

# Understanding origins of discrimination and reflecting on Christian responses

## A case study on Turkey

Wolfgang Häde<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This study examines the origins of discrimination against Christians in Turkey and explores appropriate Christian responses. Based on a case study of Turkish media, it identifies historical, political, and socio-psychological factors shaping negative perceptions. The paper highlights the enduring impact of Islamic and nationalist narratives, political strategies, and deep-rooted prejudices. Drawing on biblical teachings, particularly 1 Peter, it suggests responses such as embracing Christian identity, ethical engagement, mission commitment, and exemplary conduct. While persecution persists, a biblical understanding of suffering and mission can help Christians navigate challenges while maintaining faithfulness and integrity in Turkish society.

### Keywords

Christianity in Turkey, reactions to persecution, media in Turkey.

## 1. Introduction

In 2017, I published (in German) a study based on a qualitative content analysis of five daily newspapers in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> The study revealed the perception of Christians from the viewpoint of different socio-political milieus in Turkey.

The analysis discovered a rather diverse perception of Christians in nationalistic, fundamentalist Islamist, moderate Islamist, secular Kemalist and liberal democrat milieus.<sup>3</sup> However, alongside diversity there is a common perception of

1 Wolfgang Häde (D.Th. UNISA) has been working since 2001 among Protestant churches in Turkey. With the Germany-based Martin Bucer Seminary, he is engaged in theological training in Turkey and Germany. This article uses American English. Article submitted: 6 Sept. 2024; accepted: 15 Feb. 2025. Email: wghaede@gmail.com. ORCID: 0009-0008-5210-0835.

2 Wolfgang Häde, 2017. *Anschuldigungen und Antwort des Glaubens: Wahrnehmungen von Christen in türkischen Tageszeitungen und Maßstäbe für eine christliche Reaktion*. Berlin: LIT (Beiträge zur Missionswissenschaft/Interkulturellen Theologie, Vol. 38). See also Wolfgang Häde, 2013. Perceptions of Christians in Turkey? A study of the climate of accusations against Christians in Turkish newspapers, *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, 6(1/2): 65-84.

3 Häde, 2017, 169-170.

Christians as potentially untrustworthy and dangerous. Besides being suspicious of Christians, the newspapers – reflecting the milieu that they represent, but also influencing it – give the impression that prejudice in Turkish society is frequently exploited for political and ideological goals.

This article focuses on the origins of prejudice against Christians in Turkey and the reasons underlying these negative perceptions. It then reflects on responses to prejudice and discrimination that Christians in Turkey may consider. The suggestions draw from the New Testament book of 1 Peter, written to believers in a similar context to what Christians in Turkey face today. Before that, I begin with a short summary of the findings.

## 2. How are Christians perceived in Turkey?

In the eyes of the fundamentalist Islamic milieu,<sup>4</sup> Christians belong to a valid but outdated religion resisting the truth claims of the Qur'an. The nationalist milieu in Turkey<sup>5</sup> perceives Christians – and especially Christian missionaries – as an instrument of the Western attempt to weaken Turkey. The moderate Islamists<sup>6</sup> agree with this analysis. However, because of a greater confidence about the emergence of a strong Turkey, they can admit a certain – though subordinate – role for Christians in Turkey.

Secular Kemalists<sup>7</sup> and liberal Democrats<sup>8</sup> defend religious freedom as including Christians. Their suspicion against Christians is rather a distrust in the relation of conservative Christians to the ruling elite in the USA.

## 3. What changed in Turkey after 2005?

Since 2005,<sup>9</sup> Turkey has been experienced considerable political turmoil and change. Former Prime Minister and now President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been in power with his party, the AKP, since 2002-2003. Initially seen as a hope for a moderate Islam compatible with Western democratic-liberal values, he returned more and more to his own roots in a fundamentalist, anti-Western political Islam. Starting in 2015, Erdoğan's policies took a clear nationalist turn, which finally led to the coalition between Erdoğan's AKP and the nationalist party MHP starting from 2018.

