

# Where is Our Place for Faith in this World?

Homily by Brian J. Sarnecki, Diocese of Richmond

Promise me one thing after listening to me today: go out one night this week. Out away from the city lights, if you can. Sit in the complete darkness let your eyes adjust and look to the sky. What do you see or not? Do you see an incredible lightshow or just faint lights in the sky? Might you see God among the stars or the evidence of God in that lightshow? Each of us has to answer that question for ourselves. Is the existence of God aided by the night sky or is one's faith negated by the vastness of science and the beyond? Is there enough room in the world for the sciences of man and our God?

These same questions have challenged our ancestors for thousands of years. The scientists of the University of Arizona we had the honor to visit this spring might wrestle with these same questions as they add to modern science on a daily basis. Modern scientists like Dr. Renu Malhotra or Dr Brenda Frye might not view the Universe with the naked eye of early man or the looking glasses or lens of early telescopes as did Galileo or Copernicus. Instead these men and women of today's science view our world with earth-bound and space telescopes, instruments that can see much better into the vastness of the universe and time. We all marvel whether it's 90 million miles just to our sun or the estimated age of our galaxy, some 12 billion years old. The stars we see are only a few of the many in the Milky Way, taking up only a slight sliver of our night sky. You may also find it surprising that the modern study of astronomy began in Catholic medieval universities or that the "Father of Astrophysics" was a Jesuit priest, one Fr. Secchi in the 1800's. Even today our Catholic Church continues to have a role in the discoveries of modern science in men such as the Vatican's head astronomer, Br. Guy Consolmagno, S.J. These men of faith have found the room for the discoveries of space and the presence of God.

I don't think it comes to anyone surprise that if one wonders about oneself, we also wonder about the world around us. From around the night fires of warmth and

safety early man marveled at the night sky and our place in it. Man's wonder and imagination found patterns for himself, animals and myths in the night sky. Our ability to reason and order gave logic to our skies and the wonder around us, but it was our faith in another greater than us that provides reason for ourselves in religious beliefs. Where was the conflict in our early faith and man's place in the world? Recall again the words of Genesis or Isaiah:

*And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years. (Genesis 1:14)*

*Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. (Isaiah 40:26)*

*I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host (Isaiah 45:12)*

Is there a conflict? Why is it that as we reason more scientific order into the complexity of our world and universe around us, we sometimes find a conflict in ourselves, in our faith and sciences? Is it that as our world expands, we find less focus and thus value on ourselves amongst our greater world and universe? Is there not the ability in our reason and faith that as our world expands, we as individuals can remain of value and purpose in our own eyes and in the eyes of God?

Do not our sciences of the human like biology and genetics portray each of us as unique creatures of cellular structure and genes here on Earth? Why then can there not be a place among some people in our world for the reason of science and faith in the Creator; wonder in the universe and the uniqueness of each of us here on Earth? Can there not be room in the arms of God for one's faith and in the expanding universe of science?

Why then is there this conflict between science, particularly those regarding the universe and the faith of the Church? Go back again then to the absolute vastness and darkness of the night sky, and do you sense a conflict between your faith in God and your

faith in those 90 million miles to the sun or man's estimate of the 12 billion years for the Milky Way? Might then the conflict for mankind between science and faith be rather a possible conflict in ourselves, our own self-value and faith, not in the numbers or reason of science? Instead, is our own personal identity for self-worth, our personal egos, the larger problem within this Universe? Might the vastness of ourselves, our own self-worth and knowledge diminish the value for our larger human-nature and the lack of value we often place on each other? Can there not be space in the universe for the value for our greater faith, our own reason for ourselves and the greater value of each ones of us here on Earth, just that faint dot around our sun and just one the many dots in the night sky?