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Audience with participants in the Second Conference of the Vatican Observatory in memory of Georges Lemaître: “Black holes, gravitational waves and space-time singularities”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received in audience the participants in the Second Conference of the Vatican Observatory in memory of Georges Lemaître, on the theme: “Black holes, gravitational waves and space-time singularities”, taking place at Castel Gandolfo from 16 to 21 June 2024.

The following is the Holy Father’s address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear scientists, brothers and sisters, good morning!

I greet His Eminence Cardinal Farrell, and I greet the Sister deputy governor. The women are starting to take command in here! [laughter]

I warmly welcome you and I thank you for your kind visit. In particular, I am grateful to Brother Guy Consolmagno and the other members of the community of the Vatican Observatory for this initiative.

You have gathered at Castel Gandolfo for the conference “*Black holes, gravitational waves and space-time singularities*”, organized in honour of Msgr. Georges Lemaître, seven years after the preceding edition. In the meantime, the scientific value of the Belgian priest and cosmologist has been further acknowledged by the International Astronomical Union, which has decided that the well-known Hubble’s law should properly be called the Hubble-Lemaître law.

In these days, you are discussing the latest questions posed by scientific research in cosmology: the different results obtained by the measurement of Hubble’s constant, the enigmatic nature of cosmological singularities (from the Big Bang to black holes), and the very topical theme of gravitational waves.

The Church is attentive to such research and promotes it, because it stirs the sensibility and the intelligence of men and women of our time. The beginning of the universe, its ultimate evolution, the deep structure of space and time confront human beings with an anxious search for meaning, in a very vast scenario where they risk getting lost. This makes us rediscover the relevance of the words of the Psalmist: "When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, / the moon and the stars which thou hast established; / what is man that thou art mindful of him, / and the son of man that thou dost care for him? / Yet thou hast made him little less than God, / and dost crown him with glory and honour" (*Ps 8:3-5*). It is thus clear how these themes have a particular relevance for theology, philosophy, science and also for spiritual life.

Georges Lemaître was a priest and an exemplary scientist. His human and spiritual journey represents a model of life from which we can all learn.

To comply with his father's wishes, he studied engineering; he was drafted into the First World War and experienced its horrors. He followed his priestly and scientific vocation as an adult. Initially, he was - as they say - a "concordist", that is, he believed that scientific truths are conserved, in a veiled manner, in Holy Scripture. His human experiences and subsequent spiritual elaborations then led him to understand that science and faith follow two different and parallel paths, between which there is no conflict. On the contrary, these paths can harmonize with each other, because both science and faith, for a believer, have the same matrix in the absolute Truth of God. His journey of faith led him to the realization that creation and Big Bang are two distinct realities, and that the God in whom he believes cannot be an object easily categorized by human reason, but is the "hidden God", who always remains in a dimension of mystery, not totally comprehensible.

Dear friends, I hope you will continue to confront in a loyal and humble spirit on the themes you are discussing. May the freedom and absence of conditioning, which you are experiencing in this conference, help you to progress in your fields towards the Truth, which is surely an emanation of God's Charity. Faith and science can be united in charity, if science is placed at the service of the men and women of our time, and not distorted to their detriment or even their destruction. I encourage you to venture to the peripheries of human knowledge: it is here that one can experience God-Love, which satisfies and fulfils the thirst of our heart.

I heartily bless you all, and your work. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
