



International Institute
for Religious Freedom

**Integrating insights from various disciplines into research and
education on the persecution of Christians
and freedom of religion or belief for all**

Lessons from My Life's Journey

Thomas Schirrmacher

*September 17, 2025, Fjellhaug International University College, Oslo, Norway
Opening Plenary, Symposium - Religious persecution and theological education*

This paper is a call to Christian scholars in all relevant fields of academic research to engage in religious freedom studies and to join this growing global community of scholars.

But it is also a call to Christian scholars to collaborate with scholars of all faiths or none, and to present the results of their research in such a way that they can be shared and discussed with any scholar of good will around the world, also making them accessible for media, governments, and parliaments, which usually represent a mix of worldviews.

Examples will be given from fields in which the speaker himself has been involved globally over the past four decades, such as systematic theology, political ethics, cultural anthropology, sociology of religion, historical studies, and interreligious dialogue.

1. The idea of religious freedom originated from religious minorities within Christianity since 1641 and from the minority of Jews since 1783.



Christianity and Democracy – magazine of the German
Parliament 2009

MBS TEXTE 44



2. Jahrgang
2005

Thomas Schirrmacher

**Der ursprüngliche Taufritus:
Übergießen des halb im
Wasser stehenden Täuflings?**



Vorarbeiten zur Dogmatik
Vorarbeiten zur Dogmatik

Early Rites of baptism

den Baptisterien von Rom und Mailand deutlich auf eine solche Taufpraxis hin.⁴⁹ Der einzige – allerdings nicht mit absoluter Sicherheit für diese Funktion in Anspruch zu nehmende – fassbare Überrest einer Vorrichtung für diese Art der Taufe ist die Ose im Scheitel des Baldachins über der Piscina von Djemila/DZ (Nr. 75), die zur Befestigung eines Eimers o.ä. gedient haben könnte.⁴⁹ Neben der Taufe durch Übergießen des im Wasser stehenden Täuflings oder seltener auch durch Untertauchen wurde wohl ebenso bereits die Besprengungstaufe (aspersion) praktiziert, und es müssen für die verschiedenen Kirchenprovinzen unterschiedliche Taufpraktiken als möglich angesehen

werden. Aussagen zur allgemeinen Gültigkeit verschiedener Taufformen trifft bereits die Didache⁶⁵, die in das 2. Jahrhundert datiert wird; zur Möglichkeit der aspersion äußern sich die Kirchenväter seit dem 3. Jahrhundert.^{66/67}

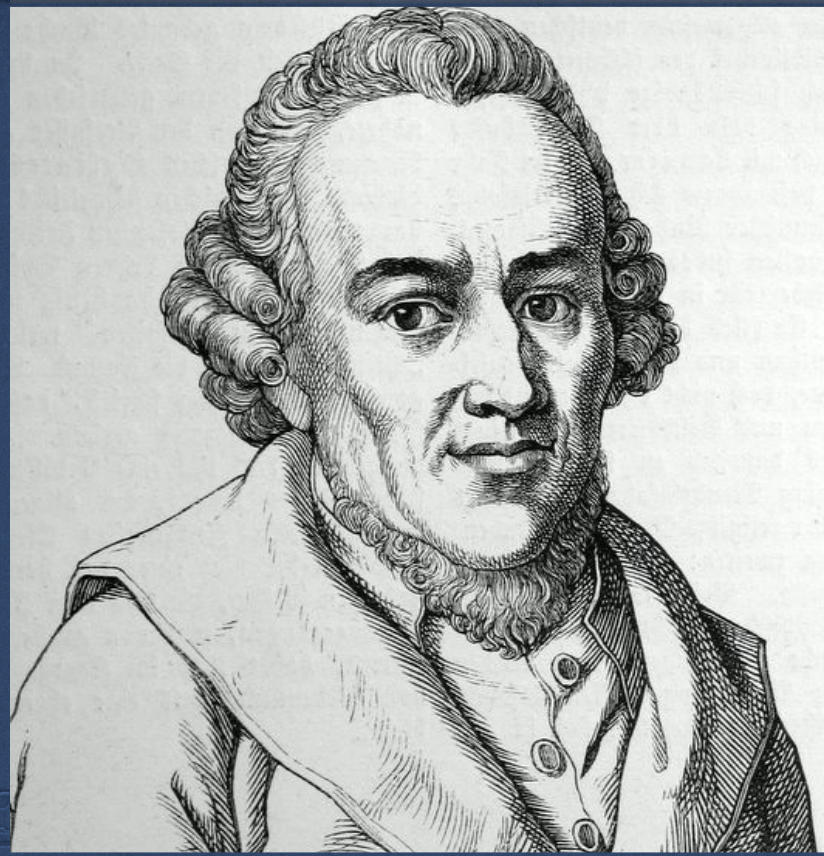
Die frühen Taufbecken im ganzen Römischen Reich sind meist nicht groß genug, um einen Menschen unterzutauchen und dienen wohl der Halbimmersion mit Übergießen.⁵⁰ Dies gilt auch etwa für das Gebiet der heutigen Schweiz und Süddeutschlands.⁵¹ Sebastian Ristow hat dazu alle bekannten Taufbecken und Baptisterien bis zum 6. Jh. n. Chr. in einem Katalog zusammengestellt. Diese sog. Piscinas waren beispielsweise 40 cm, 55 und 65 cm



