

NEWEST CATHOLIC MISSION IS INTER-GALACTIC

POPE FRANCIS ANNOUNCES THE HOLY SEE'S PLANS TO LIQUIDATE ALL VATICAN ASSETS TO REORIENT CHURCH TOWARDS SPACE EXPLORATION

FOUNDS NEW HOLY BODY FOR CATHOLIC ONTOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP.

BY TOMÁS VALENTINE

The Holy See has launched a new mission called "COS•MOS" (Catholic Ontological Scholarship • Mission to Outer Space), sending shockwaves through organized religion as well as the space exploration and science communities. Pope Francis, the first Jesuit Pontificate, declared that, "this Holy See initiative can best be comprehended through the Society of Jesus' motto of 'finding God in all things.' The Holy See hopes to create a paradigm shift--away from a focus on individual morality towards a future in ontological scholarship. That starts with humans truly understanding the universe we live in. Outer space is not only the last frontier--it might also be the first step on the stairway to Heaven."

The new mission, which strongly resembles a government space program, is to be funded by the Vatican's total divestment of its earthly possessions. Led by Jesuit scientists, the Vatican's famous Swiss Guard is being retrained to handle logistics, navigation, and piloting of all earthbound and heaven-ward activities of the new organization. Their Michelangelo-designed blue and yellow striped uniforms are being reformulated as full-pressure suits for galactic conditions. Jesuits will occupy the research positions within COS•MOS, their vows of poverty, chastity, and total obedience to the Pope making them appropriate space "Missionauti."

With the divestiture, a special *Votum Paupertatis Spatium Eruditus* ("vow of poverty for space enlightenment") has been taken by all Holy See and Vatican citizens and employees. The Pope himself has moved to a former souvenir storage room in Santa Maria Rotunda, also known as the Pantheon. "A better people's observatory could not be found," stated Monk Giuseppe di Spazio as he pointed upwards to the famous exposed oculus in the structure's coffered domed roof.

The Holy See has been a leader in astronomy since 1582, when the Gregorian calendar was established using astronomical data. In 1935, the Vatican Observatory's headquarters were relocated from Rome to the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, where they remain. Since 1980, the Vatican Observatory Research Group has ramped up its funding of scholarship in astronomy and space exploration, leading to the 1993 founding of its most advanced observatory, the Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope (VATT) at the Steward Observatory on Mount Graham, Safford, Arizona, with the University of Arizona, USA.

Partnering since the 1950s with the Soviet Space Program, NASA / JPL, CalTech, MIT, the Bio-Sphere, and most recently Bigelow Aerospace, the Vatican has contributed important research to the fields of astrophysics and extra-galactic astronomy, in particular subatomic particles, dark matter, and dark energy--none of which can be seen by telescopes, but must be inferred via gravitational effects. What motivates Fr. Christian Lenz SJ, the Holy See's newly appointed Superior of Ontological Scholarship? "Copernicus was a Catholic cleric; Galileo was a devout Catholic; and Fr. Angelo Secchi SJ was the "Father of Modern Astrophysics," he replies in a distinct Swiss-German accent. "People always ask whether we're looking for a sign from above. But, in fact, we're just bringing our special perspective on that which cannot be seen by the human eye. One could say we are experts in the "unseen."

According to Seymour Kometts, a former director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, NASA's recent downsizing has left a huge gap in the space research and exploration community. As Kometts says, "Catholic does means 'universal.' Maybe COS•MOS will not only fill this void but create a Renaissance in the field."

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