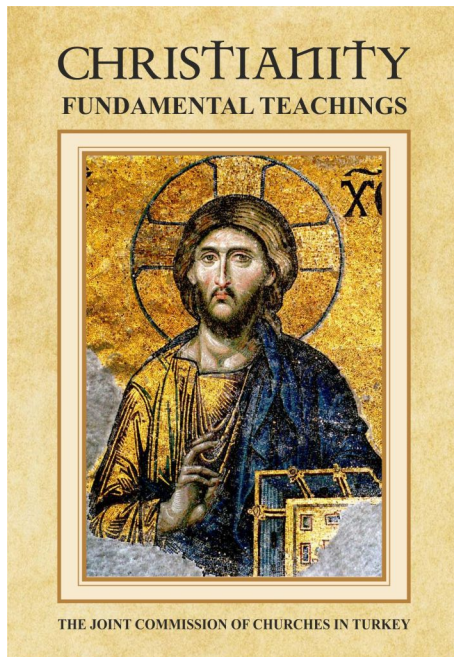


## Turkish Christians produce historic book



A comprehensive book on the foundations of Christianity, unprecedented in its nature and in the scope of Christian collaboration that led to its development, was released in March by all the major Christian organizations in Turkey.

Called *Christianity: Fundamental Teachings*, the book was compiled by an 11-member committee over the course of more than 10 years. The committee comprised representatives of Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox and Protestant/Evangelical churches in Turkey.

Armenian bishop Sahag Mashalian explained that the committee was established in 2002 when the Turkish Ministry of National Education asked the churches to redraft texts devoted to Christianity in Turkish educational textbooks. After completing this task, the committee decided to pursue creation of a separate textbook devoted fully to Christianity.

The back cover of the book explains its contents and significance with these compelling words: 'This book is a landmark in inter-church 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 will help every Christian in Turkey to understand their own faith doctrines, but it also represents a striking and seminal advance in mutual respect and affection. 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.'

The Turkish churches invited Thomas Schirmacher, Associate Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance and President of Martin Bucer Seminary (the Turkish branch of which was heavily involved in the project), to give a commemorative address on the occasion of the book's release. Among those present were His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople; Monsignor 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 of the Turkish Protestant Churches, the Turkish member of the WEA, and also president of the board of Martin Bucer Seminary Turkey. Dr. Konutgan's wife, Natalie, translated the Turkish version into English.



Bishop Schirmacher addressing Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the heads of the major Turkish churches © BQ/Warnecke

Quoting Jesus from John 17:18–23, Schirmacher emphasized how important it is for Christians to speak with one voice to their Muslim neighbours and other non-Christians. ‘We cannot expect non-Christians to become first-class theologians’, Schirmacher 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.’

Schirmacher continued, ‘All the churches together have presented 100 pages, about our God, our Saviour, our faith, the Church 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.’

The English version of the book can be purchased at <https://www.kitabimukaddes.com/hristiyan-yayinlari/christianity-fundamental-teachings-tr/>

## New WEA ambassador to Orthodox churches

Bishop Dr Nikolas Nedelchev, president of the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance and an experienced trainer of church leaders in the Middle East, has been named the World Evangelical Alliance’s ambassador to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and all Orthodox churches.

Nedelchev made his first official visit in this capacity on February 1 in Istanbul. There, he was welcomed by Bartholomew I, who as Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch is the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide.

Nedelchev was nominated after an internal search process and then appointed by the WEA’s Secretary General, Bishop Efraim Tendero. According to protocol, he was formally introduced to the Ecumenical Patriarch by WEA Associate Secretary General Thomas Schirmacher, although in fact the two had met on previous occasions.

‘I am glad that the WEA will be represented to the Orthodox Churches by such an experienced Evangelical statesman as Nik Nedelchev, who is highly respected by many Orthodox leaders’, said Bishop Tendero. ‘We are interested in good and harmonious relations with all Orthodox churches and will show practical solidarity with the many Orthodox Christians living under persecution and discrimination.’

