

Balzan prizes awarded to 4 academics

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An Anglo-American expert on the evolution of the universe and an Irish-born historian of the rise of Christianity and the cult of the saints are two of the four winners of this year's Balzan Prizes.

Astronomer Joseph Silk and historian Peter Brown joined Polish philosopher Bronislaw Baczko and Russell Lande of the United States in winning the 750,000 Swiss franc (euro670,000; \$950,000) prize, which seeks to highlight new or emerging areas of research and to sustain overlooked fields of study.

Silk, of Johns Hopkins University, was credited with pioneering work on the early evolution of the universe. The Balzan judges lauded Princeton University-based Brown for his influential studies on the cult of saints, the body and sexuality and the rise of Christianity.

Baczko, who is based at the University of Geneva, was cited for his contributions to the consequences of the Enlightenment on the French Revolution. And judges hailed Lande, based at the Imperial College in London, for his work on theoretical population biology.

The Balzan foundation, based in Milan and Zurich, was established by the family of Italian journalist Eugenio Balzan, who fled his homeland to Switzerland in the 1930s to oppose Fascist pressure on the media.

The winners announced Monday must dedicate half of their prize money to continuing research work, preferably involving young scholars.

Each year, the [prizes](#) are awarded in different subjects. Next year they will be awarded in jurisprudence, musicology, solid [earth sciences](#) and epigenetics.

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