

Vatican celebrates big bang to dispel faith-science conflict

May 8 2017, by Nicole Winfield



In this April 15, 2011 file photo, Brother Guy Consolmagno, a Jesuit astronomer at the Vatican's Observatory, right, shows to visitors the Globe of planet Mars from the collection of the Specola Vaticana. The Vatican Observatory has invited leading scientists and cosmologists to talk black holes, gravitational waves and space-time singularities as it honors Monsignor George Lemaire, a Jesuit cosmologist considered one of the fathers of the idea that the universe began with a gigantic explosion. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

The Vatican is celebrating the big-bang theory. That's not as out of this world as it sounds.

The Vatican Observatory has invited leading scientists and cosmologists to talk black holes, [gravitational waves](#) and space-time singularities as it honors the late Jesuit cosmologist considered one of the fathers of the idea that the universe began with a gigantic explosion.

The Tuesday-Friday conference honoring Monsignor George Lemaitre is being held at the Vatican Observatory, founded by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 to help correct the notion that the Roman Catholic Church was hostile to science. The perception has persisted in some circles since Galileo's heresy trial 400 years ago, even though the [observatory](#) and Catholic universities around the globe have produced top-notch science over the centuries.

In 1927, Lemaitre was the first to explain that the receding of distant galaxies was the result of the expansion of the universe, a result he obtained by solving equations of Einstein's [theory](#) of general relativity.

Lemaitre's theory was known as the "primeval atom," but it is more commonly known today as the big-bang theory.

"He understood that looking backward in time, the universe should have been originally in a state of high energy density, compressed to a point like an original atom from which everything started," according to a press release from the Observatory.

The head of the Vatican Observatory, Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, says Lemaitre's research proves that you can believe in God and the big-bang theory.

"Lemaitre himself was very careful to remind people—including Pope

Pius XII—that the creative act of God is not something that happened 13.8 billion years ago. It's something that happens continually," Consolmagno said Monday.

Believing merely that God created the big bang means "you've reduced God to a nature god, like Jupiter throwing lightning bolts. That's not the God that we as Christians believe in," he said.

Christians, he said, believe in a supernatural God who is responsible for the existence of the [universe](#), while "our science tells us how he did it."

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