

Jehovah's Witnesses' request for recognition as a corporation under public law in Germany: background, current status, and empirical aspects.

Journal of Church and State - January 1, 2001

Gerhard Besier

Word count: 4745.

[citation details](#)

BACKGROUND: THE SITUATION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN GERMANY, 1919-1989

Early in 1924, the German Reich's Minister of the Interior said to his Prussian colleague: "Surveillance of the activity of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society also appears to me to be indicated if this can be done inconspicuously. Perhaps the presidents of the government might thereby possibly make use of the Protestant consistories which mostly are well-informed about such associations and with the involvement of church interests would surely readily provide information." The latter replied: "I cannot speak in favor of a ban of the sect on the grounds of a state of emergency. Nor would I recommend at this time initiating new German Reich legal regulations in order to hinder its activities. Even if the activities of the sect are undesirable to the state, combating it for as long as possible should rather be left to the churches, against whom its attacks are primarily directed."⁽¹⁾

In other words, the Ministers of the Interior of the Weimar Republic would have liked to have banned Jehovah's Witnesses, but saw no legal way of doing so. Therefore, they simply put them under observation and relied on the mainstream churches to combat the Jehovah's Witnesses, anticipating that they would accept the assignment. However, the "Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten zur Bekämpfung politischer Ausschreitungen" (Decree of the President of the Reich for the Combating of Political Disturbances) of 28 March 1931, opened up to the state the possibility of acting directly against Jehovah's Witnesses. This decree could also be applied when "a religious association under public law, its institutions, customs or items of religious worship are insulted or maliciously brought into contempt."⁽²⁾

At the beginning of the "Third Reich," German-Christian church authorities encouraged their priests and pastors to spy for the Gestapo "in order to 'put a stop to the Witnesses' activities."⁽³⁾ The "Apologetische Centrale" (Apologetic Center), a department of the Central Ausschuss der Inneren Mission (Central Committee of the Inner Mission), provided background material about the "sects" for the Ministry of the Interior and the Propaganda Ministry of the Reich as well as for the Gestapo.⁽⁴⁾ During mutual discussions at the Berlin Gestapo Office (Secret State Police) and the Ministry of Culture at the end of May or in early June 1933, members of the Apologetic Center and of the Prussian High Protestant Church Council declared that they welcomed a ban on Jehovah's Witnesses.⁽⁵⁾

It was only for a short period after the breakdown of the Nazi dictatorship that there was hope for Jehovah's Witnesses in Eastern Germany. From 1950 on, they were banned and persecuted anew in the GDR.⁽⁶⁾ This small religious association continued a course of suffering which they had already been made to follow under the first dictatorship.⁽⁷⁾

As shown, however, Jehovah's Witnesses were not only persecuted under both dictatorships, but they had already endured many harassments during the Weimar Republic. The state's efforts to marginalize this minor religious association was aided by the major churches.

From the outline of these processes, one can indeed conclude that the Western constitutional system offers a certain protection for religious minorities. However, certain social conventions exist that make it possible to discriminate against minorities and make their life difficult.

Whenever majorities of a different denomination marginalize minorities and apply carefully thought out strategies of defamation, the state must indeed intervene so as to protect the legally guaranteed freedom of a minority. A society with a democratic constitution can indirectly share in the suppression of minorities if the state merely grants majorities the possibility of doing as they like and thus neglects its possibilities of educating the public through its instruments (such as the State Centers for Political Education in the Federal Republic).(8)

When majorities marginalize and defame minorities they are always impelled by the best of intentions. Minorities--or at least their leaders--are portrayed as dangerous in their thoughts, actions, and feelings; their members are portrayed as morally,,,politically, or religiously led astray and capable of interfering with the proper beliefs of members of the majority churches.

THE SITUATION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN GERMANY AND EUROPE SINCE 1990

Since 1990, throughout Europe Jehovah's Witnesses have been depicted as a threat to society. Parliamentary commissions in Germany (1996-1998)(9) and France(10) have tried to prove this very fact. A ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia was attempted. The topic of "sects" has meanwhile taken hold of the whole continent. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe dealt with religious associations during its session of 22 June 1999, and, like the national parliaments, called for a "sect" observatorium as the most important prerequisite for combating "potentially dangerous tendencies."