The Patriarch expressed appreciation for the substantial support for persecuted Orthodox Christians that the WEA has provided for decades, and for the WEA’s effort to further strengthen evangelical-Orthodox relationships through the appointment of a special ambassador.

Nedelchev, current president and previously director of the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance, also served as president of the European Evangelical Alliance from 1999 to 2007.

Nedelchev was born in Petrich, Bulgaria, very close to the Greek border, in 1949. He became a follower of Christ at age 21, was ordained in the Baptist Union of Bulgaria, and served as a traveling preacher and teacher, and then as senior pastor of the Baptist Church in Sofia. He also headed the Baptist Union of Bulgaria.

Prior to the fall of communism in November 1989, Nedelchev secretly disciplined, mentored and trained young leaders through small groups, home Bible studies, and personal training in partnership with Biblical Education by Extension (now Entrust). In 1990, he helped to found the Bulgarian Biblical Academy, now Saint Trivellii Bible Seminary, and served as its executive director until 2006.



Bishop Thomas Schirmacher, WEA Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns, introduces Bishop Nik Nedelchev to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I © BQ/Warnecke



Nedelchev has travelled frequently to Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries to train emerging church leaders. He is a board member of the National Council of Religious Communities in Bulgaria (NCRCB).

The WEA's ambassador program falls under its Office for Intrafaith and Interfaith Relations (OIIR), which is seeking to identify leaders from member alliances around the globe who have the requisite skills to represent the WEA in its dealings with global Christian world communions and other major world religions. Currently Thomas K. Johnson represents the WEA as ambassador to the Vatican.

## Faith-based entrepreneurs meet in Geneva

Leaders from more than 20 international and national associations of Christian entrepreneurs, active in over 60 countries, gathered in Geneva on 22–23 January 2018 for a conference entitled 'Faith-based entrepreneurs: stronger together'.

Timo Plutschinski, director of the WEA Business Coalition, was among the presenters on a panel of speakers who discussed the current status of existing associations. Plutschinski stressed the importance of equipping Christians to do effective evangelism and mission in the marketplace, particularly in Western cultures where participation in the institutionalized church has been declining.

Business activity, Plutschinski said, should be 'intrinsically an expression of God's creativity, emphasizing not only a holistic worldview but also loving service to people. Especially in these times of postmodernity and post-Christendom in the Western world, this has the potential to be the future framework for spiritual formation and expression of a "Church at large."



The WEA's Timo Plutschinski (second from right) and his fellow panel participants.

The conference was co-sponsored by the non-profit Geneva Agape Foundation and the World Council of Churches. Participants adopted a **12-point 'Faith in Business' declaration** containing biblically grounded convictions related to such areas as service, stewardship, human rights, opposing corruption and supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

## Seminar for supervisors of theological field research: May 9–12 in Thailand

The Asia Theological Association (ATA) and the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) will hold a Field Research Doctoral Supervisor's Seminar on May 9–12 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The seminar provides a unique opportunity for mentors in doctoral programs at theology schools to explore best practices in both qualitative and quantitative field research.

Specialists including Kevin Lawson of Biola University, USA and Jessy Jaison of New India Bible Seminar will lead sessions on field research genres and ethics, project design, data collection tools and techniques, methodological combinations, research limitations and mentoring skills. The seminar will permit doctoral research supervisors to interact with experts on empirical research, develop critical skills in field studies and mentoring, and gather practical insights from colleagues in the region towards reinvigorating their doctoral research programs to impact the changing needs of their churches and societies.

Registration is available at <http://www.ataasia.com/event/field-research-doctoral-supervisors-seminar/>

## WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism Conference Meets in Tanzania

*by John Baxter-Brown, Senior Advisor on Evangelism, WEA Theological Commission*

Rosalee Velloso Ewell, Thomas Schirmacher and I from the World Evangelical Alliance's Theological Commission, along with David Ruiz, Rob Hay and Bertil Ekström from the WEA Mission Commission, were among the over 1,000 delegates at the global conference of the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) on 8–13 March.

