

**PROFESSOR GERHARD BESIER
DRESDEN TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

It gives me considerable pleasure to speak here today on the occasion of the opening of a new and very impressive office for the Church of Scientology International.

There is a battle waging for freedom of belief and worship. It is occurring in Germany and across Europe, where the gap between the legally-guaranteed freedom of belief and the day-to-day realities of religious discrimination often collide.

The issue comes down to this: Is Germany – indeed all of Europe – to be a society where the rights of all faiths are truly respected?

The constitutions of individual nations say yes. European law says yes. They all include, as cornerstones, the right to freedom of belief. Yet in practice, members of religious minorities experience discrimination and harassment. Germany is not the only place this happens. It is occurring in enlightened countries all over Europe.

And lest members of any traditional faiths present today think I am excluding you, I am not. In European countries where your faiths are in the minority, you, too, could experience similar treatment. The message of the need for tolerance and pluralism applies to you, too.

Making circumstances worse is the lack of a universally accepted definition of religion, broad enough to encompass all faiths.

Today, a growing community of scholars such as from Oxford and Paris II Universities recognize that the evidence is clear: new religious movements must be accepted as an important part of our spiritual landscape – and that the narrow definitions of yesteryear must give way to the religious pluralism shaping the Europe of tomorrow.

Therefore I take real pleasure in being able to study this definitional problem from the perspective of the Scientology religion, along with several of my colleagues.

Of all the new religious movements in Germany, Scientology is by far the most visible and has stood tall against many attacks. The battle is not yet over. But so far, the Church of Scientology has won some notable and precedent-setting legal victories in the courts.

Time and again the courts have declared that Scientology is a religious community protected by the German Constitution. The Federal Supreme Labor Court has ruled that the staff members of Scientology churches are motivated by an idealistic commitment and not monetary gain. And this year the courts compelled the German Federal Finance Ministry to recognize that the mother church, Church of Scientology International, is a charitable tax-exempt religious organization. The tide of the battle for religious freedom in Germany is turning.

The Church of Scientology stands in the front row of those who fight for the acceptance of religious pluralism. Scientologists don't give up. They are determined. They persist. They show courage in the face of obstacles. I am convinced, only a sincere belief in their religion can produce this level of commitment and dedication. And that is why the

Church of Scientology leads a fight for tolerance that will benefit everyone.
And their example gives hope to others.

Thank you very much.