

# Bonner Querschnitte

*Bonn Profiles – Press Reports*

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## **BQ 331 – No. 45/2014**

### **Schirmmacher visits Lebanon**

#### **2015 – The Centennial Commemoration of the Genocide committed against Armenians is a more contemporary Issue than Anyone could have imagined**

(Bonn, 09.12.2014) The World Evangelical Alliance's Ambassador for Human Rights, Thomas Schirmmacher, was recently in Lebanon where he visited Catholicos Aram I and familiarized himself with the preparations underway for the centennial

commemoration of the genocide against Armenians. The audience given by Catholicos Aram I was the high point of a multi-day stay Schirmmacher had with his family at the Catholicos' official residence, the center of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Cilicia. Schirmmacher summarized as follows for the Lebanese media: "Even at the time when the trip was being planned, I was unable to foresee how current the topic is. What Armenian Christians, Syrian and Aramaic Christians, and other Christian minorities experienced and what has repeatedly been rekindled, has suddenly experienced a brutal return for these same groups of people."



Audience with Catholicos Aram I.

Under the direction of the bishop responsible for ecumenical relationships, Nareg Alemezian, Schirmmacher visited the following locations with his family:

1. The statue in Bikfaya, which was dedicated in 1965 in commemoration of the genocide, symbolizes the revival of the Armenian people. It is being renovated from scratch. The Schirmmachers also visited the adjacent theological educational establishment which is being completely refurbished.
2. The planned genocide museum in Byblos in the former 'Birds' Nest Orphanage,' in which missionaries cared for Armenian orphans. The building is being completely reconstructed and, in the meantime, items of remembrance are being collected from around the world.

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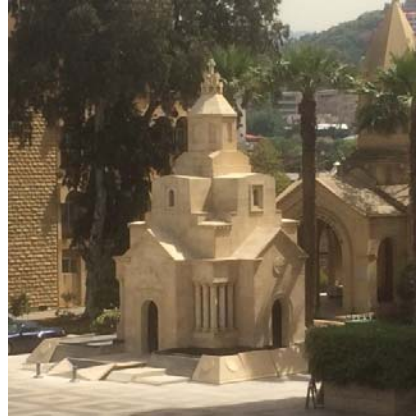
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In front of the building site of the upcoming genocide museum in Byblos with Bishop Nareg Amezian



The Chapel of the Martyrs in Antelias

3. Renovations on the property of Catholicos' official residence in Antelias near Beirut: The Martyrs' Chapel dating from 1936, St. George's Cathedral (1940), and the Cilicia Museum of Armenian Culture and Spiritual Heritage (1998).

Additionally, Schirmmacher paid courtesy calls on numerous church leaders located in Beirut, including Clemis Daniel Kourieh, the Archbishop of Beirut for the Syrian Orthodox Church and Metropolit Cyril Salim Busto, the Governor at the residence of the Antiochian Patriarch, the head of Eastern Catholic Christians, with whom Schirmmacher has maintained in contact for a number of years.

In Saida, a neighboring city of Beirut, Prof. Schirmmacher visited the presiding Sharia judge, Sheik Muhammad Abu Zaid. In a city tour which followed, the judge observed in a concerned manner what a shame it is that Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Saida are increasingly unable to live at peace with each other. Following this, Schirmmacher held a guest lecture at Al-Iman High School, which is a part of the Islamic Jinan University. The lecture was held before students and training staff and addressed the situation of Muslims in Europe and the advantages of religious freedom.



With the High Judges of the Sharia Court in Saida

Rector Kamel Kazbar expressed his desire that this sort of dialog occur more often.

The Catholicos of Cilicia is one of the three patriarchs of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Armenian Apostolic Church belongs to the seven monophysite churches in the Near East. The other six are the Coptic, Syrian, Ethiopian, and Eritrean Church as well as two Syrian Orthodox Churches in India.

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Aram I. Keshishian (b. 1947) is a cleric within the Armenian Apostolic Church and has been the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia since 1995. Since 1975 he has held important leading offices in the World Council of Churches, and from 1993-2003 he held the highest office as Moderator of the Central Committee of the WCC – this was the first time that a representative of an Eastern church held his position. In 1974, Aram Keshishian was co-founder of the Middle East Council of Churches. During his visit at the Vatican in 1997, he signed a joint ecumenical declaration with Pope John Paul II.

Schirmmacher has recently published a study under the Hanns Seidel Foundation on the significance of the Armenian question in Turkish domestic politics (see [BQ 278](#)). At the present time, he is conducting research on Armenian and Syrian diaspora commemorative culture for a symposium entitled The Confrontational Nature of Religious Identity Formation and Commemorative Culture in Europe since Early Modern Times (official German title: *Zur Konflikthaftigkeit religiöser Identitätsbildung und Erinnerungskultur in Europa seit der Frühen Neuzeit*) for the Federal Institute for Culture and History of the Eastern Europe (*Bundesinstitut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa*) at the University of Oldenburg.

### Links:

- <http://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/en/armenian-genocide-projects>
- <http://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/en/museum>
- [http://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/Cilicia\\_Museum](http://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/Cilicia_Museum)

### Downloads:

- [Photo 1](#): Audience with Catholicos Aram I.
- [Photo 2](#): Exchanging books with Catholicos Aram I.
- [Photo 3](#): Thomas Schirmmacher, Katholikos Aram I., Bishop Nareg Alemezian
- [Photo 4](#): The Genocide Statue in Bikfaya
- [Photo 5](#): Signing the Golden Book of the Armenian Theological Seminary in Bikfaya
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