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Thomas Schirrmacher

**WEA welcomes
Book „Christianity“ by
All Churches in Turkey**



Bishop Thomas Schirrmacher greeting the Ecumenical Patriarch Bortholomew I (© BQ/Warnecke).

Prof. Dr. theol. Dr. phil. Thomas Schirrmacher, PhD, ThD, DD, serves the World Evangelical Alliance as Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns (Theology, Theological Education, Intra-faith Relations, Interfaith Relations, Religious Freedom, Global Scholars) and as Chair of the Theological Commission. As President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights he regularly testifies in the parliaments and courts in Europe and the Americas, the OSCE and the UN in Geneva and New York. He has authored and edited 102 books, his newest including 'Fundamentalism', 'Racism', 'Human Rights', 'Suppressed Women', and 'Human Trafficking'. Bishop Schirrmacher earned four doctorates in ecumenical theology, in cultural anthropology, in ethics, and in the

sociology of religion and received two honorary doctorates from the USA and India. He is Distinguished Professor of Global Ethics and International Development at William Carey University in Shillong (Meghalaya, India), extraordinary professor of the sociology of religion at the state University of the West in Timisoara (Romania) and director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo, Brasilia). He is professor of social ethics as well as president of Martin Bucer European Theological Seminary and Research Institutes (with branches in Berlin, Bielefeld, Bonn, Chemnitz, Hamburg, Innsbruck, Istanbul, Izmir, Linz, Munich, Pforzheim, Prague, Sao Paulo, Tirana, Zurich).

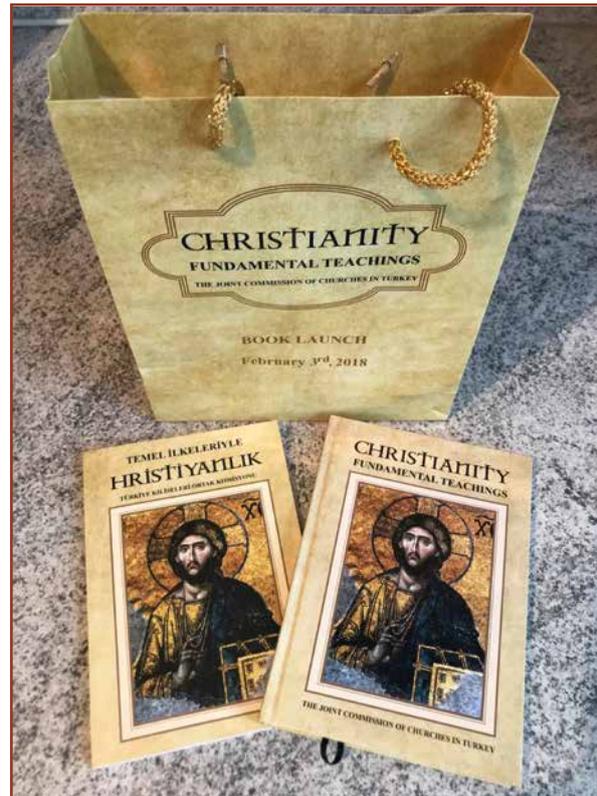
WEA welcomes Book „Christianity“ by All Churches in Turkey

Schirmmacher speaks at book launch to the Ecumenical Patriarch and other heads of churches in Turkey

A comprehensive book devoted to the foundations of Christianity has been released in Turkey and is unprecedented in its nature. The book entitled “The Fundamental Principles of Christianity”, was compiled by an 11-member committee in the course of over 10 years. The members of the committee were representatives of Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox and Protestant/Evangelical Churches in Turkey. This is the first all-Christian book published in Turkey.

The Turkish churches invited Thomas Schirmmacher, Associate Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance and President of Martiun Bucer Seminary, whose Turkish branch was heavily involved in the project, to give a commemorative speech. Schirmmacher addressed His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Monseigneur Ruben Tuerrablanca from the Catholic Church, Archbishop Karekin Bekciyan, surrogate of the Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Patriarchal Surrogate Metropolitan Yusuf Çetin of the Syriac Orthodox Church, and Dr. Behnan Konutgan, Turkish Protestant Churches, the Turkish member of the WEA, also President of the board of Martin Bucer Seminary Turkey, together the highest representatives of your churches and communities in Turkey. He also thanked Armenian Father Drtat Uzunyan, the liaison between the Armenian Church and Martin Bucer Seminary, and Natalie Konutgan, who translated the Turkish version into English.

