

Templeton Prize for Religion Writing Awarded to Thomas Gärtner in Dresden

The John Templeton prize for the "European Religion Writer of the Year 2004" has been awarded to Dr Tomas Gärtner, a freelance journalist from Dresden, Germany. With the support of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony, the award ceremony took place in the historical Dreikönigskirchen (Church of the Three Kings) of Dresden, 21 September.

The aim of the award is to honour journalists who write about religion in the secular press with accuracy, impartiality and with an ecumenical spirit. It is administered by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) on behalf of the prestigious "John Templeton Foundation".

Dr Gärtner's entry for the Templeton prize included three articles published by the daily newspaper "Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten" (DNN). "The articles he has submitted", said the judges, "although local in focus, address broad issues of the place of religion in a highly secularised part of Europe, Eastern Germany". Tomas Gärtner, the judges added, "tells his stories with objectivity, permitting readers to draw their own conclusions rather than imposing judgements upon them."

The prize, which includes a certificate and a check for 5,000 Swiss Francs, was given on behalf of the Templeton Foundation by the Rev. Theodore Gill, Senior Editor of the World Council of Churches. Rev. Gill recalled Sir John Templeton's passion for "research into the interaction of religion, modern science, technology and the cultures of our time".

OKR Christof Vetter, spokesperson of the Evangelical Church in Germany, underlined the value of Dr Gärtner's reporting on the life of the local church: "Church is where you can see the bell-tower, where people meet to worship and to help each other. The Templeton Prize has been awarded to someone who does not write about grand assemblies and conferences, but about the grass-roots".

"It is a high art to write about religion in a secular world", said Jochen Bohl, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony. Both as a reader and as a bishop, he said he appreciates Dr Gärtner's "solid knowledge of the church and of theological issues".

Thanking the Templeton Foundation and CEC, Dr Gärtner stated he tries "to tell people about the church, not only Christians, but especially those who are strangers to the church". There are many interesting things to report about the church, he said, "besides the three topics we are always beating to death: broken-down churches, not enough money, departing members. Not only is there a wealth of art in the churches, of unique examples of cultural history, of architectural beauty; there is also a wealth of people who don't make pious speeches, but whose faith opens their eyes to the suffering of this world, and they are doing something about it in very practical ways".

For more information see the press release at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/pr-cq0537e.shtml>

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The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of some 125 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 associated organisations. CEC was founded in 1959. It has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.