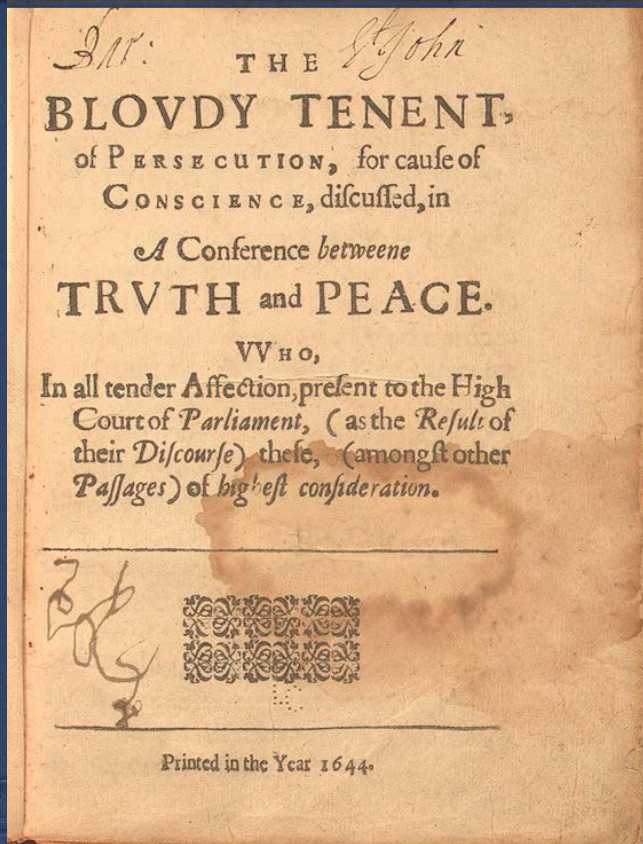
Abbildung 5: Piscina im Baptisterium der Johannesbasilika in Ephesus, Türkei, Mitte 5. Jh.⁵²

An dieser Stelle diskutierte der Verfasser mit mehreren landeskirchlichen Pfarrern und mehreren baptistischen Pastoren aus Deutschland die Frühgeschichte des Taufritus und erörtere, wie beide versuchten, die Anlage in Sinne ihres Ritus zu deuten, obwohl das Taufbecken für das Besprengen zu tief und für das Untertauchen zu niedrig ist.

Early Rites of baptism



Moses Mendelssohn 1783



Roger Williams The Bloody Tenent of Persecution 1644

**A SHORT
DECLARATION**
of the mystery of iniquity.

Jer. 51. 6.

Flee out of the midst of Babel, and deliver
every man his soule, be not destroyed in his
iniquity, for this is the time of the
lords vengeance, he will render
vnto hit a recompense.

Hosea 10. 12.

Sow to your selves in righteousnes, reape
after the measure of mercie, breake vp your
fallow ground, for it is time to seeke
the lord, till he come & raine
righteousnes vpon you.



Anno 1612.

Thomas Helwys 1612

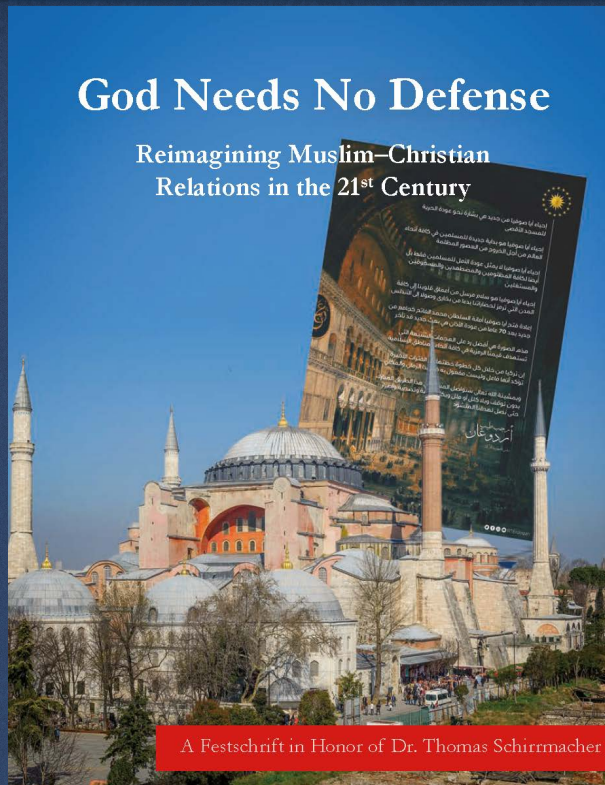
2. Therefore, Christians and Jews must confidently participate in the global promotion and implementation of this idea, even though it is now shared by people of all religions and beliefs as part of the canon of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



Faith for Rights Beirut Launch

God Needs No Defense

Reimagining Muslim-Christian
Relations in the 21st Century



A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Thomas Schirmacher

Editors:
Thomas K. Johnson and C. Holland Taylor

Festschrift by Muslim friends "God needs no defense"



Human Rights in Albanian

Menschenrechte

Anspruch und Wirklichkeit

In nur
2 Stunden
wissen Sie
Bescheid!



Thomas Schirmacher

Thomas Schirmacher (Hrsg.)

HÄNSSLER

KURZ UND BÜNDIG

SCM Hänssler

Human Rights in German



Human Rights in English

Heiner Bielefeldt

Freedom of Religion or Belief:

Thematic Reports of the
UN Special Rapporteur 2010 – 2016



Thomas Schirmacher (Ed.)

