundamental right guaranteed in the constitutions of most modern democratic nations. Germany is among these nations, but conflicts persist, especially between German state churches and religious minorities. Minority religions in Germany today routinely must defend themselves against institutionalized mistrust, bias, and occasionally, outright persecution not only by officials of favored religions, but also by government officials themselves. Indeed, despite constitutional guarantees, the right to religious freedom for all German citizens and religious groups is not being realized.

In 1996, a special body, The Enquete Commission, was appointed by the German Parliament to investigate so-called "sects and psychogroups." Unfortunately, the religious communities who were investigated were given no chance to react to allegations made against them. The commission's findings, based on almost no credible evidence, referred to certain religious minorities as dangerous and suspect and recommended that surveillance of these groups be continued. The commission's findings, therefore, did little to strengthen the free exercise of religion in Germany but rather exacerbated a climate of hysteria about certain religious groups whose members have been described by respected experts as some of Germany's best citizens.

This volume gathers expert opinions, petitions, appeals and statements pertaining to the status of religious minorities in Germany today. The findings support the notion that indeed, there is an unnecessary "New Inquisition" taking place in Germany today. Special attention is paid to comparing the treatment of religious minorities in other countries, especially the United States where religious pluralism, and the accompanying difficulties of granting religious freedom to all religious groups, is perhaps more a reality than in any other nations of the world.

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