Consequently, the Parliamentary Assembly faces the same problem as the German Federal Parliament and the French National Assembly: It wants to protect the European citizen from something that in no way has yet been firmly proven to be a "danger." On the contrary, the experts commissioned by the Enquete Commission on "So-Called Sects and Psychogroups" of the German Federal Parliament unanimously reached the conclusion that no greater danger emanates from suspect religious groups than from other religious or non-religious organizations. Attempts at "mental manipulation" are evidenced almost anywhere in modern society. They are encountered in consumer advertising as well as in the field of political parties or religions.

Thus, Strasbourg repeated the scenarios of Paris and Bonn. As in the national parliaments, concerns about abuse, neglect, indoctrination, and brainwashing as well as illegal enrichment emerged but there was little evidence presented to substantiate the proposition that the concerns warranted action. The reservations of sociologists respecting often jelly-like terminology were also disregarded. Not once was it clarified what was to be understood by the term "sect." The Rapporteur, Adrian Nastase (Romanian Socialist Party), advanced the argument that membership of suspect religious groups had considerably increased over the past few years. Such religious organizations had spread rapidly, particularly since the political changes in Middle and Eastern Europe.

Once Nastase had presented his report about the "illegal activities of sects," numerous representatives protested in the name of the fundamental right of freedom of opinion and religion (Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights) the classification of unnamed groups as "sects." Others were of the opinion that the text of the report did not go far enough. Despite considerable doubt, a "compromise recommendation" was finally accepted unanimously which grants priority to the prevention of "dangerous sects," but foregoes comprehensive legislation. The controversial discussions reflect considerable inconsistencies in the text. Among other things, the member states of the European Union are recommended to set up "independent national or regional information centres on sects"; but they are also recommended to support non-governmental organizations. Yet, the latter are usually not "independent" because they are either run by so-called "sect-dropouts" or by commissioners for sect issues of the established mainline churches. On the other hand, steps are supposed to be taken to prevent any discrimination and marginalization of the suspect religious groups.

The core of the critical attitude of the European states towards sects lies in specific politico-cultural reasons. They want to set limits to the broad field of ideologies. The more mainline churches, with predictable and socially acceptable worldviews, lose members, and as religious associations continue to grow, the greater the unpredictability and obscurity of the mental worldview of growing

parts of the population will become. However, such thinking contradicts the principle of religious freedom.(11)

In Germany, several commissioners for sect issues from the two major churches were active as "experts" on the investigating committee, thus enabling them to continue their apologetic work with parliamentary support. Since 1990, Jehovah's Witnesses are among the religious minorities especially standing in the crossfire of criticism. This is not only the reason they are fighting for equal legal rights with the two major religious associations but also why, as explained in the 14 March 1990 letter of the Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic, they fought for equality with the more than thirty other churches and religious associations that held legal status in the former GDR.(12) Presently, about thirty religious associations in Berlin possess the rights of a corporation under public law. To the indignation of the mainline churches, the Administrative Court and the Higher Administration Court of the Federal State of Berlin had considered the application of the Jehovah's Witnesses for recognition as a corporation under public law as legitimate, since they have over 192,000 members in Germany. The Federal State of Berlin objected to the request of the association on the grounds that the sect repudiated elementary civil rights.(13)

In mid-June 1997, the Federal Administration Court of Berlin reversed the judgment of the two lower courts. The Seventh Senate based its decision on the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses refused to participate in general elections. The legal status to which the religious associations aspired is a public privilege and is offered with the intention of promoting these associations and permanently cooperating with them. However, such cooperation presupposes a minimum of mutual respect. Therefore, the state can expect the religious association at least to refrain from calling into question the very foundation of its political existence. On 13 August 1997, Jehovah's Witnesses lodged a constitutional complaint with the Federal Constitutional Court.(14) The decision of the Supreme Court of 19 December 2000 says that the state cannot ask religious minorities to demonstrate additional "faith towards the law." An essential part of the "faith towards the law" is that the rights of third parties--the welfare--is respected. The case was resubmitted to the Higher Administration Court of the Federal State of Berlin. This court will have to examine whether the Jehovah's Witnesses educational principles actually interfere with their children's welfare, as is being alleged by "sect experts" of the mainline churches.

Whether the religious association of Jehovah's Witnesses presents a "danger" for the state and society and, on account of its attitude, does not fulfill the preconditions necessary for gaining corporate status is the subject of the next section.

RESULTS FROM A SURVEY OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

In 1994, Jehovah's Witnesses distributed a questionnaire to their members in order to collect data for a social study. We received the data and were asked to statistically analyze and interpret it.