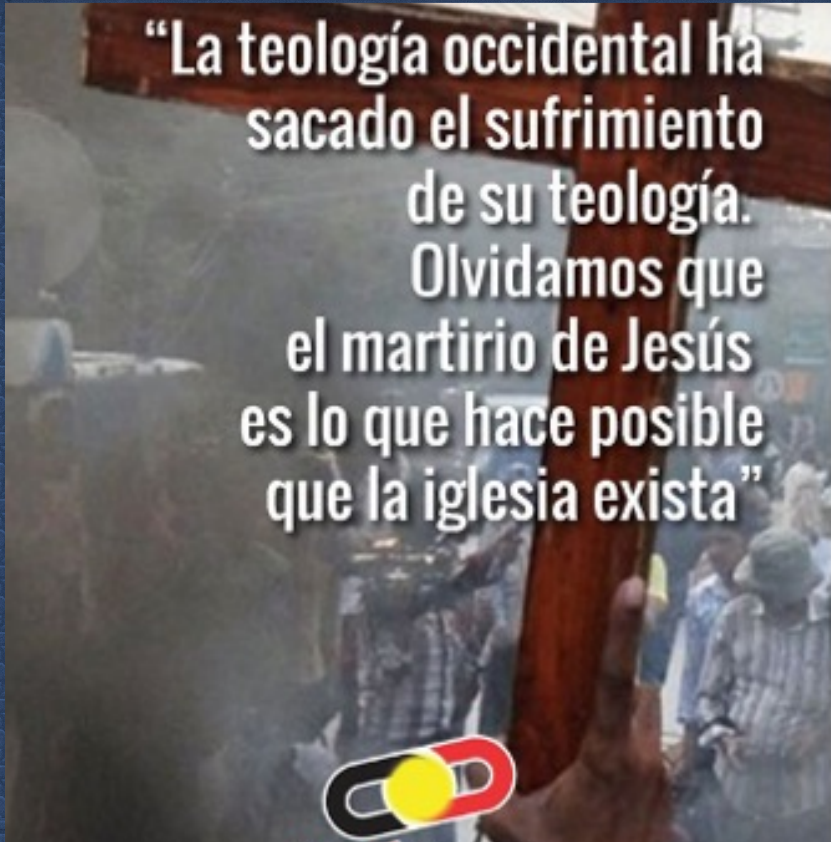
VKW Religious Freedom Series 3

Reports by the UN Special Rapporteur Heiner Bielefeldt



UN Human Rights Council Geneva Michael Wiener

3. The study of persecution and martyrdom must find its way back to the heart of Christian systematic theology and become an integral part of every subject of theological studies, e.g. Christology, ecclesiology, church history, ethics, missiology or pastoral care.

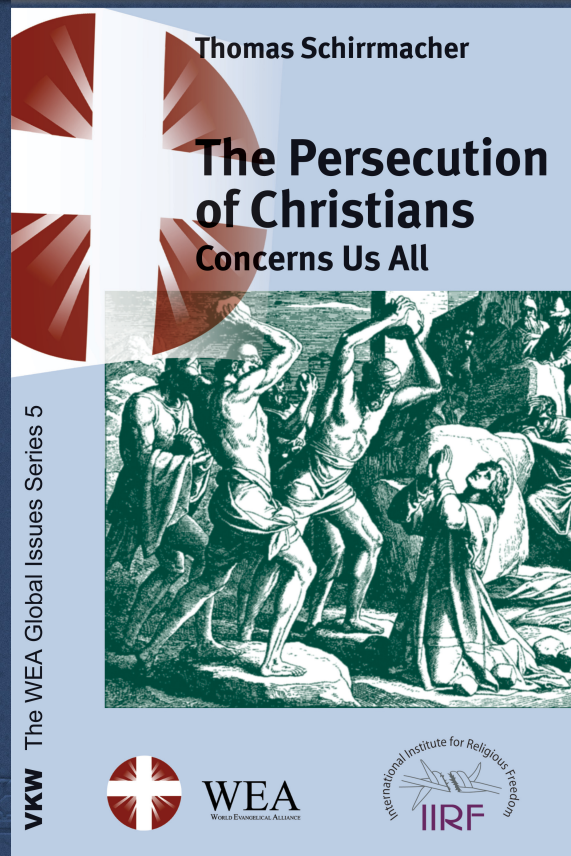


“La teología occidental ha sacado el sufrimiento de su teología. Olvidamos que el martirio de Jesús es lo que hace posible que la iglesia exista”

Western theology has taken suffering out of its theology. We forget that the martyrdom of Jesus is what makes it possible for the church to exist.

Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher

Quote on Western theology



The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All 1999 in English

D 43830 • November 1999 • 7,50 DM

idea

Dokumentation



15/99

Christenverfolgung geht uns alle an
– Auf dem Weg zu einer Theologie des Martyriums