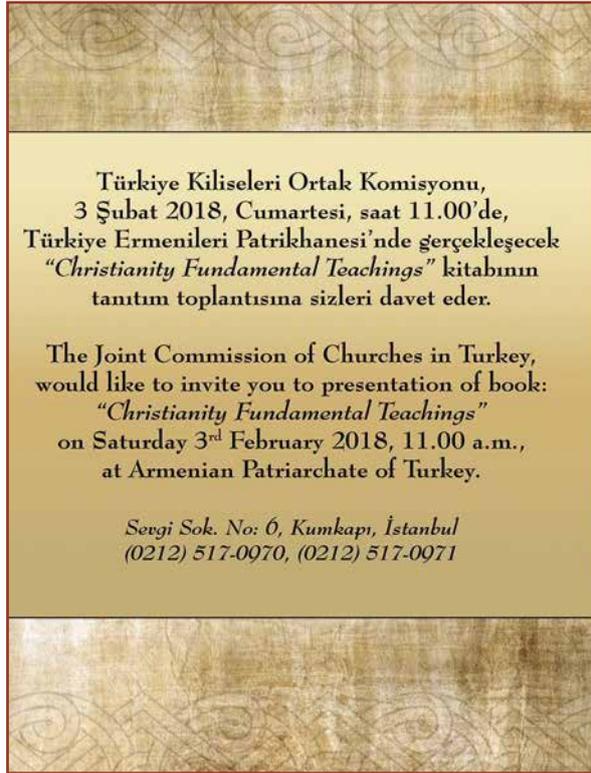
Quoting Jesus in John 17-18-23, he emphasised, how important it is, that Christians speak with one voice to their Muslim neighbours and other non-Christians. „We cannot expect non-Christians to become first-class theologians,” Schirmmacher said, “able to describe and understand the different versions of the Christian faith and then choose one of them, before they even understand the gospel. Non-Christians should come to know the one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the one faith that brings salvation through the death of Jesus. They should hear revelation from the one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”



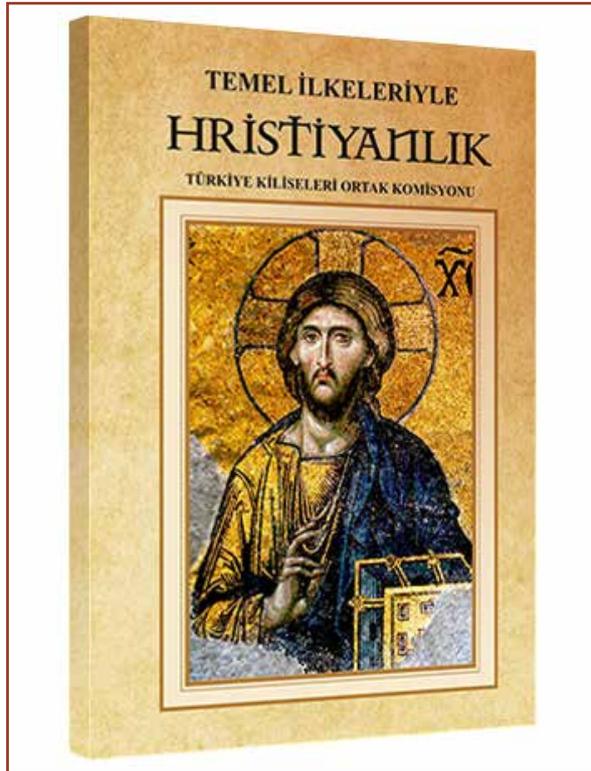
The welcome package with the English and Turkish version (© BQ/Warnecke).

Text on back cover fo the book

„This book is a landmark in interchurch efforts to draw closer together. It was written by a commission delegated by leaders of all of the major churches of Turkey. This commission, which met at regular intervals, decided to publish a basic book containing the doctrines of faith held in common by all Christian churches. This joint publication, which will help every Christian in Turkey to understand their own faith doctrines, but also for the striking and seminal advance in mutual respect and affection that it represents. The faith doctrines summarized in this book can already be found in each church’s books on faith and doctrine. Yet for churches that have ostracized each other for centuries leaving a legacy of deep divisions and resentments to sign their names to such a work is no small step toward church unity. Through this book the churches that have maintained their presence in Istanbul express in lasting words how few points of difference they have in their beliefs and how many of the same values and teachings they share on the essentials of their faith.“



Invitation to the event (© BQ/Warnecke).