4 As represented by the newspaper *Millî Gazete* (see Häde 2017, 125-138).

5 Newspaper *Yeniçağ*, Häde 2017, 115-125.

6 Newspaper *Yeni Şafak*, Häde 2017, 138-148.

7 Newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, Häde 2017, 153-160.

8 Newspaper *Milliyet*, Häde 2017, 148-153.

9 The study analyzed newspapers from November 2004 to January 2005. The rationale for choosing that period of time was a fiery discussion in Turkish media and society that originated from a seemingly serious attempt by the Turkish government to access the European Union, which brought more freedom to Christian activities. All of the analyzed newspapers joined this discussion and thereby revealed their respective perceptions of Christians.

In an article published in 2020,<sup>10</sup> I explained the changes in the political landscape and in the orientation of the newspapers I examined in my original study. However, I found that the general perceptions of Christians had not changed substantially.

There had been a decrease in negative media coverage of Christian activities in the years since 2007.<sup>11</sup> In recent years, however, there has been an increase in negative reporting about Christians and especially about their missionary activities.<sup>12</sup> The starting point for this increase seems to have been the arrest of US pastor and missionary Andrew Brunson in 2016, accompanied by the above-mentioned nationalist turn of Erdoğan and his party.

The years after 2016 saw a wave of deportations of foreign Christian church workers from Turkey.<sup>13</sup> In some cases, even foreign spouses of Turkish Christians were denied an extension of their residence permits. Some foreign Christians pursued court cases against their deportation or denial of entrance. Recently, a decision on some of these cases by the Turkish Constitutional Court (*Anayasa Mahkemesi*) denied the claim by the foreign Christians that their religious freedom had been infringed.<sup>14</sup>

## 4. What are the origins of such perceptions?

### 4.1. Historical origins

The historical Islamic and Koranic perception of Christianity as an outdated religion is still operative. The Koran and the status of Jews and Christians as *dhimmi* (“protected person”) allows for some religious tolerance towards them. However, Christians resisting the prophetic claims of Muhammad are characterized as liars (cf. Sura 3:71-72; 4:50).<sup>15</sup> The role as *dhimmi* implies sub-

10 Wolfgang Häde, 2020. Perceptions of Christians as reflected by Turkish newspapers: Analysis and development, *Islam und Christlicher Glaube/Islam and Christianity* 2:18-29.

11 The years 2006 and 2007 saw murders of Christians in Turkey, culminating in the massacre against three Christian men in the East Turkey city of Malatya on 18 April 2007. The murderers had been affected by the negative media coverage.

12 See for instance an article in *Yeni Şafak* on 20 January 2021 titled “The Again Growing Danger in Social Media: Missionary Activities” (“Sosyal medyada yeniden büyüyen tehlike: Misyonerlik”). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/5n8wbsbr>. Or the column of February, 19, 2023 in the Islamist daily newspaper *Yeni Akit* about “The ‘Missionaries’ and ‘Agitators’ of the Earthquake” (“Depremin ‘misyoner’ ve ‘provokatorleri’”), Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/4mzuzr4k>.

13 See an article of 14 July 2020 on the website of the TV Station “Oda TV” with the title: “We had said ‘Give the pastor, take the pastor.’ We don’t take any other pastor” (“Ver papazı al papazı” demiştik ... Bir daha papaz almayoruz”). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ye3czc85>. The headline of this article on the deportation of foreign pastors in Turkey alludes to the Turkish government’s perceived attempt to force the extradition of political opponent Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic cleric, from the US through the arrest of American pastor Andrew Brunson from 2016-2018.

14 See a relatively objective report about the decision in the Internet: <https://tinyurl.com/8fyzejmw>. The article in Haber7, however, sees the decision as “proof” that those Christians were agents for foreign countries: <https://tinyurl.com/m57kr8hk>.

15 See Häde 2017, 23.

ordination under the Muslim rulers.<sup>16</sup> Christian mission to Muslims is definitely barred.<sup>17</sup>

The experience of the invasion by Western Christian crusaders in the Middle East is maybe more than ever part of the common memory of Muslims, especially of Turks. “The Ottoman state was born on the frontier between Islam and Christendom.”<sup>18</sup>

During the decline of the Ottoman Empire, starting with its defeat in the Russian-Ottoman War (1768-1774), most of the people groups rebelling against the Ottomans and gaining their independence were Christians, often with the support of Christian countries.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the trauma of a broken empire for Turks is connected with the idea of Christians as the culprits. Starting from there, some intellectuals have developed a grand narrative of the centuries-old struggle between Islamic and Christian civilization.<sup>20</sup>

History is a heavy burden for today’s perceptions of Christians in Turkey. Only part of this historical burden can be covered here.