70 biblisch-theologische
Thesen von Prof. Dr.
Thomas Schirmacher,



erarbeitet im Auftrag
der Deutschen
Evangelischen Allianz

The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All 1999 in German

Toleo la Kiswahili 2008

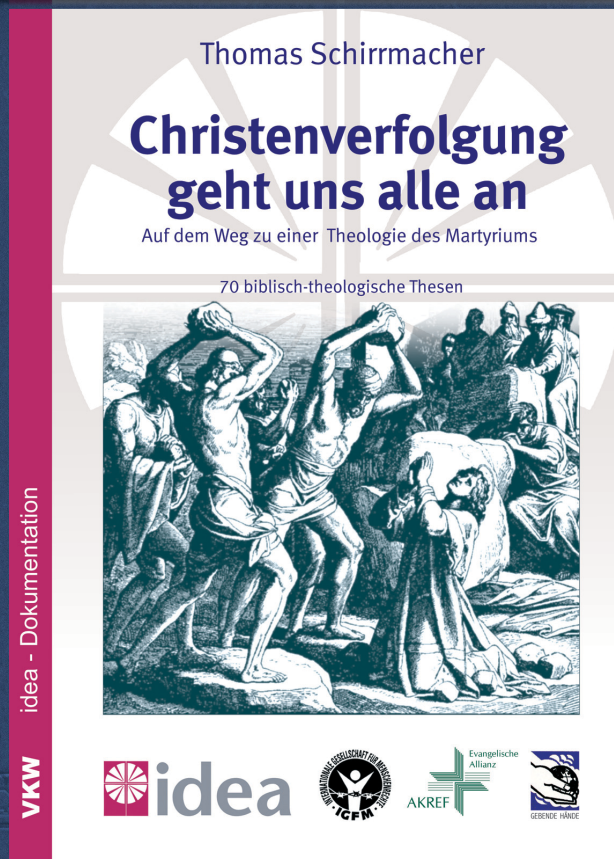
Mateso ya Wakristo Yanatuhusu Sisi Sote

Thomas Schirmmacher

Kuelekea Theolojia ya Mauaji wa Mashahidi wa Imani
Juzuu 70 za Kibiblia na Kitheolojia zilizoandikwa kwa ajili ya
Shirikisho la Kiinjili la Ujerumani na Tume ya Uhuru wa Kidini
Dibaji imeandikwa na John Candelin, Shirikisho la Kiinjili la
Ulimwengu, na Julia Doxat-Purser, Shirikisho la Kiinjili la
Ulaya



The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All 1999 in Kiswahili



The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All 2001 in German

Schirmmacher: Martyrdom has to become a Part of Doctrine

Thursday October 20th, 2016 / Persecution of Christians, Special topics ecumenical relations, Human Rights, Ecumenism, ProMundis Blog, Right to religious freedom, Theology

Sant'Egidio campaigns against the Persecution of Christians at its International Meeting for Peace

At the International Meeting for Peace organized by the Catholic community Sant'Egidio, one of the largest interreligious meetings for dialogue in the world with leaders of all world religions, the World Evangelical Alliance's moderator for intrafaith and interfaith relations and human rights and freedom of religion expert, Thomas Schirmmacher, has called upon the international Christian community to awaken from its lethargy and demonstrate a heretofore unequalled level of solidarity in light of the world situation. According to Schirmmacher, there are politicians, journalists, and leaders of non-Christian religions who are campaigning more intensively for the destiny of persecuted Christians than many church leaders..



Thomas Schirmmacher during his lecture, at the far right the President of Sant'Egidio, Marco Impagliazzo

Tirana Sant'Egidio 2015



Tirana Sant'Egidio 2015

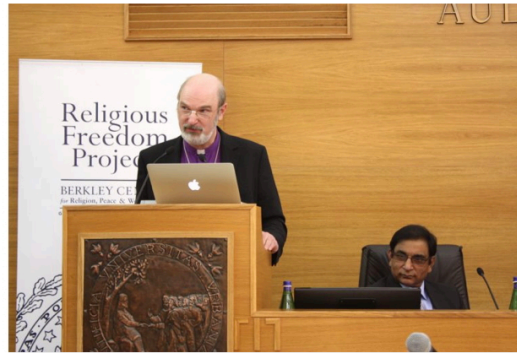
4. This must happen in cooperation with all churches, as we all believe in the foremost martyr, Jesus himself, we need to learn from the Eastern churches in general, as well as from their experience with persecution. We must also acknowledge that persecutors rarely care what kind of Christian they persecute or martyr.



Archbishop Anastasios at the Global Christian Forum
in Tirana 2015

The International Institute for Religious Freedom is honored by the US Ambassador for International Religious Freedom

As part of an international consultation on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Dignitatis Humanae, the declaration on religious freedom made by the Second Vatican Council, the Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) gave a guest lecture at the Pontifical University of Urbanina. The consultation was hosted by the Center for Civil and Human Rights at the University of Notre Dame, the Religious Freedom Project of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University in Washington and the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome. Schirmmacher was accompanied by two colleagues of the IIRF, the co-director of the IIRF, Prof. Dr.



Guest lecture by Thomas Schirmmacher in the auditorium of the Pontifical University Urbanina; seated behind Schirmmacher is Dr. Paul Bhatti, Pakistan

Call in Pontifical University



Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul 2008



Global  Christian Forum

**Discrimination,
Persecution,
Martyrdom:
Following Christ Together**

Report of the global consultation
Tirana, Albania, 2-4 November 2015

Global Christian Forum Tirana 2015



Kurt Cardinal Koch honored in 2016

“Coffee Breaks with the Pope”: Cardinal honored in front of Denominations from around the Globe

Friday December 9th, 2016 / Catholic Church, Ecumenism, ProMundis

Blog

Thomas Schirmmacher has dedicated his book “Coffee Breaks with the Pope” to Cardinal Kurt Koch for his efforts in connection with the “ecumenism of martyrdom.” In a small ceremony during the course of a joint dinner of the annual Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions, which took place this year in Rome, Schirmmacher paid tribute to Koch as a farsighted moderator for



Thomas Schirmmacher during his tribute to Cardinal Kurt Koch (from the left): Thomas Schirmmacher, Diop Ganoune, General Secretary

