

Belief in aliens doesn't negate faith in God, Vatican says

The Catholic Church's chief astronomer says any extra-terrestrial being would also be a 'part of creation.'

VATICAN CITY -- Believing that there may be extraterrestrial life does not contradict a faith in God, the Vatican's chief astronomer said in a recent interview.

Father Jose Gabriel Funes, the Jesuit director of the Vatican Observatory www.vaticanobservatory.org was quoted as saying the vastness of the universe means it is possible that there could be other forms of life outside Earth, even intelligent ones.

"How can we rule out that life may have developed elsewhere?" Funes said. "Just as we consider earthly creatures as 'a brother,' and 'sister,' why should we not talk about an 'extraterrestrial brother'? It would still be part of creation."

In the interview by the Vatican newspaper [L'Osservatore Romano](#), Funes said such a notion "doesn't contradict our faith" because extraterrestrials would also be God's creatures. Ruling out their existence would be like "putting limits" on God's creative freedom, he said.

The interview, headlined "The extraterrestrial is my brother," also covered the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and science, and the theological implications of the existence of life on other planets.

Funes said science, especially astronomy, did not contradict religion, touching on a theme of Pope Benedict XVI, who has made exploring the relationship between faith and reason a key aspect of his papacy.

The Bible "is not a science book," Funes said, adding that he thinks the Big Bang theory is the most "reasonable" explanation for the creation of the universe. The theory holds that the universe began billions of years ago in the explosion of a single, super-dense point that contained all matter.

But he continues to believe that "God is the creator of the universe and that we are not the result of chance," he said.

Funes urged the church and the scientific community to leave behind divisions caused by Galileo's persecution 400 years ago, saying the incident had "caused wounds."

In 1633 the astronomer was tried as a heretic and forced to recant his theory that Earth revolved around the sun. Church teaching at the time placed Earth at the center of the universe.

"The church has somehow recognized its mistakes," he said. "Maybe it could have done it better, but now it's time to heal those wounds and this can be done through calm dialogue and collaboration."

Pope John Paul II declared in 1992 that the ruling against Galileo was an error resulting from "tragic mutual incomprehension."

The Vatican Observatory has been at the forefront of efforts to bridge the gap between religion and science. Its scientist-clerics have generated top-notch research and its meteorite collection is considered one of the world's best.

The observatory, founded by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, is based in Castel Gandolfo, a lakeside town in the hills outside Rome where the pope has a summer residence. It also conducts research at an observatory at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

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