#### 4.2. *Political strategies*

Turkey is an illustration of Bernard Lewis’ thesis in his book *History: Remembered, Discovered, Invented*,<sup>21</sup> where he uses examples from the Middle East to show that history is sometimes invented for political purposes.

After the demise of the multi-religious and multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, the founders of the Republic of Turkey needed a new foundation for nationhood. From their viewpoint, nation building required a rewriting of history that Turkified non-Turkish Muslim people groups and excluded non-Muslims. “Ankara ... viewed the country’s Muslims as Turks and Christians as outsiders.”<sup>22</sup> As Christians couldn’t become “real Turks” because of their religion, it wasn’t supposed to be an option for a Turk to be or become a Christian.

The *Turkish-Islamic Synthesis*, developed in the 1970s by nationalist intellectual İbrahim Kafesoğlu, which gained significance in the Turkish political life of the

16 Clifford Edmund Bosworth, 1982. The Concept of *Dhimma* in Early Islam, in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 41. Bosworth aptly explains the role of *dhimmi*, which is derived from Sura 9:29: “The general purport of the verse is clear: the People of the Book are exempted from the general sentence of being combatted till death, the inexorable fate of obdurate pagans, but the price of their preservation is to be reduction to a humiliating status in society as second-class citizens, liable to a poll tax.”

17 Häde 2017, 28.

18 Bernard Lewis, [1961] 2002. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 3rd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 42.

19 See Häde 2017, 48-53.

20 See Häde 2017, 143-145 about interpretations published in *Yeni Şafak*.

21 Bernhard Lewis, [1975] 1987. *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*. 1st Touchstone ed. New York: Simon & Schuster.

22 Soner Cagaptay, 2005. *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* London: Routledge Chapman & Hall (Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern History), 156.

1980s, claims that the Turkish people found their true identity when they adopted Islam.<sup>23</sup> In the wake of converting to Islam, Turks became the savior of Islam against its enemies and the spearhead of Islamic expansion. Today, these ideas retain the potential to unite nationalists and Islamists in Turkey.

Once widespread distrust is present, the opportunity to use prejudice against Christians arises. The instrumentalization of prejudice against minorities for political causes is not limited to Turkey, but it can be seen time and again in Turkish political discourse. To name just two recent examples, in the early years of the Erdoğan administration, nationalist opposition figures cited vastly exaggerated numbers of Christian missionary activities as part of their propaganda against the Islamist government,<sup>24</sup> which then was accused of giving too much freedom to Christian missionaries in its attempt to gain access to the European Union. In 2020 the rededication of the famous Hagia Sophia as a mosque was certainly a move by President Erdoğan designed to please his political supporters.<sup>25</sup>

### 4.3. Socio-psychological origins

Socio-psychological origins of discrimination against Christians in Turkey are harder to demonstrate, because they are often unconscious. As stated by Gordon Allport in his classic work *The Nature of Prejudice*, the identities of societal groups or even nations are shaped by the distinction between *ingroups* and *outgroups*.<sup>26</sup> This distinction is inevitable. However, in contexts such as Turkey, the outgroups are often perceived not only as “the other,” but as an enemy.

Christians in contemporary Turkey are evaluated as strangers who pose a threat to the country's values and to societal order. Christof Sauer has shown convincingly that fear of the stranger may occur even in an environment where Christians and Muslims have lived side by side for centuries.<sup>27</sup>

Another important basis for prejudice and negative perception of Christians seems to be some kind of inferiority complex in light of the superiority of Western (Christian) countries during the time of colonialism and beyond, from which the Christian minorities within the Ottoman Empire benefited.<sup>28</sup> Since Erdoğan came to power, one of his main goals has been to replace this feeling of inferi-

23 See Ünal Bilir, 2004. *Der Türkische Islam als politisches und religiöses Weltbild in seinem historischen Kern von der II. Meşrûtiyyet-Periode bis zur Gegenwart*. (Diss. Doktor der Philosophie, Universität Hamburg), 44-45.

24 See Häde 2017, 1-5.

25 See Häde 2020, 24-29.

26 Gordon W Allport, [1954] 1979. *The Nature of Prejudice*. 25th anniversary edition. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 41-43.