Kurt Cardinal Koch honored in 2016



Patriarchs of the Middle East 2015

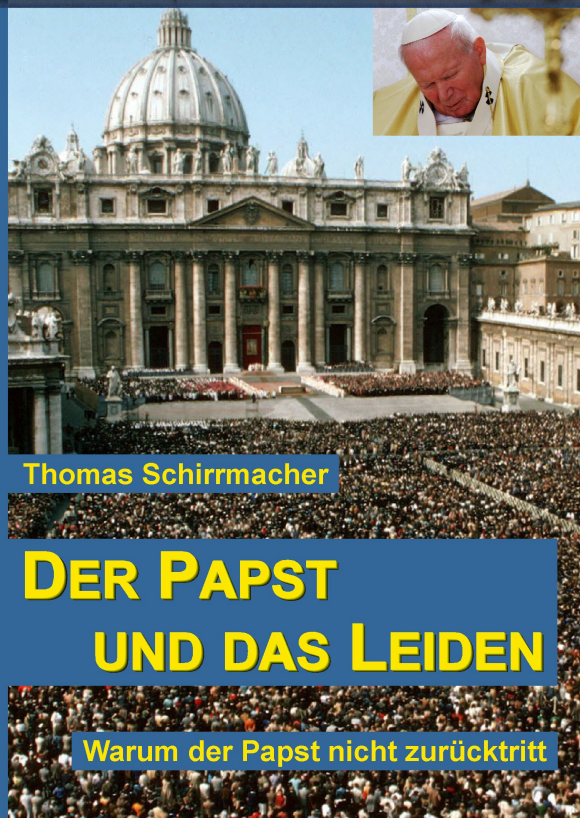
Schönblick 
Herz trifft Himmel



**Christenverfolgung
und Ökumene
der Märtyrer**

Eine biblische Besinnung
Kurt Cardinal Koch

Preface to Kurt Cardinal Koch



The Pope and suffering 2002

5. The same applies to the broader question of freedom of religion or belief for everyone. Theologians should be able to explain the basis of this freedom in terms of dogma and political ethics in a clear, easy-to-understand way.

Wenn Christsein neues Leben in Christus bedeutet, muss sich das besonders in der Ethik bewähren. Wenn die Bibel Gottes Weisheit für die Menschen enthält, muss sie Antworten auf grundsätzliche Fragen der Ethik geben. Wie aber sieht eine Ethik aus, die altkirchliche und reformatorische Anregungen ebenso aufnimmt wie die evangelikalen und säkularen Fragen der Gegenwart?

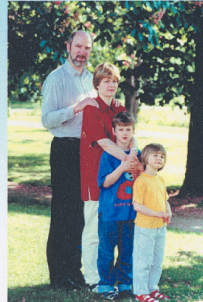
In den auf sechs Bände verteilten 66 Lektionen werden die Schwerpunkte der persönlichen Ethik ebenso wie der Familien-, Kirchen-, Wirtschafts- und Staatsethik behandelt. Jede Lektion ist in sich abgeschlossen und behandelt eine ethische Frage, die allgemein diskutiert wird, z.B. die Gültigkeit der Bergpredigt, die Zulässigkeit des Schwörens, das Widerstandsrecht oder die Euthanasie. Die Ethik erarbeitet weithin diskutierte Themen anhand kontroverser Fragen, damit der Leser die angeschnittenen Probleme mit ihm bekannten Situationen und Gesprächsthemen in Verbindung setzen kann.

„Ein theologisches Meisterwerk –
nimm und lies“

Prof. Dr. Dr. Georg Huntemann



Thomas Schirmacher promovierte in Theologie (1985), in Kulturanthropologie (1989) und in Ethik (1996) und erhielt 1997 eine Ehrenpromotion. Er ist Rektor des Martin Bucer Seminars, Kuratoriumsvorsitzender des internationalen Hilfswerkes Gebende Hände gGmbH, Inhaber des Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft und Mitinhaber der Consulting Schirmacher GbR. Er hat außerdem Lehrstühle und Lehraufträge für Systematische Theologie/Ethik und für Missions- und Religionswissenschaft an in- und ausländischen Hochschulen inne, wie dem Whitefield Theological Seminar (USA), der ACTS University (Bangalore, Indien), dem Neues Leben Seminar oder der Freien Theologischen Akademie. Er ist Mitarbeiter der Kommission für Religionsfreiheit der Deutschen und der Weltweiten Evangelischen Allianz und Verfasser und Herausgeber von 51 Büchern, darunter eine dreibändige „Ethik“. Er ist mit der Islamwissenschaftlerin Dr. Christine Schirmacher verheiratet und Vater eines Sohnes (10) und einer Tochter (7).



Seine Biographie findet sich in: Who's Who in the World, International Who is Who of Professionals, EU-Who is Who, Who is Who in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2000 Outstanding People of the 21st Century, 2000 Outstanding Intellectuals of the 21st Century, International Who's Who in Distance Learning, Kürschners Deutscher Sachbuch-Kalender.

ISBN 3-933372-57-7

VTR
RVB

ETHIK

Thomas Schirmacher

ETHIK

Thomas Schirmacher

Gottes
Ordnungen

Staat
und
Recht



6

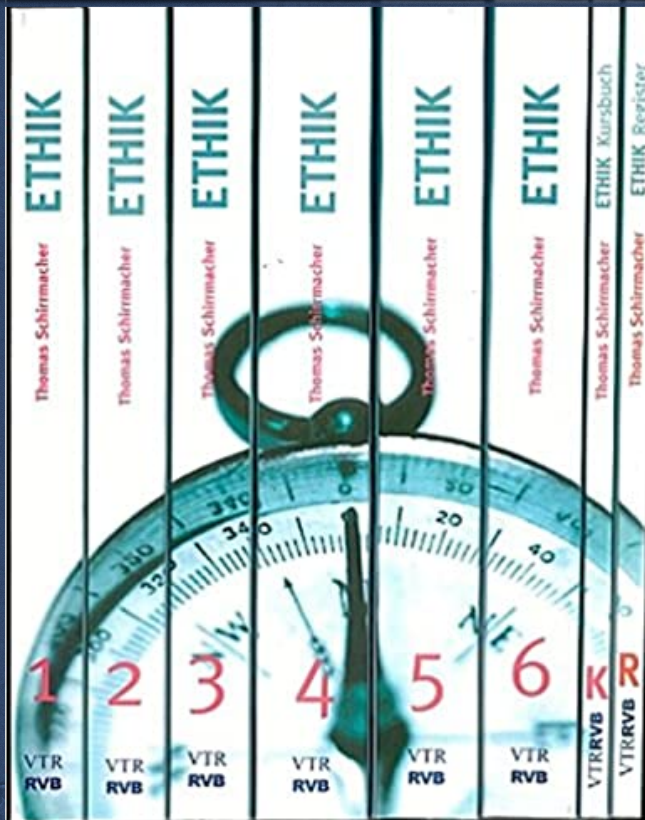
VTR
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6

