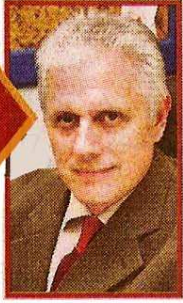


All world religions proselytize



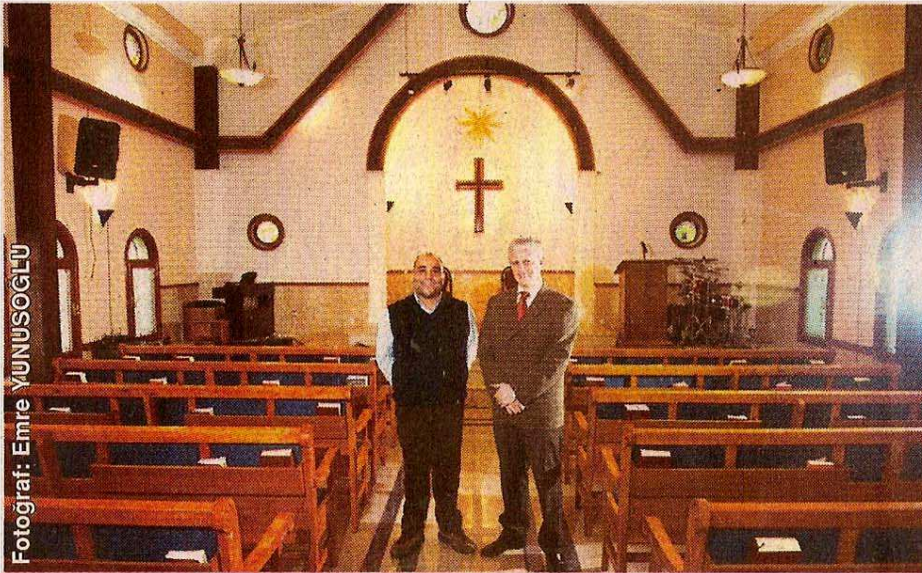
► Carlos Madrigal:

A member to any religion has the responsibility to make his/her religion known. In this respect, both Christians and Muslims proselytize. Obviously with the word "proselytize," I do not mean to include political connotations or to express the idea that we work or intend to convert people by desecrating other faiths or holy values. Of course we must make our religion known, but in a way that does not make society feel threatened.

Fotograf: Emre YUNUSOĞLU

Support from the Ministry of Religion to the first civilian Church

in its 10th Anniversary



The first Turkish civilian church is celebrating its 10th anniversary in Altintepe. Representatives of the Ministry of Religion, the Istanbul Governor's office, the local district, the Union of Spanish Protestant Churches, and several foreign consulates attended the anniversary celebrations of the Istanbul Protestant Church Foundation.

■ Sefa KAPLAN

Within a lush garden in the Altintepe neighborhood of Istanbul sits a very discrete building. It's so discrete that if it were not for the sign on the door and the shape of its windows you wouldn't even realize it was a church. This is the first civilian-based church opened in Turkey. In other words, it is the first church outside of ethnic churches such as the Armenian, Syrian, or Greek churches that have been opened. We might as well get to the point: It's a church started by missionaries. Its interior is rather elegant and reminiscent of churches we are used to seeing in Europe, but it has the lighting that is so characteristic of our mosques. The pastor, Carlos Madrigal, is an author who has written several books on Christianity and represented his faith in the media. The president of the foundation, Timur Topuz, became a Christian 19 years ago and was a key element in the establishment of the foundation 10 years ago.

"It's a Miracle of Tolerance"

This is the expression that members of the church use as they describe their process of establishment. After the violent massacre of missionaries in Malatya and the priest assassinated in Trabzon, this well seems a tangible miracle indeed. The Istanbul Governor's Office did not create any difficulties for them, and even today you can see telegrams by the ex-president and ex-prime minister on the church's bulletin board congratulating the inauguration that took place some 10 years ago. Everything is approved by Turkish legislation. "We're the only church that is constantly open within the borders of the Kartal, Maltepe, and the Pendik districts," state both Carlos Madrigal and Timur Topuz as they have a hard time covering their proud smile.

The First Church of the Republic

This subheading might cause some misunderstanding. But this church is in fact the first inaugurated church which does not belong to ethnic minorities: "After the official registration in the zoning code, our church opened its doors as the first official church outside of those that belong to ethnic Christian minorities." Have they not faced any setbacks or been scared by murders? Sure they have. Both of their offices in Eskisehir and Izmit were assaulted and even though the police caught the suspects, they were released on grounds of "insanity." However, the Malatya murders really affected them. Both Topuz and Madrigal state the following:

The Murders Scared Them

"Only then did we fully realize that our lives were at stake. After that day we developed security measures that were previously unthinkable. Shortly after the Malatya murder, a group of young men came to our church. We asked for their ID, and when we realized they were underage we urged them to get a letter of parental consent. The next time these young men came they noticed we had installed cameras. They covered their heads with caps and wanted to enter again but this time trying to cover their IDs. We did not allow them in, and next time around they threatened us via emails."

The beautiful side of this story is that whenever the church requested protection from the Ministry of Religion and local authorities they were speedily attended to and received much support. Maybe we are truly living a miracle of tolerance and yet we're not even aware of it..

As if one were to change a soccer team



► Timur Topuz: Some people want to change their faith as if they were switching soccer teams. Generally when we face people who make these sort of requests we reply saying: "All bookstores sell New Testaments. Buy one, read it, and if you believe and apply what is taught, you are practicing Christianity." The New Testament compares the person who finds Jesus this way to a man who finds a hidden treasure in his property. Should the neighbors of a man like this not rejoice with him for having found such a treasure?

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