27 See Christof Sauer, 2009. *The Religious Other as a Threat: Religions Persecution as an Expression of Xenophobia – a Global Survey of Christian-Muslim Convivence*. *Missionalia* 37: 88.

28 See Timur Kuran, 2011. *The Long Divergence. How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 189.

ority with a new consciousness of superiority as Muslims and as Turks, but still it appears that the Turkish people have not really arrived at a balanced point of identity and a balanced self-assessment.

#### 4.4. *Christian theological interpretations*

From a Christian perspective, historical, political or socio-psychological origins of discrimination against Christians are real but do not reflect the whole reality. Biblical-theological patterns of explanation are necessary not only where other explanations seem insufficient. Beyond the visible reality, there is an invisible reality that the apostle Paul characterizes as “eternal” (not “temporal,” 2 Cor 4:18<sup>29</sup>).

The apostle Peter presumes (1 Pet 2:4-8) that Christ as the “cornerstone” of God’s eschatological temple is “precious” to those who believe, but “a rock of stumbling and a rock of offence” to those who are not obedient to God’s claim in Christ. Vernon J. Sterk therefore correctly speaks about “the confrontational nature of the Gospel.”<sup>30</sup>

Jesus himself teaches his disciples that attacks against Christians will follow “for my name’s sake” (John 15:21). “The church suffers because of the hatred towards Christ by the world in rebellion against God.”<sup>31</sup>

At times, the extent of hatred against the very small minority of Christians in Turkey seems irrational and therefore more directly demands a spiritual explanation. The biblical book of Revelation reveals God’s enemy especially behind untrue accusations against the church of Jesus. Satan is called “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10).

We have summarized some of the origins of prejudice and discrimination of Christians in Turkey. Now we will turn to recommended responses by Christians to discrimination.<sup>32</sup>

### 5. **How should Turkish Christians respond to discrimination?**

Vernon J. Sterk indicates, in his study of persecution in Chiapas, Mexico, the great importance of proper Christian responses to persecution as decisive in determining the results for the church.<sup>33</sup> Persecution of Christians will not necessarily lead to church growth and revival. Wise and appropriate responses will help the church to survive and maybe even prosper in persecution.

<sup>29</sup> Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Bible.

<sup>30</sup> Vernon J. Sterk, 2019. *Surviving Persecution: How to Understand, Prepare, and Respond*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Christof Sauer, 2010. Bad Urach Statement – Towards an Evangelical Theology of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom for the Global Church in Mission, in Christof Sauer and Richard Howell (eds.), *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom – Theological Reflections*. Bonn: VKW. (Religious Freedom Series Vol. 2), 49.

<sup>32</sup> See Häde 2017, 197-260.

<sup>33</sup> See especially Sterk 2019, xxi-xxii.

### 5.1. *A biblical view of persecution*

One basic prerequisite for appropriate responses to discrimination should be a well-founded biblical view of persecution. Jesus Christ himself prepared his disciples for persecution and gave a proper interpretation: “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). The apostle Paul included persecution among the basics of teaching to new believers: “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). If Christian believers do not understand that suffering for the gospel is normal, they might be ill-prepared and disappointed once trouble approaches.

### 5.2. *Being sure of one's identity in Christ*

The main method of persecution in Turkey is a steady stream of negative opinions about and slander against Christians.

Christians need to protect their own perception of Christian identity. The new Christians might develop a ‘minority psyche’ with all their negative aspects as well. They might lose their courage to contribute positively to society and perceive themselves as inferiors. Alternatively, Christians might develop a sectarian attitude, trying to live in their own social ghetto and secretly feeling superior to “the others.”<sup>34</sup>

The role of a deep knowledge of true Christian identity as an antidote against the attempts by the persecutors to define Christian identity negatively becomes very obvious in 1 Peter, which is directed to Christians exposed to mainly verbal discrimination. Peter focuses on reminding the recipients in Anatolia of who they are in God’s perspective, i.e., elect and chosen by God (1:2; 2:4; 2:9). They are “living stones” (2:4) in the eschatological temple of God and are commissioned to function as a “royal priesthood” (2:9). Miroslav Volf aptly explains, “Only those who refuse to be defined by their enemies can bless them.”<sup>35</sup>

### 5.3. *Openness to criticism*

Many of the accusations in Turkey are and have been vastly exaggerated or outright lies.<sup>36</sup> That makes it difficult for Christians to engage with the criticism against them and especially against their missionary activities. However, Christians in Turkey should beware of completely ignoring all accusations. Arab Chris-

34 Wolfgang Häde, 2012. Persecution as a battle for defining identity: Reflections from Turkey, *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, 2012, 5(1): 94-95.