Lektionen 58-66

Ethics volume 6 State and Law

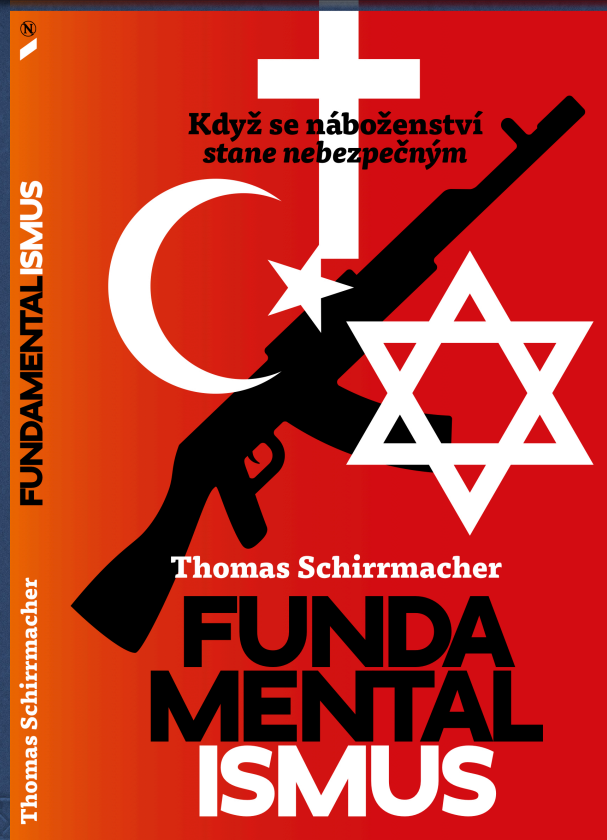


Ethics volume 6 State and Law

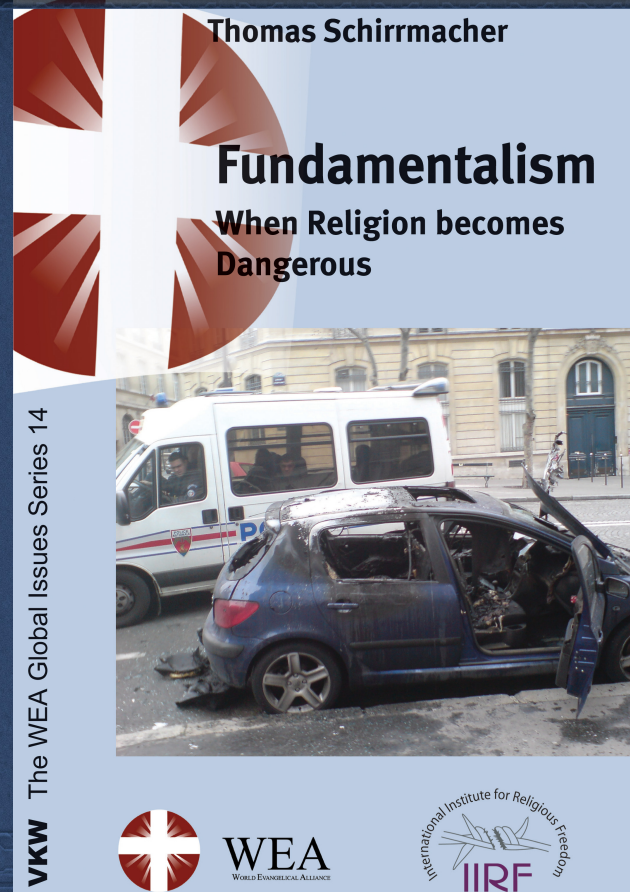


Shifting from persecution to religious freedom
with Angela Merkel

6. This includes a critical study of the ways in which Christianity has lived up to or violated its own standards throughout history. The OT and NT prove our faith to be highly self-critical and always including honest investigation and even repentance. At the same time, we must combat religious extremism and fundamentalism within our own ranks.



Fundamentalism in Czech



Fundamentalism in English

Fundamentalismus

Wenn Religion zur Gefahr wird

In nur
2 Stunden
wissen Sie
Bescheid!



Thomas Schirmacher

Thomas Schirmacher (Hrsg.)

HÄNSSLER
KURZ UND BÜNDIG

SCM Hänssler

Fundamentalism in German



Launch Christian Witness Code Geneva 2011



Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS WORLD

Edited by INDUNIL J. KODITHUWAKKU K.

Preface by JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN



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Ten years of Christian Witness in a multireligious World

ETHICS · SOCIETY · THEOLOGY ·
MISSION · SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

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Schirmacher testifies in British parliament

Friday October 20th, 2017 Christianity & Politics Dialogue with other religions Special topics politics Special topics religions Islam ProMunda Blog Right to religious freedom Religion & State Religious Freedom

Thomas Schirmacher, Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), testified in the British House of Lords in a meeting between Parliamentarians from the UK and from all over Latin America.

„Every religion and worldview has its extremist and violent wing“, the sociologist of religion said. „What changes over time, is the percentage clinging to it.“ Thus Christianity 100 years ago still accepted at large the use of state power to fight other religions or other confessions within Christianity, today only a very tiny minority is in favour of it.