Neither the method used to collect information, a 15-page questionnaire, nor the results can be presented in detail in this essay. In the following analysis, the focus will be on data that is of special interest in light of the current discussion in Germany.

We will compare the data obtained through this survey with the corresponding data for the total German population collected by the Statistisches Bundesamt (Federal Office for Statistics) of the Federal Republic of Germany. In addition, we will use the results from surveys conducted by the Institut für Demoskopie (Institute of Public Opinion) in Allensbach, the German "Gallup Institute." The findings on Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany will be compared with the findings of a survey conducted in North American areas in 1997, which was published by Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone in the Journal of Contemporary Religion.(15)

As is the case in the USA,(16) women are strongly over-represented among the members of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Federal Republic of Germany--61 percent of membership. In the USA they make up approximately 70 percent.

The age structure of Jehovah's Witnesses corresponds in outline to the all-German population. The 15-19-year-olds, the 25-29-year-olds, the 35-44 year-olds, and the 65-74-year-olds are

over-represented in comparison to the population, whereas the age groups 20-24, 50-59, and 80-84 are rather underrepresented. In the USA, however, the members are more likely to be under 30 and less likely to be over 65 years old(17) (Tables 1 and 2).

[TABULAR DATA 1-2 NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII]

According to the findings by Stark and Iannaccone,(18) the divorce rate among Jehovah's Witnesses is as high as the rate of the total population of the USA. In contrast to this, there is a significant difference in the Federal Republic of Germany: while one-third of the population (29.9 percent) are divorced, the rate among Jehovah's Witnesses is considerably lower. Only 4.9 percent of them have been divorced. Unfortunately, the results of the survey do not indicate whether the individuals got divorced before or after they became Jehovah's Witnesses.

The differences with regard to the level of education correspond with the USA.(19)

If we compare the qualifications of Jehovah's Witnesses when graduating from school with that of the general German population (Statistisches Bundesamt, micro census of 1995(20)), it becomes obvious that among the total population--those born in 1959 or later, and with a delay of seven years also among Jehovah's Witnesses--graduation from intermediate secondary school (after grade 10) is the dominant qualification. Among the older generations, short-course secondary school qualification (graduation after grade 9) is most common. In all, we find 8.3 percent more short-course secondary school qualifications and 2 percent more intermediate school qualifications, but there are 10 percent less high school graduates among Jehovah's Witnesses than in the total population. The proportion of vocational trainer's qualifications and university degrees corresponds to the aforementioned. Whereas 13.8 percent of the general population have a university degree, only 4.8 percent of the Witnesses went to a university. Instead, 89.4 percent of Jehovah's Witnesses did an apprenticeship or undertook vocational training; this ratio lies at only 77.5 percent among the total population.

It is remarkable that the unemployment rate among Jehovah's Witnesses is only 3.4 percent while the average in Germany lies at 10.6 percent. One of the reasons for this may be the higher proportion of self-employed persons among the Witnesses (Table 6). Another reason is their willingness to accept any kind of work, regardless of their vocational qualification, in order to provide for their families.

TABLE 6: GAINFULLY EMPLOYED PERSONS ACCORDING TO THEIR VOCATIONAL POSITION

	Jehovah's Witnesses		Gainfully employed Persons in Germany(*)	
	frequency	percent	frequency	percent
Self-employed persons (assisting family members)	5520	10.7%	3129	8.9%
Public officers	1787	3.5%	458	1.3%
Employees	21742	42.2%	2545	7.3%
Workers	22421	43.6%	15515	44.4%
Total	51470	100%	13325	38.1%
			34972	(per thousand)

(*) Source: Grund- und Strukturdaten 1994, Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft, Forschung und Technologie)

Another interesting aspect is that despite their lower income (Table 7) compared with the average income in Germany, Jehovah's Witnesses tend to be content with their own situation: they view themselves as persons with an average standard of living who have enough to make a living. One important reason for this self-perception may be the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses do not gain their self-esteem from their work nor from the amount of money they earn; rather, their missionary commitment to their religious community is the most important thing. In this regard, we also find coincidences with the findings by Stark and Iannaccone:(21) as in the USA, Jehovah's Witnesses usually invest less time in secular work, consequently earn less, and spend a considerable amount of time in their missionary preaching activities. In addition, one income per family is more common and

they put much emphasis on intact family relations (Table 8).

