

The Vatican joins the search for alien life

The Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences is holding its first ever conference on alien life, the discovery of which would have profound implications for the Catholic Church.

By Tom Chivers

Published: 10:20AM GMT 10 Nov 2009

Comments [33](#) | [Comment on this article](#)



The Vatican has joined the search for alien life Photo: AP/20TH CENTURY FOX

The Pontifical Academy of [Sciences](#) is holding a conference on astrobiology, the study of life beyond Earth, with scientists and [religious](#) leaders gathering in [Rome](#) this week.

For centuries, theologians have argued over what the existence of life elsewhere in the universe would mean for the Church: at least since Giordano Bruno, an Italian monk, was put to death by the Inquisition in 1600 for claiming that other worlds exist.

Related Articles

- [Vatican embraces theory of evolution](#)
- [Album featuring Pope released](#)
- [Pope Benedict XVI celebrates Galileo's astronomy](#)
- [Looking for the biggest answers](#)
- [SETI at 50: key moments in the search for ET](#)
- [Found: hell planet where rock falls as rain](#)

Among other things, extremely alien-looking aliens would be hard to fit with the idea that God “made man in his own image”.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ’s role as saviour would be confused: would other worlds have their own, tentacled Christ-figures, or would Earth’s Christ be universal?

However, just as the Church eventually made accommodations after [Copernicus and Galileo](#) showed that the Earth was not the centre of the universe, and when it [belatedly accepted the truth of Darwin's theory of evolution](#), Catholic leaders say that alien life can be aligned with the Bible’s teachings.

Father Jose Funes, a Jesuit astronomer at the Vatican Observatory and one of the organisers of the conference, said: "As a multiplicity of creatures exists on Earth, so there could be other beings, also intelligent, created by God.

"This does not conflict with our faith, because we cannot put limits on the creative freedom of God."

Not everyone agrees. [Paul Davies](#), a theoretical physicist and author of *The Goldilocks Enigma*, [told The Washington Post](#) that the threat to Christianity is "being downplayed" by Church leaders. He said: "I think the discovery of a second genesis would be of enormous spiritual significance.

"The real threat would come from the discovery of extraterrestrial intelligence, because if there are beings elsewhere in the universe, then Christians, they're in this horrible bind.

"They believe that God became incarnate in the form of Jesus Christ in order to save humankind, not dolphins or chimpanzees or little green men on other planets."

The Academy conference [will include presentations from scientists](#) – by no means all of them Christians – on the discovery of planets outside our solar system, the geological record of early life on Earth, how life might have started on Earth, and whether “alien” life of a different biochemistry to our own might exist here without our knowing, among many other things.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/space/6536400/The-Vatican-joins-the-search-for-alien-life.html>