

Gratitude and Acceptance Speech for FTH Gießen

on the occasion of receiving the "Science award"

on Religious Freedom and persecution of Christians

James Bultema, 27 January 2026

THANK YOU, Dr. Buchholz, Prof. Kauder, FTH Faculty, Students, and Guests:

What a great honor it is for me to receive this Science Award on Religious Freedom 2026! I am humbled by your kind recognition of my work, and I overflow with gratitude for this deeply meaningful award. I trust you'll be pleased to hear that I was able to do one more revision of Springer Nature's marketing data for Free Enough to Grow, which will be an open-access book to maximize readership. The back cover and online description will now include mention of this honorific award from FTH Gießen. And I also look forward to gifting the FTH Library with a hard-cover copy of the book after its soon-to-come publication.

The Acknowledgements section of my book is filled with names of family members and other persons to whom I am indebted for their staunch support and assistance during my research and writing. From among them all, I am compelled to mention here and now one in particular: my promoter, Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer. I do wish he could have been here this evening, for, with regard to the success of my PhD project and this much-appreciated award, I feel most indebted to him for his trustworthy guidance and outstanding support.

In 2005, after Renata and I had lived in Turkey for 15 years, a Finnish Protestant missionary named Trevor died at a rather young age from cancer. Trevor had spent roughly 20 years working in Turkey, and he was particularly influential in noticeably advancing the right of assembly for Turkish and foreign Protestants in the country. That noticeable advancement of the right to assemble and worship was an example of the still imperfect but sufficient religious freedom in Turkey, which enabled Protestant churches to emerge and exist there.

Be that as it may, when Trevor died, I remember being struck not so much by his passing, I confess, but rather by the fact that unrecorded and irretrievable stories and insights regarding his missional experiences in Turkey died with him. It was shortly thereafter that I formulated the working draft of a research question, and that led to my interviewing and recording Turkish-Protestant-related stories of, ultimately, over 100 individuals, several of whom have since also died. With the prize money from this award, I intend to further my interviewing and research of the Turkish Protestant movement, focusing on 2016-2026.

I share this especially with you students. You're getting a fantastic education here at FTH Gießen. But may your education here prove to be just the preface of your lifelong learning, in which you uncover intriguing questions of great value, and investigate them with great passion, and then offer plausible explanations with great effect. By doing so, not only will you honor the God of all truth, but you will also leave this world a wiser place.

THANK YOU once again for the award, thank you for listening, and may God bless you all.