TABLE 7: MONTHLY AVAILABLE INCOME PER MEMBER IN THE HOUSEHOLD

	Jehovah's Witnesses	German Population (general)
Households		
Private (total)	\$ 532-\$ 798 DM 1000-DM 1500	\$ 1064-\$ 1152 DM 2000-DM 2166
Self-employed	931 DM 1750	\$ 2193-\$ 2376 DM 4123-DM 4466
Public officials	1064 DM 2000	\$1252-\$ 1356 DM 2353-DM 2550
Employees	957 DM 1800	\$ 1149-\$1245 DM 2161-DM 2341
Workers	691 DM 1300	\$ 798-\$ 864 DM 1500-DM 1625
Pensioners	\$ 532-\$ 798 DM 1000-DM 1500	\$ 1027-\$1112 DM 1930-DM 2091
Unemployed persons	426 DM 800	\$ 638-\$ 691 DM 1200-DM 1300
Special full-time servants	\$ 266- \$ 399 DM 500-DM 750	

15.1 percent of the members stated that they receive social services for themselves and their family.

(1 \$ = 1.88 DM)

TABLE 8: AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES ACCORDING TO THE ROLE WITHIN THE RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION

Role within the religious association	Amount of time spent for religious activities	Number of Active and Inactive Persons	
	Modal in hours/week	Total	Inactive (%)
Publishers	15 (8.6)	121953	9.0%
Elder/Ministerial Servants	20 (15)	25154	2.3%
Regular Pioneers	40 (35)	6093	2.7%
Special Pioneers	60 (40)	603	2.8%
Missionaries	50 (60)	18	11.0%
Members of Bethel family	70 (65)	1033	2.6%
Traveling work	60 (50)	250	2.8%

More than 90 percent of the Witnesses did not experience any negative effects due to being a member of their religious association. They did not experience any negative effects, disadvantages, or discriminations at work nor in their general relations with other people. They do not feel restricted or forced into an "outsider position" in their private life ("privacy," "personal freedoms," "forms of recreation," "general quality of life"). According to Jehovah's Witnesses, their religious beliefs have a positive impact on their social relations toward believers as well as with non-believers. On average, two-thirds of the persons questioned stated that they experienced an "increased satisfaction due to possessing a more meaningful life," they received "loving care and attention provided by fellow believers," and found "comfort and strength by gaining a new hope." Over 90 percent stated that they have no "fear of (a possible) world's end" (Table 9).

[TABULAR DATA 9 NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII]

Members of the religious association (53.6 percent) mentioned that they had no personal problems at the time when they joined the religious association of Jehovah's Witnesses. But 73.3 percent of all members (total of 107,637) answered that becoming acquainted with the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses had "assisted them in overcoming problems." Some of these members (23.7 percent) stated that they formerly had suffered from mental or spiritual problems (occultism, spiritualism, superstitious compulsions, severe depression, and social isolation), 6.4 percent suffered from addiction (medical abuse, alcoholic problems, consumption of hashish or hard drugs, compulsive

gambling), 22.3 percent from partnership problems (family breakdown, quarrelsomeness, jealousy), 20.5 percent had consumed tobacco, 4 percent had formerly been involved in acts of violence or other criminal acts, and 2.9 percent of the members were heavily in debt.

Considering the social function of religion in a society, such findings suggest a generally positive judgment. The negative points brought up in the Federal Republic of Germany, however, seem to be mainly based on prejudice. The Witnesses state in the anonymous questionnaires that they in no way view themselves as dominated by the elders. On the contrary! The situation is very similar to that in the USA.(22) There is found to be a high degree of unity and trust. The majority of the persons questioned consider the authoritative behavior of the governing bodies respecting the teachings to be proper.

Another point of criticism in the Federal Republic of Germany is directed at the practice of disfellowshipping--the expulsion of Witnesses from the religious association if they deviate from the standards of their religious association and do not show any repentance over their inappropriate behavior. The results point to the fact that separation from the community is usually caused by the affected person himself. In this connection, human relationships generally play a bigger role than religious doubts. Besides this, disassociating oneself from the religious association is least viewed as a final separation. While 5,817 persons were disfellowshipped during the past five years, 2,078 persons (35.7 percent) returned to the religious association after showing their repentance. In contrast to the widespread opinion that disfellowshipping is a strict separation of the Witnesses from the disfellowshipped person, some contacts are maintained between active and former Jehovah's Witnesses. For example, the bodies of elders and the judicial committees are urged to treat persons who did wrong in a loving way. Over 90 percent of the Witnesses stated that they view disfellowshipped persons with the hope that they will return.