35 Miroslav Volf, 1994. *Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter*. Ex auditu 10, 21.

36 See Häde 2017, 122-125.

tian Tony Maalouf warns, “However, while missionaries and Christian workers should be ready to lay down their lives for the Gospel of Christ, one may need to stop and analyze some of the elements standing behind the rejection of the Gospel message in the Arab and Muslim context.”<sup>37</sup>

A qualitative engagement with criticism may lead to correction and even repentance where necessary, or to better apologetics in the Turkish context.<sup>38</sup> Christians have made initial attempts at Turkish-language apologetic writings.<sup>39</sup> In a 2021 article, Armand Aupiais names Turkish mainstream’s perception of *mişyoner faaliyetleri* (missionary activities) “the Missionary Chimera”<sup>40</sup> and offers a more thorough report on what drives the Protestant community, especially in Istanbul.<sup>41</sup>

#### 5.4. *Ethics guidelines for Christian mission*

As Elmer Thiessen has shown, not only is mission an ethical necessity for followers of Jesus Christ, but it must be done in an ethical manner, befitting the character and ministry of Jesus himself.<sup>42</sup>

In an effort to define and publish an ethics of Christian mission, several documents have been developed. The most prominent among them was the declaration “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct,”<sup>43</sup> released on 28 June 2011 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) of the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

As its title states, the short declaration gives “recommendations,” not binding rules. However, Christians in Turkey can point to this balanced document when they face accusations of strongly unethical methods of mission. Christians in Turkey are accused of promising money or education abroad for conversions, putting dollar bills in New Testaments that they distribute, baiting young Muslims with pretty girls, using threats to force conversion, and more.<sup>44</sup> Christian

37 Tony Maalouf, 2008. *Missions in the Context of Violence in the Middle East*, in Keith E. Eitel (ed.). *Missions in Contexts of Violence*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 378.

38 1 Peter 3:15: “And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.” “Answer” is here the equivalent of the Greek *apologia*, from which “apologetics” is derived.

39 See Häde 2007, 200–201.

40 Armand Aupiais, 2021. From Missionaries to Missionary Labour. Hypotheses on Contemporary Evangelicalism in Istanbul (Turkey), in Norig Neveu, Karène Summerer-Sanchez, and Annalaura Turiano (eds.). *Missions and Preaching: Comparing and de-compartmentalising the study of the missionary phenomenon. Middle East-Northern Africa*, Leiden, Brill, 92.

41 Aupiais, 92–124.

42 Elmer J. Thiessen, 2018. *The Scandal of Evangelism: A Biblical Study of the Ethics of Evangelism*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

43 World Council of Churches et al. 2011. *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/zr6tkf3u>.

44 See Häde 2017, 123–124; 134–135.



missionaries may present and indicate their adherence to the guidelines of the said declaration to distance themselves from any unethical methods of mission – regardless of whether such cases are real or just slander.

### 5.5. *Never accepting a Christianity without mission*

Attacks against Christians in Turkey are mostly directed against missionary activities. Awareness of unethical methods of missionary work – if they occur – must never lead to accepting a Christianity without mission. Even a study of Christian missiology by an Islamic scholar in Turkey concluded that for the Christian church this would be to deny its *raison d'être*.<sup>45</sup>

Theologically, it is not possible for the church not to join the *missio dei*, the mission of God to save a people for his own. “The notion of mission is intimately bound up with his [God’s] saving plan which moves from creation to new creation.”<sup>46</sup> This statement is biblically clear, but today it has to be defended against the Islamic concept of Christianity as a religion that has a right to exist, but basically as subordinate to Islam and without any missionary intention toward Muslims. The indispensability of mission as a call to faith in Christ is also under attack by a pluralistic theology of religion<sup>47</sup> and other derivatives of a Christianity that does not accept Jesus as the only name to find salvation (see Acts 4:12).

