

Vatican Gives Nod to ETs

by Paola Harris

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On May 14, 2008, Father Gabriel Funes, the Jesuit priest who directs the Vatican's observatory at Castel Gandolfo near Rome, declared: "As an astronomer, I continue to believe that God is the creator of the Universe. The search for extraterrestrial life does not contradict belief in God." He added that some aliens might even be innocent of original sin. "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."

When Funes calls the extraterrestrial "our brother or sister," we are involved in some revolutionary thinking. That statement goes beyond saying that we are not alone in the Universe.

To make this statement even more important, the newspaper *Il Osservatore Romano*, the official mouthpiece of the Vatican, released the interview. In the article, Funes stated, "Even if we don't currently have any proof, the hypothesis of extraterrestrial life cannot be ruled out."

"Just as there are a plethora of creatures on Earth, there could be others, equally intelligent, created by God."

With this statement, Funes echoes the words of Monsignor Corrado Balducci, a UFO researcher with many years in the field. Balducci is known to fellow researchers as the "unofficial" voice of the Vatican. At UFO conferences in Italy, Monsignore Balducci, once Vatican Nuncio to Washington, D.C., presaged the words of Father Funes when he said: "All is possible. God created us to give praise to Him, as I imagine He created others species to do the same. How can God be glorified without a varied creation?"

For the past 15 years, I lived in Italy very close to the Vatican, and I often dined with Monsignor Balducci at his home. Balducci, who was also an expert demonologist, wanted to open the door to the Catholic study of ufology. Since he was never hindered in this pursuit by Vatican authorities, he felt they had given him their silent approval. With the proclamation of Father Funes, that approval is no longer silent.

I often asked Balducci if he thought that some aliens were demonic. His answer was, "The devil does not need UFOs."

Balducci believes that over the last 150 years, the UFO phenomenon has appeared sequentially and with an increasing and spreading frequency. He made a strong distinction between this phenomenon and manifestations of the paranormal, such as Spiritualism. He believes

adamantly there must be creatures between us and the angels on the evolutionary scale. These could be ETs. Humans are at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder because we know the difference between good and evil, and often choose evil.

The Catholic Church will have a difficult time incorporating such beliefs into official dogma. Maintaining official Catholic doctrine may be impossible in the face of an ET disclosure process. This is all unmapped territory.

Unlike Father Funes, who says that humans may be the only creatures with original sin, Monsignor Balducci said in 2004 that Jesus died for the sins of extraterrestrials as well: "Jesus died for all beings in the cosmos. In the sacred Scriptures, He is called King of the Universe at least 66 times. Never underestimate the great mercy or compassion of God, whose grace and compassion surpass all."

Father Funes asserts that original sin refers to the fallen state from which humans can be saved only by God's grace. "If other intelligent beings exist, it's not certain that they need redemption," he said. "[They could] have remained in full friendship with their creator" without committing original sin. If not, extraterrestrials would benefit equally from the Incarnation, in which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, assumed earthly flesh, body, and soul in order to redeem humankind. Father Funes called the Incarnation "a unique event that cannot be repeated."

Father José Gabriel Funes has been named by Pope Benedict XVI as the new director of the Vatican Observatory. He will succeed a controversial American, Father George Coyne. Father Funes, an Argentine Jesuit, is already a member of the Vatican Observatory team.

The Vatican Observatory was established by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 to advance astronomical knowledge and to demonstrate the Church's support for the physical sciences. Originally it was located at Castel Gandolfo, near the Pope's summer residence. In 1981, because of the smog that obscures viewing of the sky near Rome, the main observatory was moved to Arizona.

The scientific community and the church split more than four centuries ago as a result of the persecution of Galileo, who said that neither the Earth nor the Sun were situated in the center of the universe. In 1633, Galileo was tried for heretical beliefs and forced to deny his theory.

The reconciliation between science and the church began in 1992 when Pope John Paul declared that Galileo's trial was a "tragic mutual incomprehension."

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