The aspect of association plays an essential role in the subculture of Jehovah's Witnesses. More than 72 percent of the members stated that they had joined the religious association because they liked Jehovah's Witnesses for who they are "as people" and had "found good friends" among them. Over 95 percent of the members mentioned religious reasons as their main motive for being one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The main motives for carrying out their religious activity is based on their religious convictions also. The majority of the members are positively motivated toward their activities, as the results show. Avoiding punishment in the sense of avoiding inconveniences or worries about the withdrawal of conveniences (fear of the world's end, elders' disapproval, assistance by fellow believers) seems to be no essential motive among the members.

Probably the most striking result is their keen interest in politics and social life, although Jehovah's Witnesses do not participate in political elections for religious reasons. However, 76.4 percent of the men and 63.8 percent of the women stated that they are interested in political, cultural, and social issues. Of the German population, only 58.5 percent of the men and 35.2 percent of the women on an average mentioned that they were interested in politics.

CONCLUDING POINT

In our opinion, marginalizing and suspecting small religious associations such as Jehovah's Witnesses is a classical example of how prejudices are formed.(23) In addition to a follow-up study that should validate the results, a study on the prejudices against Jehovah's Witnesses in the Federal Republic of Germany may be undertaken in the near future.

[TABULAR DATA 3-4 NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII]

TABLE 5: VOCATIONAL TRAINER'S OR UNIVERSITY DEGREE

Jehovah's Witnesses		Total Population (per thousand)(*)	
frequency	percent	frequency	percent

Teaching/Training Profession	78536	89.4%	35195	77.5%
College diploma (incl. master's and technical engineering training)	5093	5.8%	3951	8.7%
University/College degree	4232	4.8%	6258	13.8%

(* Source: Microcensus of April 1995, Statistisches Bundesamt, Population and Education)

(1.) According to Matthias Pohlmann, *Kampf der Geister. Die Publizistik der "Apologetischen Centrale" (1921-1937)* (Stuttgart: 1998), 213, fn. 122.

(2.) See Defief Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium. Die Zeugen Jehovas im "Dritten Reich," Studien zur Zeitgeschichte* (Munich: 1999), 42: 82f.

(3.) Detlef Garbe, "Die Verfolgung der ZJ," in *Widerstand aus christlicher Überzeugung-Jehovas Zeugen im Nationalsozialismus* (Essen: 1998), 16-28; see esp. 17.

(4.) Harald Iber, "Die Apologetische Centrale und der Centralausschu [Beta] für die Innere Mission. Zur Geschichte der Apologetischen Centrale bis 1934," in Theodor Strohm and Jorg Thierfelder, eds., *Diakonie im "Dritten Reich." Neuere Ergebnisse zeitgeschichtlicher Forschung* (Heidelberg: 1990), 108-24, 122f., fn. 89.

(5.) Pohlmann, *Kampf der Geister*, 214f.

(6.) Gerald Hacke, *Zeugen Jehovas in der DDR. Verfolgung und Verhalten einer religiösen Minderheit* (Dresden: 2000); Hans-Hermann Dirksen, *Strafverfolgung der Zeugen Jehovas in der DDR*, LLD thesis, Greifswald: 1999. Forthcoming in the series *Zeitgeschichtliche Forschungen* (Berlin: Publishing House Duncker & Humblot, 2001).

(7.) See Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium*; Hans Hesse, ed., "Am mutigsten waren immer wieder die Zeugen Jehovas." *Verfolgung und Widerstand der Zeugen Jehovas im Nationalsozialismus* (Bremen: 1998).

(8.) Under the influence of the commissioners for ideological issues of both mainstream churches, it can even be said that the state sometimes places its capacity in the service of the apologetic work of the people's churches. See Gerhard Besier and Erwin K. Scheuch, eds., *Die neuen Inquisitoren. Religionsfreiheit und Glaubensneid*, 2 vols. (Osnabrück: 1999).

