

Astrobiology News for October 2014: Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial?

- Grace Wolf-Chase, Ph.D. (gwolfchase@adlerplanetarium.org)

For those of you who live in the Chicago area, I hope you can come to the Adler Planetarium on the evening of November 18th to hear how Brother Guy Consolmagno of the Vatican Observatory answers this question! Br. Guy will also sign copies of his new book by the same title (coauthored with Father Paul Mueller). Copies of the book will be available for purchase. We expect this to be a very popular event, so please check Adler's web site for soon-to-be-released information on obtaining tickets:

(<http://www.adlerplanetarium.org/programs-events/>).

NOTE: For those of you who don't live in the Chicago area or who can't attend for other reasons, you can catch this presentation as we live-stream it on Adler's YouTube channel, or in the archives afterwards: <https://www.youtube.com/user/adlerplanetarium>

Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial?

Presented by Br. Guy Consolmagno
Astronomer, Vatican Observatory

Tuesday, November 18, 2015, 7 pm
Samuel C. Johnson Family Star Theater
Adler Planetarium

\$10 General Admission
\$5 Members and Students

This frequently-asked question raises interesting issues not only for what it means to be a creature of this universe in need of baptism, but the larger question of when it is appropriate, or not, to "baptize" modern science and its understanding of our universe in the light of our religious beliefs. What assumptions are hidden or unrecognized in this question, especially about the significance of ourselves and our belief systems in the face of an overwhelmingly large universe? What can we learn from how explorers in the 15th-17th centuries dealt with the discovery of other civilizations, as a possible analog to the issues that might be raised in such a discovery in space? And how can this question be re-framed to better illuminate its hidden assumptions and motivate our search for extraterrestrial intelligence?

Br. Consolmagno is curator of the Vatican meteorite collection in Castel Gandolfo, one of the largest in the world. His research explores the connections between meteorites and asteroids, and the origin and evolution of small bodies in the solar system. In 1996, he spent six weeks collecting meteorites with an NSF-sponsored team on the blue ice of Antarctica, and in 2000 he was honored by the IAU for his contributions to the study of meteorites and asteroids with the naming of asteroid 4597 Consolmagno. He is the 2014 recipient of the Carl Sagan Medal from the American Astronomical Society.