### 5.6. *Living a good life*

Peter wrote his first New Testament letter in a context that resembles the situation in today’s Turkey. There were verbal attacks against Christians. Neighbors of the followers of Jesus perceived them as strange (1 Pet 4:4), causing them to “speak against” Christians “as evildoers” (2:12). They had a tendency to “speak evil” and “falsely accuse” (3:16).

The main Christian response that Peter seems to recommend is a good life. Seeing “your good works” may even lead those who blame Christians to glorify God, i.e., to repent (2:12). Christians are called to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” by “well doing” (2:15). As a result, “they may be ashamed that falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ” (3:16).

Doing good things should be a strategy for Christians in Turkey as well. I saw a TikTok video a few weeks after the devastating earthquakes of 6 February 2023 in southeastern Turkey. A few religious Muslims were talking about the Christian ac-

45 Süleyman Turan 2011. *Misyoloji. Hristiyan Misyon Bilimi* [Missiology. Christian Science of Mission]. Ankara: Sarkaç, 18.

46 Andreas O. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien 2001. *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Missions*. Leicester: Inter Varsity, 25.

47 See for instance the book by its main proponent: John Hick, 1980. *God Has Many Names*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

tivities in earthquake relief. They complained that the young Christians were very friendly to the people and even cleaned a small park regularly. This behavior was interpreted as an evil missionary strategy. Many Turkish people wrote commentaries on the website that showed this video. The great majority of them praised the Christians and called on the accusers to start cleaning parks themselves.

### **5.7. *Enduring injustice***

However, 1 Peter and other apostolic writings never promise that an ethical approach in mission and good living will satisfy and convince everybody. Christians should use all ethically appropriate means to avoid or reduce persecution, but they should also be prepared to endure suffering.

Peter does not just invite Christians to be ready to suffer; he puts their sufferings in a deep Christological context. Christians are “called” to endure suffering “because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). For the apostle Paul, “to suffer for his sake” (Phil. 1:29) is counted a privilege. He even yearns for the “fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil 3:10). In countries like Turkey where Christians experience pressure, they must be taught that following Christ is not a guarantee that all troubles will be taken away but part and parcel of following the suffering Christ.

On this path, Christ promises special support to his followers. The Holy Spirit will speak through them in times of persecution (Matt 10:20; see also 1 Pet 4:14), and every single hair on their head is under the control of their heavenly Father (Matt. 10:30).

## **6. Conclusions**

In today's Turkey, we find a complex mixture of origins of prejudice and discrimination against the small Christian minority. The idea, dating back to early Islam, of Christians as a subordinate people inside an Islamic empire remains powerful. The long history of confrontation with “Christian” powers during the decline of the Ottoman Empire continued all the way up to the beginning of the Republic of Turkey. In the process of building the new nation, Christians were perceived as an ongoing danger rather than as contributing to the state and society.

From the perspective of the Bible and history, it would be wrong to expect that persecution will purify the church of Christ in Turkey. In contrast, the church needs purification and spiritual knowledge to be prepared for persecution. The church's response to prejudice and accusations will affect the outcome.

Christians in Turkey therefore need a clear biblical view of suffering as followers of the suffering Christ. A strong focus should be placed on believers' identity in Christ as an antidote to false definitions by their persecutors.

Leaders of the Christian community must be ready to honestly evaluate criticisms lodged against them and their missionary approaches. Ethical guidelines in mission might be helpful not only for self-correction, but also as a basis for public apologetics. However, the indispensability of active mission for the church of Jesus must never be denied.

A good and exemplary life within Turkish society is not only a requirement for Christian living but may also help to convince some members of the society to trust their Christian neighbors more than the accusations against them. However, suffering for the sake of Christ will always be part of the authentic Christian life.

Further research would be warranted to assess how Christians in Turkey – and especially the Protestants, who are most active in mission – actually respond to persecution.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> A 2017 study examines the efforts of religious minorities in Turkey to secure their religious freedom. However, the study focuses on the (non-Christian) Alevis and two important Orthodox minorities, the Armenians and the Arameans. See: Mehmet Bardakci, Annette Freyberg-Inan, Christoph Giesel, and Olaf Leisse, 2017. *Religious Minorities in Turkey: Alevi, Armenians, and Syriacs and the Struggle to Desecuritize Religious Freedom*, London: Palgrave MacMillan.

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