

Cérémonie Docteur Honoris Causa

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Your Excellency Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in France, Mr President of the Royal Academy of Belgium, Mr Minister, Mr NASA Attaché to the US embassy in Paris, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is a great honor for me to welcome you at Paris Observatory, in this prestigious Cassini room, witness of the rich history of this place, and which has seen so many illustrious characters over the centuries, such as for instance François Arago, or Urbain Le Verrier, and many others.

I note that many of these famous astronomers who stayed at Paris Observatory during its history were coming from foreign countries.

Notorious examples are the Italian Jean-Dominique Cassini himself who gave his name to this very room, the Dutch Christian Huygens, the Danish Ole Roemer, and of course the German Alexander von Humboldt who was a very close friend of François Arago,

the American George Ritchey (the one of the famous Ritchey-Chrétien telescope design),

and the Belgian Paul Melchior who has inspired several astronomers from this institute into research on tides, tidal interactions and the earth rotation.

This list of famous characters who have helped to write the history of this Observatory shows how well this institution has been inserted for many decades, even centuries, in the world-wide concert of astronomy and astrophysics.

I can add of course that this international presence of Paris Observatory, which has grown over the centuries, constitutes today one of its major priorities.

And it is this will to promote international collaboration which has motivated us some years ago to establish the title of Doctor Honoris Causa, which we deliver today to three colleague scientists of great talent and of equally great fame.

All three have maintained over the years very strong links with researchers of Paris Observatory, and can therefore be considered, each one in his or her specific area, as a symbol of our international exposition.

This is one of the reasons which are driving us today to express to them our deep gratitude and profound admiration.

These three colleagues that we have chosen to honor this year represent three different areas of research and come from three different countries with which Paris Observatory has had a long and fruitful tradition of collaboration.

Ladies first, so I will start with Belgium. Collaborations between scientists of Paris Observatory and Belgian scientists are so numerous that I will not even attempt to list them.

Today, we are thinking specifically of the areas of celestial reference systems, geodesy, earth rotation, as well as planetology, which are the areas of research of Prof. Véronique Dehant, member of the Royal Academy of Science and of the Royal Observatory of Belgium.

These research themes are very important at Paris Observatory, they have been developed for many years in common with Belgian scientists and more specifically with the Royal Observatory of Belgium,

and Prof. Véronique Dehant has played a central part in this fruitful collaboration. By attributing to her the title of Doctor Honoris Causa, Paris Observatory wishes to recognize her remarkable achievements in this collaborative research.

The relations that Paris Observatory entertains with Germany are also very numerous and fruitful.

They cover pretty much all research activities at Paris Observatory, from observation to theory, from ground to space, from planets to galaxies and cosmology.

And it is precisely this richness and variety of scientific relations with German institutes that we have chosen to honor this year by attributing the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to Prof Reinhard Genzel, director of the Max Planck Institut für Extraterrestrische Physik in Garching bei München.

Prof Genzel is a world renowned astrophysicist, expert in galactic and extragalactic physics, and also well known for his strong involvement in instrumental developments in the infrared and sub-mm ranges, on the ground and in space, many of them in collaboration with teams of Paris Observatory.

We are happy to honor him today for his exceptional career and his long history of collaboration with our Observatory.

Last but not least, come the USA.

I don't think it is necessary to recall how strong our scientific relations are with so many institutes in the US, in absolutely all areas of astronomy and astrophysics.

As a matter of fact, we already have a long list of doctors Honoris Causa from the United States, a list which is going to get longer by one unit this year, with Prof Thomas Phillips, from CALTECH.

Prof Phillips is one of the very few pioneers of millimeter and sub-millimeter astronomy.

This is an area where both CALTECH and Paris Observatory have played and continue to play a major role.

Prof Thomas Phillips has not only had an outstanding, widely recognized career in this area, but he has also played an immense role, directly or indirectly, in the development of sub-mm astronomy at Paris Observatory.

For all these reasons, we have decided to honor him today with the title of doctor Honoris Causa of Paris Observatory.

I don't want to use too much of your time, and I certainly do not want to further delay the ceremony.

But let me just express once again how honored and happy I am of the presence of all of you, around our three new doctors Honoris Causa who represent the very best of the international scientific community,

and who constitute for all of us and more particularly for young researchers among us, outstanding examples to be followed.

I also wish that the attribution of these three titles of doctor Honoris Causa will reinforce friendship and mutual recognition between Paris Observatory and scientific communities of the three great countries which we honor today :

Belgium, Germany and the United States of America.

Thank you.