Titled 'Moving in the Spirit: called to transforming discipleship', the conference took place in Arusha, Tanzania, hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania.

Each day began with prayer and worship, including a Bible study, and then split into a series of plenary sessions, workshops (called warsha) and sokoni sessions (an exposition area where participants could explore issues in greater depth through a variety of presentations and view the work of relevant organizations). As always, one of the significant blessings was the chance to renew friendships and develop new ones over the breaks and meals.

It was refreshing to see a deliberate emphasis on developing younger leaders, partly because a Global Ecumenical Theological Institute programme took place during the days immediately before the main conference, with many young theologians participating. Indeed, the speakers who made the biggest impressions on everyone I spoke with were young women.



All 1,000 or so conference participants managed to fit into this picture! © Albin Hillert, WCC

Of particular note was CWME director Rev Dr Jooseop Keum's public appreciation of the contribution by WEA staff to the CWME's work. In his report to the conference, Dr Keum highlighted WEA representatives' participation in the development of the 2013 WCC mission statement 'Together Towards Life' and the 2011 document 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World'.

Dr Ewell, director of the TC, led a workshop on mission and proselytism. (I was supposed to co-lead it with her but missed it due to an unplanned hospital trip, from which I was discharged only later that day.) This event was part of an effort initiated by the four pillars of the Global Christian Forum (the WCC, the Roman Catholic Church, the WEA and the Pentecostal World Fellowship), aiming to develop a mutual statement on the contentious issue of intra-Christian witness. The workshop was well attended and included helpful contributions from Catholic, ecumenical and Orthodox members of the Mission and Proselytism Working Group.

Proselytism is a significant issue for many Christians, in part because it raises complex issues of language, power, doctrine and religious freedom as well as methodology and practice. It is arguably the biggest obstacle to Christian unity in the world, and it can create hostility between people who claim a shared commitment to following Jesus as Lord. I am in the final stages of editing a book on the subject, *Mission and Proselytism: A Reader*, bringing together thinking from Christian bodies and notable missiologists, which will be published later this year.

Although we readily acknowledge a deepening relationship between the CWME and the WEA (especially with the WEA Mission and Theological Commissions), there are also areas in which we think evangelicals have more to contribute—particularly in discipleship, the main theme of the conference, and evangelism. As evangelicals, we would wish to place emphasis in discipleship upon following and becoming like our Master, Jesus Christ; on personal and corporate holiness and ethical living; on giving public witness to Christ, including even readiness to face martyrdom; and on the role of mature Christians discipling newer Christians in practical Christian living—as well as on the concept of mission from the margins, which was well covered in Arusha.

## New educational tool enhances religious freedom literacy

It's not often that the World Evangelical Alliance helps to fund a website that shows a photo of a smiling woman with a sign saying 'Hi Mom, I'm an atheist.' But this case is a worthy exception.

The Nordic Ecumenical Network on International Freedom of Religion or Belief has launched a 'Freedom of Religion or Belief Learning Platform' ([www.forb-learning.org](http://www.forb-learning.org)). The site's launch was publicly announced on 6 March at a high-level side event on 'The Impact of Media on Freedom of Religion or Belief' at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The WEA and the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) supported this work, the brainchild of Katherine Cash of the Swedish Mission Council.



Dr Christof Sauer, co-director of the IIRF, explained that the website and its contents grew out of a workshop on 'Religion and Religious Freedom in International Diplomacy' hosted by the UN in Geneva on 22 September 2016. 'The need for literacy on religion and religious freedom in those circles was emphasized and a call for the production of suitable training material issued' Sauer said. 'One of the speakers, Katherine Cash, pledged to heed the call. The IIRF encouraged and supported her. The wonderful educational tool that has now been presented is the fruit of her educational competence and diligent labour.'