Schirmacher, Bernidge, Currida © IIRF / Wikimedia

The wings prone to violence within Christianity, Jewish faith and non-religious worldviews are in retreat since 1950, but the wings prone to violence within Islam and Hinduism are growing and are steadily winning additional supporters. After all, peaceful Muslims and Hindus are in large numbers victims of the wings of their religions prone to violence, but it is obvious, that the extremist percentage within the two religions has risen a lot.

Schirmacher called upon the peaceful wings of religions and worldviews to fight for freedom of religion or belief over against the enemies of freedom of religion or belief within ones own religion.



About me



Archbishop and Professor Dr. Thomas Paul Schirmacher is President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights, President of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Co-President of Religions for Peace and President of the Bonn Abrahamic Center for Global Peace, Justice and Sustainability (BAC). [Read more ...](#)



SEARCH

Tags

Bible Book Catholic Church Christians Church History Democracy Dialog der Religionen Dialogue Discrimination Ecumenism Ethics Evangelical Alliance Evangelical Review of Theology Evangelicals Evangelization Family Germany Human Rights Human Trafficking IIGFM IIRF International Institute for Religious Freedom International Institute for

Testifying in the British House of Lords press release



Testifying in the British House of Lords

7. In addition to theological perspectives, Christians are interested in secular and empirical perspectives that examine reality in history and the present. We should become leaders in this area of research.

ETHICS • SOCIETY • THEOLOGY •
MISSION • SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

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Schirmacher thanks Hermann Gröhe for the “most momentous rebuke in all my life”

Monday June 25th, 2018 German parliament Christianity & Politics Persecution of Christians ProfMunda Blog Right to religious freedom Religious Freedom

Thomas Schirmacher published his speech at the opening of the religious freedom chair at the Gießen School of Theology (Freie Theologische Hochschule Gießen). In it he thanks the vice-chair of the CDU/CSU in the German Parliament and former health minister, Hermann Gröhe, for the “most momentous rebuke in all my life”.



(from left) Hermann Gröhe, Heiner Bielefeldt, Thomas Schirmacher © Mario Wemede/IRF



About me

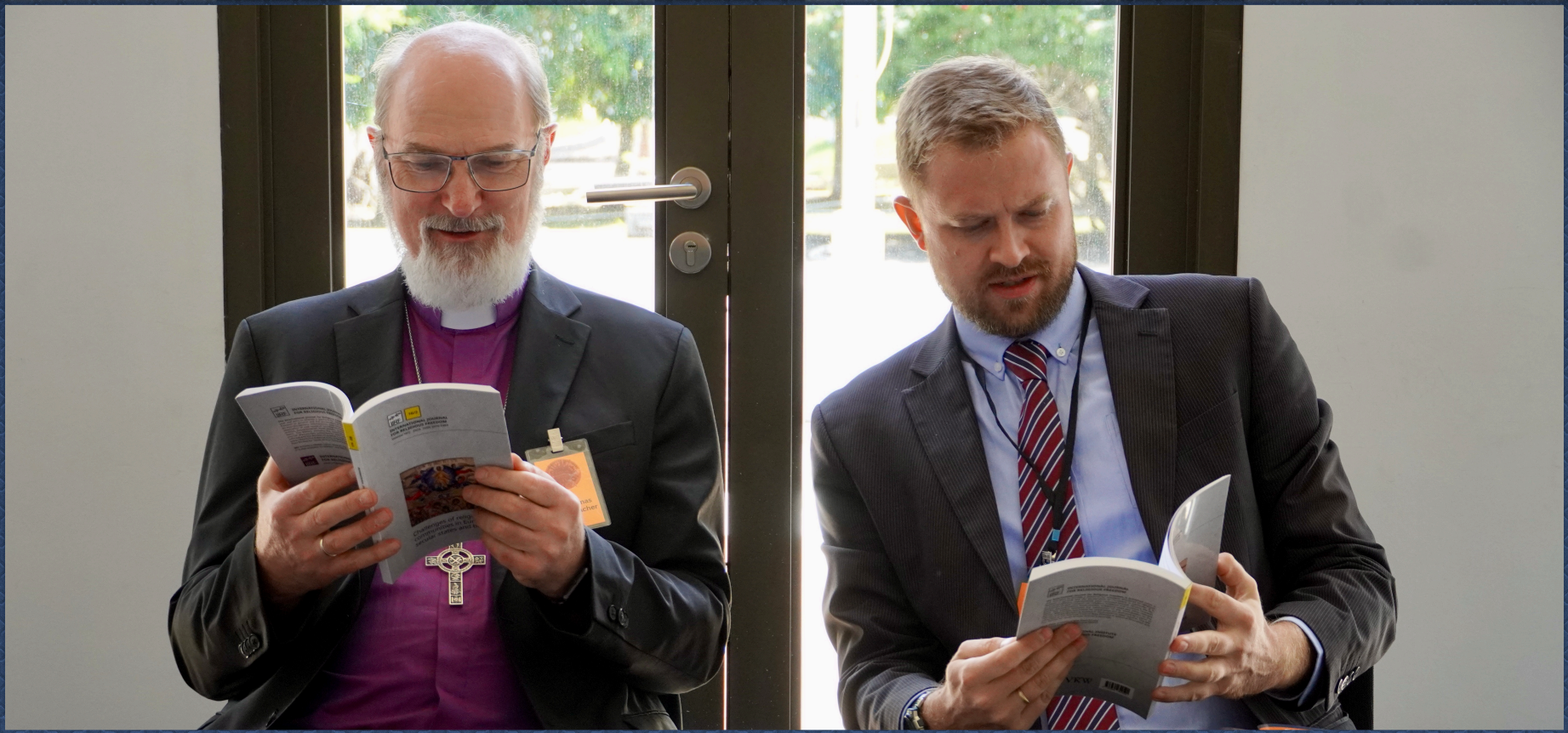


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Hermann Groeche - Schirmacher thanks him for the
“most momentous rebuke in all my life”