(9.) Deutseher Bundestag, ed., *Final Report of the Enquete Commission on "So-called Sects and Psychogroups," in New Religious and Ideological Communities and Psychogroups in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Bonn: 1998); Deutscher Bundestag, Enquete-Kommission, ed., "Sogenannte Sekten und Psychogruppen," *Neue religiöse und ideologische Gemeinschaften und Psychogruppen. Forschungsprojekte und Gutachten der Enquete-Kommission "Sogenannte Sekten und Psychogruppen"* (Hamm: 1998).

(10.) Massimo Introvigne, *Schlu [Beta] mit den Sekten! Die Kontroverse über "Sekten" und neue religiöse Bewegungen in Europa*, ed. Hubert Seiwert (Marburg: 1998). The original French version, edited by Massimo Introvigne and J. Gordon Melton, appeared in 1996 in *Pour En Finir Avec Les Sectes. Le debat sur le rapport de la commission parlementaire* (Paris and Torino: Centre d'etudes sur les nouvelles religions).

(11.) Massimo Introvigne, "Freedom of Religion in Europe and the Question of New Religious Movements", in *Religion--Staat--Gesellschaft. Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews* 1 (2000), 5-21.

(12.) *Waehtturm-Gesellschaft*, ed., *Anerkennungsverfahren der Religionsgemeinschaft der Zeugen Jehovas in Deutschland 1990-1997* (Selters: 1997).

(13.) Die WELT, 16 May 1997, 2.

(14.) See Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 188, 15 August 1997, 4.

(15.) Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12 (1997): 133-57; Laurence R. Iannaccone, Rodney Stark, and Roger Finke, "Rationality And The 'Religious Mind,'" in *Economic Inquiry* 36 (July 1998): 373-89. See also the studies among Japanese, Italo-Brussels, and other congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses: Bryan R. Wilson, "Aspects of Kinship and the Rise of Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan," *Social Compass* 24 (1977): 97-120; Bryan R. Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism. Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: 1990); Johan Lemon, "The Italo-Brussels Jehovah's Witnesses Revisited: From First-generation Religious Fundamentalism to Ethno-religious Community Formation," *Social Compass* 45 (1998): 219-26.

(16.) Stark and Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly," 149.

(17.) Ibid.

(18.) Ibid., 150.

(19.) Ibid., 148.

(20.) The following general data is taken from Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden, ed., *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1995 für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und für das Ausland* (Stuttgart: 1995). 15.1 percent of the members stated that they receive social services for themselves and their family. (1\$ = 1.88DM)

(21.) Ibid., 149.

(22.) Ibid.

(23.) In view of the methodological responses, scientific problems, and ethical as well as political presuppositions, see Eileen Barker, "The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must Be Joking!," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (September 1995): 287-310; James T. Richardson, "Brainwashing Claims and Minority Religions Outside the United States: Cultural Diffusion of a Questionable Concept in the Legal Arena," *Brigham Young University Law Review* (1996): 873-904; Massimo Introvigne, "The Question of Sects and Cults in European Perspective," in *Religion -- Staat -- Gesellschaft, Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews* 1 (2000); and Richard Singelenberg, "Stigmas and Stereotypes: Child Custody Decisions And Jehovah's Witnesses Parenthood," in *Religion -- Staat -- Gesellschaft, Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews* 1 (2000).

GERHARD BESIER (B.A.D.Th., University of Tuebingen, D.Phil., Berlin) is professor of theology (church history) at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He is author of *Kirche, Politik, End Gesellschaft im 19. im 20. Jahrhundert*, is co-editor with Eckhard Idessing, *D/e Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirche der Union, Band 3: Trennung von Staat und Kirche, Krise End Erneuerung kirchlicher Gemeinschaft* (1918-1992) and is editor of *The Churches, South Africa and the Political Context*. His articles have appeared in *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte, Journal of Ecclesiastical History, Kerygma und Dogma*, and *Jahrbuch des Historischen Kollegs Muenchen*, among others. Special interests include church-state relations, church activities in the former GDR, new religions and so-called sects and cults, and international ecumenical activities. RENATE-MARIA BESIER (B.A., University of Tuebingen) is a self-employed psychologist. This article is based on a large-scale survey done for the first time among Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany.

Citation Details

Title: Jehovah's Witnesses' request for recognition as a corporation under public law in Germany: background, current status, and empirical aspects.

Author: Gerhard Besier

Publication: *Journal of Church and State* (Refereed)

Date: January 1, 2001

Publisher: J.M. Dawson Studies in Church and State

Volume: 43 **Issue:** 1 **Page:** 35