

The 2026 Balzan Prize Subject Areas

The Social Science of Digital Technology

In the 21st century, successive generations of digital technology – from the Internet to artificial intelligence – have penetrated populations across the world and brought change to our social, economic and political lives. These technologies shape individual, collective, and organisational behaviour, mediate social and economic interactions and relationships, and transform social and informational networks. They impact upon nearly every human endeavour, from how we find love to how we make war. They allow new forms of state design, while challenging institutions tasked with maintaining social, economic, and political order and cohesion. This Prize will recognize the achievements of those who have faced the challenge of understanding the continually changing relationship between society and technology over a sustained period.

Jewish Studies

Seven years after the awarding of Islamic Studies in 2019, a 2026 Balzan Prize in the humanities will be awarded for outstanding scientific achievements in Jewish Studies. This discipline encompasses any type of effort to produce scientific knowledge relating to Jews and Judaism throughout history: religious, cultural, social, or political.

Jewish Studies is also an interdisciplinary academic field, including sociology, anthropology, archaeology, law, area studies, literature, history, art history and musicology, linguistics, religious studies, Old Testament philology, and subsequent doctrinal studies.

Biodegradable Polymers from Renewable Sources

The Balzan Prize in Biodegradable Polymers from Renewable Sources is intended to honor pioneering research that creates sustainable, high-performance materials from renewable resources. The Prize especially recognizes advances that enable scalable and cost-effective development in this category of polymers, which has seen significant innovations in recent years.

By addressing global challenges such as plastic pollution, microplastic contamination, and fossil fuel dependence, the Prize will highlight innovations with potential for transformative impacts across industrial applications in - for instance - packaging, textile, or biomedical technologies.

Molecular evolution: Decoding patterns of genomic change

Evolution leaves genetic fingerprints in the genomes of biological populations by changing heritable traits over successive generations. Research in molecular evolution leverages these fingerprints to describe and explain how natural selection and genetic drift shapes genomes over evolutionary history.

This Prize will recognize groundbreaking research in the field of molecular evolution ranging from the development of computational, statistical, and mathematical methods to empirical approaches such as experimental evolution or field studies.

The Balzan Prize for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples

The Balzan Prize for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples is a special prize awarded at intervals of no less than three years. It is destined to a person or an organisation that has achieved distinction for outstanding humanitarian work.

The Prize 2026, the thirteenth in the history of the Foundation, will be announced on 7 September, and in November, it will be presented to the winner during the awards ceremony in Rome.

This prize also has strong historical significance for the Balzan Foundation.

On 26 October **1962**, King Gustav Adolf of Sweden, on behalf of the **Nobel Foundation**, received the Balzan Prize for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples from the hands of the President of the Italian Republic, Antonio Segni. It was the first awards ceremony in foundation history, and was held in Rome, in the Hall of the Horatii and the Curiatii in the Palazzo dei Conservatori.

On 11 May **1963**, again in Rome, **Pope John XXIII** entered the Quirinal Palace – the former papal palace – to take part in the Balzan Prize awards ceremony. It was the first time in centuries that the pontiff of the Catholic Church left the Vatican to enter a State institution. The ceremony was also John XXIII's last public engagement, as he died at the age of eighty-two shortly thereafter, on 3 June 1963.

On 1 March **1979**, **Mother Teresa of Calcutta** accepted her Balzan Prize from the hands of then President of the Italian Republic, Sandro Pertini. This was the first time that she received a great international award for her tireless missionary work.

Previous Prizewinners for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples

1961	Nobel Foundation
1962	H.H. John XXIII
1978	Mother Teresa of Calcutta
1986	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR
1991	Abbé Pierre
1996	International Committee of the Red Cross, endeavours in Hospital in Afghanistan
2000	Abdul Sattar Edhi
2004	Community of Sant'Egidio - DREAM programme
2007	Karlheinz Böhm, Organisation Menschen für Menschen, Aid for Ethiopia
2014	Vivre en Famille
2018	Terre des hommes – Programme SIMSONE
2023	Fondazione Francesca Rava