Turkish book cover, presented (© BQ/Warnecke).

Schirmacher opened his speech with the words: „This is a very emotional moment for me, as I followed the project from its beginning and prayed for it often. And it is immense and undeserved honour that you have invited me for the launch of your book and I thank for the trust in me, proven by this gracious act.

Each time I visit his All Holiness, as he knows, I visit the Hagia Sophia Church first, remembering the glory of Christianity in this marvellous city. Turkey has been the site of some of the most important councils of bishops. Together with neighbour countries like Syria, Armenia and Greece, it represents the part of the world where the church grew from infancy to adulthood—from a small seed to a very large tree reaching out to all people, to use an image that Jesus once used. With this new book, Christians in Turkey are once again taking the lead, and following its publication in Turkish two years ago, they are now making their splendid efforts available for all churches worldwide.”

Christianity Fundamental Teachings. Kitab-ı Mukaddes Şirketi (Turkish Bible Society): İstanbul, 2018. 95 pp. ISBN 978-975-462-100-6

Temel İlkeleriyle Hristiyanlık. Kitab-ı Mukaddes Şirketi (Turkish Bible Society): İstanbul, 2015. 95 pp. ISBN 978-975-462-091-7

Buy the English version at: <https://www.kitabimukaddes.com/hristiyan-yayinlari/christianity-fundamental-teachings-tr/>

Buy the Turkish version at: <https://www.kitabimukaddes.com/hristiyan-yayinlari/temel-ilkeleriyle-hristiyanlik/>

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Place of Launch – Armenian Patriarchate: <http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site/>

The Commission: <http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site/christianity-fundamental-teachings-kitabi-yayinlandi/>



Bishop Schirmmacher during his speech, on the right Site of the Picture the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (© BQ/Warnecke).

Speech at launch by Thomas Schirmmacher

This is a very emotional moment for me, as I followed the project from its beginning and prayed for it often. And it is immense and undeserved honour that you have invited me for the launch of your book and I thank for the trust in me, proven by this gracious act.

Each time I visit his All Holiness, as he knows, I visit the Hagia Sophia Church first, remembering the glory of Christianity in this marvellous city. Turkey has been the site of some of the most important councils of bishops. Together with neighbour countries like Syria, Armenia and Greece, it represents the part of the world where the church grew from infancy to adulthood—from a small seed to a very large tree reaching out to all people, to use an image that Jesus once used. With this new book, Christians in Turkey are once again taking the lead, and following its publication in Turkish two years ago, they are now making their splendid efforts available for all churches worldwide.

This is a very emotional moment for Protestants and Evangelicals in Turkey and their friends around the world. A dream has become true – and not in a comfortable situation, but in one where churches struggle on all kinds of fronts. The Armenian Patriarchate, where we are located at this moment, by its very name reminds us of a history of martyrdom and difficulties, as does the Syriac Orthodox Church even in present times. The churches in Turkey are

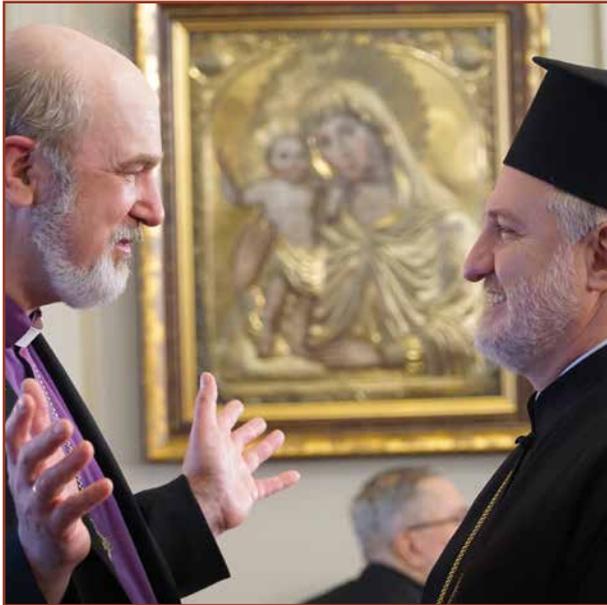
not well-funded institutions with large academic institutions that can afford to have theologians study together for years, but they love Jesus and Holy Scripture!

