

PRESS RELEASE

2018 award for Professor Dr. William (Bill) Martin of the Heinrich-Heine-Universität

Klüh Foundation honours Düsseldorf university professor for his research into the origin of life

Düsseldorf / Berlin, 18 May 2018 - the 2018 prize of the Klüh Foundation for the Promotion of Innovation in Science and Research is awarded to Prof. Dr. William (Bill) Martin (61) of the Institute for Molecular Evolution at the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf for his research on the origin of life on earth. Based on genetic comparisons of living cells today, the scientist has traced the common ancestor of all life, which, according to the results of the research, originated from hot deep-sea vents. The award, which includes prize money of 25,000 Euros, was presented yesterday at a formal ceremony at Hotel Adlon, Berlin. SE Dr. Heiner Koch, Archbishop of Berlin, illuminated the issue from the church's point of view and probed the elementary issues during the award ceremony in his lecture "The Relationship between Science and Religion".

According to the internationally acclaimed research result of the Düsseldorf-based scientist and his team, all the bacteria, fungi, plants, animals and also humans that exist today evolved from LUCA (Last Universal Common Ancestor). Our "forefather" liked it hot and based his metabolism on carbon dioxide, hydrogen and nitrogen. The diet of the unicellular organism without a nucleus could have included iron and nickel, sulphur and selenium.

The ZEIT quotes the distinguished biophysicist Professor Dieter Braun from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, for whom the present research results represent "the soundest study in this field". For the first time, the newspaper reports, researchers have tried to make the link from all the available genetic information back to the very first genetic sequence. This field is the biggest mystery of humanity: how did life on our planet come about.

With the construction of the so-called "Last Universal Common Ancestor" - LUCA - Prof. Martin has received a great deal of attention worldwide. Prof. Coordt von Mannstein, Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Klüh Foundation, spoke in his laudatory speech of a "scientist of world rank", who deserves to be distinguished. Von Mannstein: "He publishes regularly and almost self-evidently in the most important scientific journals Science and Nature. Most scientists are happy to get an essay published in one of these journals once in an academic lifetime, Bill Martin does it annually".

Bill Martin, born in Bethesda in the US State of Maryland, has been Professor of Ecological Plant Physiology in Düsseldorf since 1999, and of Molecular Evolution since 2011. His original works have been quoted almost 30,000 times. He has been awarded numerous honours around the world, since 2008 Martin has been a member of the North Rhine-Westphalian Academy of Sciences, Humanities and the Arts.

Evolution or creation - the big controversy. As a co-speaker alongside Düsseldorf's world-famous scientist, the Klüh Foundation invited Berlin's Archbishop Dr. Heiner Koch, a native of Düsseldorf, who has held the high ecclesiastical office in the capital since 2015.

On the subject of religion, the scientist Bill Martin says: "Science and religion are not alternatives within the same category. They relate to very different basic needs and life experiences of people. Science helps us to bring things together logically. Faith gives us orientation, security and meaning. I like to say to young scientists 'above all, look after your family and your children, because one thing is certain: science will never love you'."

The Foundation for the Promotion of Innovation in Science and Research, founded in 1987 by the company's owner Josef Klüh to mark the 75th anniversary of the Düsseldorf family business Klüh Service Management has, since then, awarded foundation prizes totalling 735,000 Euros. In recent years, the foundation has supported a wide range of medical research. Previous sponsorship awards were, as a rule, awarded for medical research.

About Klüh:

Klüh Service Management GmbH is a global multi-service provider. Founded in 1911, the company has decades of experience in the area of infrastructural services and offers service packages with a high level of vertical integration. Alongside cleaning, its fields of activity cover hospital services, catering, building management, security and personnel services and airport services. With around 49,500 employees across seven nations, the company achieves sales of 803.25 million Euros (2017).

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