The learning platform contains a series of short educational videos entitled the 'Introductory Learning Package', currently available in English, Arabic, Russian, French, Spanish, and Swedish. The eight completed videos range in length between 5 and 9 minutes, except for one longer video of almost 20 minutes, with a ninth video scheduled for release this year. The topics are as follows:

1. An introduction to freedom of religion or belief
2. The right to have or change your religion or belief
3. The right to manifest (practice) your religion or belief
4. Protection from coercion
5. Protection from discrimination
6. Rights for parents and children
7. Conscientious objection
8. Limitations to freedom of religion or belief
9. Freedom of religion or belief around the world



The panel at the launch of the FORB Learning Platform © FORB

A second series of four short videos on 'Access to Justice' is also available.

### JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT FOR THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Evangelical Review of Theology (quarterly)  
<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tc/>

Islam and Christianity (English and German) (semiannual)  
<https://www.islaminstitut.de/en/category/publikationen/journal/>

Jahrbuch für Verfolgung und Diskriminierung von Christen  
[Yearbook on Persecution and Discrimination of Christians]  
(German) <https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/german-yearbooks/>

International Journal of Religious Freedom (semiannual)  
<https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/iirf-journal/>

Jahrbuch für Religionsfreiheit [Yearbook on Religious Freedom]  
(German) <https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/german-yearbooks/>

#### DIGITAL ONLY:

Theological News (quarterly)  
<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tc/publications/TN.htm>

Business & Mistry News (Business Coalition) (monthly)  
order from [business@worldea.org](mailto:business@worldea.org)



In addition, the platform offers numerous educational resources, including written resources in 13 languages; practical teaching tips for teachers; materials on theological and ethical reflection from most major religions; relevant information for diplomats, legislators, and media; country-level information from around the world; and links to the major international human rights declarations and covenants.

The primary philosophical basis for the educational platform is found in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while the platform depends heavily for its legal explanations on the principles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has the force of law in 169 countries.

Dr Thomas K. Johnson, who represents the World Evangelical Alliance as Religious Freedom Ambassador to the Vatican, called the platform's launch a 'huge step forward' in protecting freedom of religion. 'For us as Evangelicals, freedom of religion is organically tied to our experience, as parents and as overseers in our churches, that there is no way to compel children from our families and churches to come to faith in Jesus. Real faith has to be free from external compulsion. Real faith is compelled internally by God's Word and Spirit, by the Evangel itself', Johnson stated.

'I have long seen a need for this sort of effort and I am very glad that the WEA has joined in the partnership to make this possible. I will be disappointed if these materials see widespread use only within the several branches of Christianity. On paper, most governments around the world have officially affirmed these principles on one or more occasions in the last 70 years. But far too few citizens of any country know the moral and legal principles that have been affirmed by their governments. And this lack of information extends even to judges, diplomat and parliamentarians around the globe. These trends have been precisely confirmed by multiple research agencies. Now we have an additional and valuable tool to address this need.'

## World Economic Forum considers the power of faith

The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, held on 23–26 January in Davos, Switzerland, focused on the theme of 'Creating a shared future in a fractured world' and included a panel discussion on 'The power of faith'. Dr Brian Grim, member of the WEA's Council for Business and Global Strategies and president of the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation, was among the participants on that panel.

'When people grant each other religious freedom and respect, that creates a society that is good for sustainable business. When you don't have that condition, you have a conflict economy', Grim stated.

Grim described a study conducted by his organization that estimated the economic contribution of the United States' 400,000 local congregations as \$1.2 trillion per year.

### WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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### WEA DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The WEA Department of Theological Concerns is responsible for Theology • Theological Education • Intrafaith: Churches • Christian World Communions • Interfaith: Interreligious Dialogue • Islam • Religious Freedom • Persecution • Christian Scholars • Research • Business and theology

The WEA Department of Theological Concerns consists of the following entities: Theological Commission • ICETE (International Accreditation) • Re-forma (Untrained Pastors Training) • Office for Intrafaith and Interfaith Relations (OIIR) • Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) • International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) • International Institute for Islamic Studies (IIS) • Business Coalition/Business and Theology • Society of Christian Scholars • Research Unit • UN Bonn liaison office for interreligious dialogue