Protestants and Evangelicals in Turkey are a small group and rather new in the country. They know that they owe the close collaboration revealed by this book to the friendliness and openness of historic churches, which have been present here for nearly 2,000 years. These historic churches are our spiritual grandfathers. They have borne the torch of faith through the centuries.

On behalf of the 600 million Protestants who belong to the World Evangelical Alliance, I would like to thank you, the heads and leaders of those churches, for your gratefulness and good example towards your spiritual grandchildren.

When I explained the project to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, on my visit to him for his birthday in December, he was thrilled. But he was not astonished when he heard who was involved! How much the Christian world has changed in our time was demonstrated when Pope Francis visited His All Holiness in 2014 here in this city and bowed to him when greeting him. The Christian faith is not about rivalry and power, but about service and respecting others, following the model of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This book, which looks so tiny and yet may become a model to Christianity worldwide, is so great because of the motivation behind it. No verses



Schirmmacher in discussion with the Secretary of the Patriarch (© BQ/Warnecke).



(from right to left) The Ecumenical Patriarchate Bartholomew I, Archbisp Karekin Bekciyan, surrogate of the Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher (© BQ/Warnecke).

in Holy Scripture that came from the mouth of the Son of God better describe this motivation than John 17:18–23, taken from the prayer of Jesus Christ as the eternal high priest to His and our Father in heaven:

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ... My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

In its unity, the church mirrors the unity of Father and Son. Its unity preaches loud and clear to the world. But the opposite is also true: disunity and a cacophony of Christian messages to the world hinder the spread of the good news.

It is not coincidental that all great ecumenical movements in history sought unity for the sake of Christian mission. This was true of the World Evangelical Alliance when it united Protestant churches in 1846, just as it was true of the World Council of Churches in 1948 uniting Protestant, Orthodox and Oriental churches. The predecessors of His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarchs of the 20th century, have called clearly upon the world's churches to come together, to present one Christ and one faith as a common witness to an unbelieving world.

Followers of non-Christian religions around us should receive the complete, essential gospel, the fundamental teachings of Christianity – but not twenty or so different versions of Christianity.

We cannot expect non-Christians to become first-class theologians, able to describe and understand the different versions of the Christian faith and then choose one of them, before they even understand the gospel. Non-Christians should come to know the one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the one faith that brings salvation through the death of Jesus. They should hear revelation from the one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There is room for earnest study of the details of theology after one is already an earnest church member. There is room for the leaders of our churches to engage with each other, to learn from each other, and to express our disagreements based on a solid study of our differences. But when we are witnessing to unbelievers, that is the wrong time and place for theological struggles.

The churches in Turkey have taken the lead with their book, *Christianity: Fundamental Teachings*. All the churches together have presented 100 pages, about our God, our Saviour, our faith, the Church



Bishop Schirrmacher and Bishop Nedelchev of WEA (right) with the heads for the Turkish churches (© BQ/Warnecke).

and Christian morals, on which we all agree. They do not act as if we have no differences among us, but they make it amply clear that the one salvation offered by Jesus Christ is the same for all.

This work was not done by church leaders and theologians who had become liberal and no longer cared for the Word of God and for our traditions, or by people who were willing to relativize the truth and settle for just finding the smallest common denominator. Rather, it was the other way around. Earnest church leaders and theologians, steeped in their traditions and with great knowledge of church history (including the history and theology of other Christian traditions), have spelled out 100 pages of truth that belong to all of us together, knowing that in the end, the deepest truth that exists is Jesus Christ himself who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life“ (John 14:6).

This is not to downplay theological differences. There is a need for serious theological debate. For Christians, unity follows from the truth, not from

cheap compromises. Speaking for Protestants, meaningful unity includes studying more thoroughly the rich inheritance of the older and historic churches. I am glad that in the last decades, Protestants and Evangelicals have started to study the church fathers in depth and to publish their works, with the 29 thick volumes of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture being the most visible example. As the World Evangelical Alliance, we are doing much in defence of our discriminated brothers and sisters of the Orthodox Church and the seven Oriental churches. Along the way, we are learning a lot from them.

The Turkish churches have shown the Christian Church worldwide that it is possible to carry out this mission in unity. Out of deep love for their fellow citizens, they have shown that unity – spelled out in 100 pages of fundamental Christianity – is more important than anything else, so that the prayer of Jesus “that the world might believe“ may be fulfilled.



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