

*Awards Ceremony for the 2020 Balzan Prizes
in the Presence of the President of the Italian Republic*

*Thursday 18 November 2021, 11:00 a.m.
Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*

**Speech by the President of the Board of the International Balzan
Foundation "Prize"**

Alberto Quadrio Curzio

Mr. President, please accept our heartfelt thanks for the honour that again this year you bestow on the 2020 Balzan Prizes awards ceremony, held in 2021 due to the dramatic events of the past two years. 2021 bears considerable historical significance for the Balzan Foundation because sixty years have gone by since the Balzan set out on its mission in September 1961. The origins were characterized by the foundation's scientific-cultural and humanitarian aims, and since then in the field of the "academic sciences" 154 prizes have been awarded to 170 winners (as some prizes were awarded *ex equo*), while 11 other prizes went to individuals or organizations for a special Balzan Prize for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples.

Two dates and two symbolic prizes mark the beginning of the Balzan Prize and its relations with the office of the President of the Italian Republic. The Prize has always been characterized by its non-sectarian nature, whether in the realm of science or culture, and by its dedication to fostering dialogue among peoples. In 1961, the Prize for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples was awarded to the Nobel Foundation as an extraordinary model for the promotion of science, with strong cultural and humanitarian implications. In October 1962, on the Capitoline Hill in Rome, King Gustaf VI Adolf of Sweden received the Balzan Prize from the President of the Italian Republic, Antonio Segni, on behalf of the Nobel Foundation. The two heads of state thus also denote the institutional character of the Prize.

In 1962 the Prize for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples was awarded to Pope John XXIII in the Basilica of St. Peter's on 10 May 1963 by Senator Giovanni Gronchi, former President of the Italian Republic. On the following day, the Pope made a public lay appearance at the Quirinal, where he was received by the President of the Italian Republic, Antonio Segni, to attend the awards ceremony for the other four annual Balzan Prizes, which went to Karl von Frisch (an Austrian biologist), Paul Hindemith (a German composer), Andrej Kolmogorov (a Russian mathematician), and Samuel Eliot Morison (an American historian). Thus, after paying homage to the Nobel in 1961, in 1962, the Balzan established its distinct identity by awarding prizes to four individuals in three fields that were not part of the Nobel sphere – music, mathematics and history – and one in biology, which was becoming increasingly more important.

Therefore, in these past 60 years, the Balzan Foundation has awarded 81 prizes in the humanities, or “literature, moral sciences, and the arts”, and 73 in the sciences, or “physical, mathematical and natural sciences, and medicine”, as well as 11 prizes for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples. The Balzan Prize is thus part of a history made of extraordinary individuals, each of whom has contributed to the progress of science, culture, and humanity. In this way, the desire of Eugenio Balzan and his daughter Lina as expressed in the Articles of Association of the Balzan Foundation “Prize” have been implemented:

« The Foundation’s objects are of an international character. Its object is the promotion, throughout the world, of culture, science and the most meritorious initiatives in the cause of humanity, peace and brotherhood among peoples, regardless of nationality, race or creed. » (*article 2*).

To this end, there is crucial collaboration between the International Balzan Foundation “Prize”, which operates under Italian law at its Milan headquarters to decide on the prizes, and the “Fund” Foundation, which operates under Swiss law at its Zurich headquarters as custodian and administrator of the assets. I also express my warmest thanks to Gisèle Girgis-Musy, President of the Balzan “Fund” Foundation, whose great professionalism is highly appreciated. The annual change of location of the awards ceremony also denotes the collaboration between the Italian and Swiss foundations: the ceremony is held one year in Rome and another in Bern, thus underlining the institutional nature of the Prize.

Although the winners of the Balzan Prize are specialists in a variety of separate disciplines in the sciences and humanities, they are distinguished representatives of one knowledge, which is universal and cannot be reduced to oversimplified schemes. They are aware that we will always pursue knowledge like a frontier that lies before us, but that we may never completely reach.

This is why the Balzan also invests in young researchers. In fact, since 2001 it was decided that half of the Prize should go to research projects coordinated by the prizewinners and involving young researchers. What is more, in 2012 “InteR-La+B” was launched, an annual interdisciplinary seminar where young people, most of whom are from the Balzan research groups, meet with some of the Prizewinners to discuss interdisciplinary themes. Since its inception, the themes of the seminars have included Experiment, Energy, Time, Utopia, Innovation, Light, Memory, Brain and Pandemics.

Every year, after the ceremony, the promotes an interdisciplinary Forum, where the winners of the current year’s prize (this year 2020) present their research and discuss it. This is all coordinated by the Chairman (Luciano Maiani) and one of the Vice Chairmen (Peter Kuon) of the General Prize Committee. I thank them for their work. Finally, there is an *Overview* of the research projects of the winners from past years which the young members of the research projects can refer to.

The Balzan is also fully aware that at the frontiers of the twenty-first century, the world’s institutions must be dedicated to human development and sustainability, and here every

form of supranational and international cooperation is becoming increasingly more important.

As President Emeritus of the Lincei, I will conclude by thanking the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, which is our host today, and by recalling two of its founders, Federico Cesi and Galileo Galilei. In the late Renaissance, that is, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, they established this paradigm which has been handed down: “the freedom to philosophize *in naturalibus*”, which shows Unity in the distinct but complementary parts of Knowledge.

The founders also defended this paradigm when the Church Inquisition tried to quash the freedom of Knowledge. Albeit in different contexts, this is a situation which has not been snuffed out even today.