Hermann Groeche



IIRF Director Dennis Petri and IIRF President Thomas Schirmacher at the Faith and Freedom Summit IV in the All American Parliament in Panama reading their journal



Launching the VID in the German Parliament

Article

Tracking Religious Freedom Violations with the Violent Incidents Database: A Methodological Approach and Comparative Analysis

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* Correspondence: dpetri@ulacit.edu.cr

Abstract: Measuring and comparing religious freedom across countries and over time requires reliable and valid data sources. Existing religious freedom datasets are either based on the coding of qualitative data (such as the Religion and State Project or the Pew Research Center), on expert opinions (V-Dem or the World Watch List) or on surveys (Anti-Defamation League). Each of these approaches has its strengths and limitations. In this study, we present the Violent Incidents Database (VID), a complementary tool designed to collect, record, and analyze violent incidents related to violations of religious freedom based on media reports and other public sources. We critically describe the criteria and process for selecting, coding and verifying the incidents, as well as the categories and indicators used to classify them. We also compare the VID with other existing religious freedom datasets and show how the VID provides a complementary picture of the nature and dynamics of religious freedom violations. We offer a preliminary analysis of the data collected through the end of 2024 with selected figures for data visualization. We conclude by discussing anticipated improvements for the VID as well as its potential applications for policy makers, advocates, and practitioners.

Keywords: religious freedom measurement; Violent Incidents Database (VID); data collection and verification; comparative religious freedom datasets; policy and advocacy applications



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1. Introduction

In 2011, Thomas Schirrmacher wrote an opinion article on the challenges of counting the number of Christian martyrs in which he concluded, “What we need is a database in which for any year we could enter all the known, larger cases [of religious persecution] so that at the end of the year we not only have a usable estimate, but rather a situation where given the list, everyone can investigate the estimate’s resilience” [1]. This statement of need inspired the development of the Violent Incidents Database (VID), which collects, records and analyzes violent incidents concerning violations of religious freedom of all faiths, as input for both research and policy-influencing efforts. The VID is publicly accessible online

Quote VID 2011 Article

1. Introduction

In 2011, Thomas Schirrmacher wrote an opinion article on the challenges of counting the number of Christian martyrs in which he concluded, “What we need is a database in which for any year we could enter all the known, larger cases [of religious persecution] so that at the end of the year we not only have a usable estimate, but rather a situation where given the list, everyone can investigate the estimate’s resilience” [1]. This statement of need inspired the development of the Violent Incidents Database (VID), which collects, records and analyzes violent incidents concerning violations of religious freedom of all faiths, as input for both research and policy-influencing efforts. The VID is publicly accessible online at www.violentincidents.com (accessed on 9 May 2025).

Quote VID 2011 Quote

IIRF Reports

International Institute for Religious Freedom
Internationales Institut für Religionsfreiheit
Institut International pour la Liberté Religieuse



Prof. Dr. phil. Dr. theol.
Thomas Schirrmacher

The Armenian Question in Turkey's Domestic and International Policy

Bonn – Cape Town – Colombo

Occasional journal with special reports,
research projects, reprints and documentation

IIRF Reports 2015/2

Research on crypto-Armenians 2015



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

hearing on

Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey

August 14, 2025 | 10:30 am - 12:00 pm EDT
USCIRF.gov

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Erin Singshin...

Erin Singshinsuk



Soner Cagaptay

Testifying on Turkey at USCIRF

 Reports

Dennis P. Petri

Lifting the Mask on Undetected Religious
Freedom Violations

2025/8

International Institute
for Religious Freedom

Violent Incidence Database IIRF 2025/8

8. Thus, every known academic field of research has a potential to help describe, evaluate, and ameliorate issues of the suppression of religious freedom, whether the researchers or the victims belong to the Christian faith or to any other major or minor faith or worldview.

Schirmmacher visits the 'Athens of West Africa' in Freetown

Wednesday August 6th, 2025 ProMunda Blog

Professor Thomas Paul Schirmmacher visited [Fourah Bay College](#) in Freetown (Sierra Leone) as well as its current head, [Professor Kelleh Gbawuru Mansaray](#). He has been Vice Chancellor since 2022 – there is currently no Chancellor. Mansaray, who studied in Germany, showed Schirmmacher the gallery of college heads since 1827, illustrating the great influence German and Swiss scientists had. Schirmmacher and his team then visited several buildings of the college's faculties, which today form the centre of the [University of Sierra Leone](#).

[Fourah Bay College](#) in Freetown is also known as the 'Athens of West Africa' because it was the most important centre for higher education and intellectual life in the 19th and early 20th centuries and was the only institution of higher education of its kind in West Africa until the Second World War. It is also referred to as the 'Oxford of West Africa' because it has produced many prominent scientists and top politicians in West Africa. Many of the first African academics, clergy, teachers and later political leaders emerged from the college. It was the first Western higher education institution south of the Sahara and played a key role in shaping the development of an educated elite that went on to play decisive roles in administration, education, the church and politics in various West African countries.



About me



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Schirmmacher visits the 'Athens of West Africa'



With Peter Berger in Istanbul 2009

9. As a result, we need global cooperation with people of goodwill in research and advocacy, as well as a willingness to build and work within global networks related to these efforts.



Mali Human Rights Experts 2025



Nepal Human Rights Experts 2024



Riyadh Saudi Arabia with the Ecumenical Patriarch 2022