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# Would You Baptize An Extraterrestrial?: .... And Other Questions From The Astronomers' In-box At The Vatican Observatory

Would You  
Baptize an  
Extraterrestrial?

... AND OTHER QUESTIONS FROM THE  
ASTRONOMERS' IN-BOX AT THE VATICAN OBSERVATORY



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*and* Paul Mueller, SJ



## **Synopsis**

Witty and thought provoking, two Vatican astronomers shed provocative light on some of the strange places where religion and science meet. "Imagine if a Martian showed up, all big ears and big nose like a child's drawing, and he asked to be baptized. How would you react?" - Pope Francis, May 2014. Pope Francis posed that question - without insisting on an answer! - to provoke deeper reflection about inclusiveness and diversity in the Church. But it's not the first time that question has been asked. Brother Guy Consolmagno and Father Paul Mueller hear questions like that all the time. They're scientists at the Vatican Observatory, the official astronomical research institute of the Catholic Church. In *Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial?* they explore a variety of questions at the crossroads of faith and reason: How do you reconcile the The Big Bang with Genesis? Was the Star of Bethlehem just a pious religious story or an actual description of astronomical events? What really went down between Galileo and the Catholic Church - and why do the effects of that confrontation still reverberate to this day? Will the Universe come to an end? And - could you really baptize an extraterrestrial? With disarming humor, Brother Guy and Father Paul explore these questions and more over the course of six days of dialogue. *Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial* will make you laugh, make you think, and make you reflect more deeply on science, faith, and the nature of the universe.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Really enjoyed this book even if it is a bit unexpected in style. Brother Guy gave a talk at my parish

which I very much enjoyed. This caused me to seek out some of his prolific work. His playful style, love of science in that child like way of wonder, and his deep faith combine into a very engaging teaching style. This book is set up as a dialogue and each day features a different question. The question ostensibly science based always develops into a catechetical moment as well. Science and Faith are partners not adversaries and few bring this point to the fore better than Brother Guy. Not too heavy on science so the lay reader is fine and I don't think anything to explicitly Catholic to put off other folks from learning about Science and Faith working together. Highly recommend

A unique blend of thoughtful science, philosophy, and Catholicism. Traditional in every sense, and clearly raising many of the prevailing arguments on the sides of science and religion. Fearless in its exploration. Thought provoking, and never pushy. Brother Guy and Father Paul clearly understand their faith AND science. A wonderful and masterful blend!

A great book! It deals with various topics of faith and science in a very sincere, very serious, and at the same time very amusing way, through a dialogue between two Jesuit scholars, one a doctor in planetary sciences and the other a doctor in history and philosophy of science. The explanation they give about the difference between what a mystery means for science and for religion is one of the things that made me think, and I enjoyed the most. Another good subject is the similarity of how scientific knowledge operates, in the example of the problem of the reclassification of Pluto as a dwarf planet, with respect to how the Church operates in councils, having to define and redefine certain concepts as new observations or situations occur, but without changes in the essential. All other topics are equally interesting and valuable, and are divided into chapters titled by daily and provocative questions like Biblical Genesis or scientific Big Bang ?, What happened to poor Pluto? What happened to Galileo? What was the Star of Bethlehem? What's going to happen when the world ends ?, and Would you baptize an extraterrestrial? However, each chapter goes beyond responding to each of these everyday questions and delves into bigger questions.

The last "theology" to which I was exposed was the Baltimore Catechism, and while it was perfect for a child, it left a lot open for adults. This is THE PERFECT stepping stone to a better understanding of my faith. Yes, the initial chapters that use references to quantum and traditional physics as if they were M & M's were a bit daunting, but I persisted and fell in love with the repartee and the elegant way in which the authors explained the relationship between science and religion. I want everyone who is seeking as I am to read this, but first I have to bone up on the physics stuff

and the underlying need to know more mathematics than I do and ... well, most of my education.

This small book by two Jesuit astronomers at the Vatican Observatory is a gem of a discussion on science and the Bible. Written as an easy colloquial dialogue between them on questions they often receive from lay visitors to the observatory, the reader is nevertheless exposed to a good deal of both theology and science. The easy answer to the loaded question of the title (cf., Is it lawful for Jews to pay taxes to Caesar?) was: *Only if she asks.* The chapter on Genesis offers an opportunity not only to review some modern understandings of cosmology, but to discuss the many kinds of writings in the Bible, many of which were never intended to be taken as literal descriptions of science or history. A chapter on *What Happened to Poor Pluto?* discusses how science progresses, the problem of dealing with changing scientific concepts once they are imbedded in the popular culture, and how even theological pronouncements have often been the result of *messy* political debate. A chapter on Galileo explores the cultural and personality issues at work around his famous condemnation by the church and why this church *error* was far more complex than a presumed Catholic condemnation of science. A section on the *star of Bethlehem* not only explores plausible scientific explanations for something the magi (astrologers) might take note of, but further examines symbolic and allegorical reasons the author of the Gospel of Matthew might include a story such as that of the magi. Finally, scientific theories about the end of the world and the title question of baptizing an extraterrestrial are woven into discussions of the meaning of Christianity, the unity of truth, and the meaning of community. It is hard to find such a responsible discussion of these issues in an accessible and entertaining package of modest length, but the two Jesuit authors have done it.

A book to go back to again and again. Illustrates the connection between Science and Theology in a way that everyday folks can understand them.

This book deals with big issues in an interesting way -- as a series of conversations between two Jesuit scientists from the Vatican observatory. Apparent conflicts between science and religious beliefs are dealt with in a highly readable way. There's a great section on the supposed battle between the Church and Galileo. The science is explained in a highly accessible manner, and there's a lot of humor as well.

A more detailed discussion of who created the Big Bang, the possibility of other universes, what

God might have been doing before our universe was created old have resulted in five stars.

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