

THE CHURCH AND THE BIG BANG

By Msgr. Gene Frilot

There can be no contradiction between the Church and Science because God is the author of both. Actually through the centuries there have been many Catholic scientists and some were priests or monks: St. Bede (d. 735), St. Albert Magnus a Dominican (d. 1280), Roger Bacon, a Franciscan (d. 1294), Card. Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464), Father Francisco Faa di Bruno (d. 1888), Father George Lemaitre (d. 1966).

“At the close of the 19th century most scientists had firmly believed that the universe had always existed...in its present unchanging form. To scientists, it was a comforting belief - and it didn't seem to matter that there was little evidence to prove it.” 1

Albert Einstein knew the universe was actually moving, but he accommodated his Theory of Relativity to this belief that it wasn't, by adding a 'constant' which kept the universe from contracting or expanding.

A Belgium Catholic priest, Father George Lemaitre, using both science and religion, came up with a solution (the universe was expanding from a moment of creation) that eliminated the need for Einstein's 'cosmological constant'. The priest told Einstein about it at a 1927 physics conference in Brussels but Einstein said “Your calculations are correct, but your grasp of physics is abominable.” 2

By 1929 the astronomer Edwin Hubble at Mount Wilson proved that the universe was indeed expanding.

“In 1931 Einstein visited Hubble at his Mount Wilson Observatory in California, and on Feb. 3, he admitted publicly ...that he had been wrong...and that Lemaitre ...had been right.”1 Einstein said it was the biggest blunder of his career. In 1933 in California after Fr. Lemaitre gave his lecture, Einstein stood and applauded and said, “This is the most beautiful and satisfactory explanation of creation to which I have ever listened.” 2

In 1935 Father Lemaitre was inducted into the Royal Academy of Belgium and in 1936 into the Pontifical Academy of Science by Pope Pius XI.

In 1950 on BBC radio the Lemaitre model was belittled by Fred Hoyle, the British scientist, as the Big Bang theory and the name stuck. In 1951 Pope Pius XII supported the Big Bang theory and this encouraged dissenting scientists to ridicule it all the more. In 1965 Father George Lemaitre was still alive but suffering from a heart attack when he learned of the accidental discovery of an echo radiation which vindicated his Big Bang theory. He died the following year.

Robert Jastrow, former NASA astronomer and agnostic, claims, “**For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.**” 1

1 From an article in The History Channel Magazine by Renee Valois (Sept./Oct. 2007)

2 A Day Without Yesterday by Mark Midbon, Commonweal (March 24, 2000)