

# Navigate Science & the Bible

**We seldom get a second chance to make a first impression. The accounts of creation in Genesis give us our “first impression” of the Bible.**

In these accounts, God creates the earth in six days. Science, however, has revealed that it took billions of years for the earth and planets to form.

Our “first impression” may be that biblical truth and scientific truth are incompatible, given all our scientific knowledge about the universe. We might be left asking: “Can the truth of the Bible be reconciled with scientific truth? Can this first impression be given a second look?”

It is our job to dispel key divisions between science and the Bible and help students find a healthy balance in their perspective.

By exploring Church teaching and introducing faith-filled scientists, young people will recognize that both science and the Bible can have a place in the Catholic worldview.

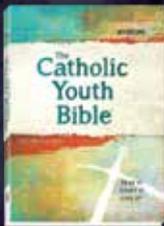


## Introduce the Experts

Countless past and contemporary scientists believe that the truth of the Bible can be reconciled with scientific truth. In fact, greater knowledge of the universe often results in a greater appreciation of the grandeur and creativity of God.

Among those scientists who believe this to be true is Br. Guy Consolmagno, SJ, of

the Vatican Observatory. In his frequent talks around the world, Brother Guy often challenges the notion of the incompatibility of the Bible and science, explaining that “we must believe in a God that is supernatural. We then recognize God as the one responsible for the existence of the universe, and our science tells how he did it.” In fact, Brother Guy



## **The Catholic Youth Bible™ Connections**

The question of scientific truth and biblical truth can be explored using

many elements in the newest version of *The Catholic Youth Bible*®, including:

“Six Days? Really?” near Genesis 1:1–2:4

“Apocalyptic Literature,” near Daniel, chapters 7–10

“What Miracles Reveal,” near Matthew 8:1–9:34

“Core Catholic Understandings about Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation,” in the Being Catholic section (p. 1720 CYB NABRE or p. 1502 CYB NRSV)

often mentions that it was a Catholic priest, Fr. George Lemaître, who first proposed what we now call the big bang theory.

*Introduce the teens to scientists, both past and present, who have made a difference to scientific study and were also believers in God and in biblical teaching. As experts in their fields (and some who were vowed religious), they serve as great examples of the ability to be both a person of faith and a scientist.*

## Explore It!

Helping the young people encounter people who have reconciled science and biblical truth can go a long way toward showing them that the two can indeed exist together. Here are some ideas for encouraging this conversation:

- 1. Ask students to learn about an accomplished Catholic scientist (especially a modern one). Some possibilities are listed below.**
- 2. Encourage the teens to share what they have discovered and how that information impacts their questions about the Bible and science.**
- 3. Invite a local scientist to speak about the Bible and faith, and engage the young people in a conversation.**

## *Catholic Scientists*

### **Roger Bacon**

(c. 1214–1294)  
Franciscan friar and early advocate of the scientific method

### **William of Ockham**

(c. 1288–1348)  
Franciscan friar known for Ockham’s Razor

### **René Descartes**

(1596–1650)  
Father of modern philosophy and analytic geometry

### **Blaise Pascal** (1623–1662)

French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer, and philosopher

### **Laura Bassi** (1711–1778)

Physicist at University of Bologna and first woman to be offered a professorship at a European university

### **Amedeo Avogadro**

(1776–1856)  
Noted for his contributions to molecular theory and Avogadro’s Law

### **Léon Foucault**

(1819–1868)  
Inventor of the Foucault Pendulum, measuring the effects of the Earth’s rotation

### **Gregor Mendel**

(1822–1884)  
Augustinian priest and monk, father of genetics

### **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** (1881–1955)

Jesuit priest, theologian, and renowned paleontologist

### **Gerty Cori** (1896–1957)

Biochemist who was the first American woman to win a Nobel Prize in Science (1947)

### **Mary Celine Fasenmyer**

(1906–1996)  
Sister of Mercy and mathematician, founder of Sister Celine’s polynomials

### **Mary Kenneth Keller**

(c. 1914–1985)  
Sister of Charity, BVM, first American woman to earn a PhD in computer science, helped develop BASIC

# Let the Church Speak

Pope Saint John Paul II, in his “Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences” (October 22, 1996) concerning the theory of evolution, gave a landmark affirmation to the complementarity of biblical truth and science when he said, “We know, in fact, that truth cannot contradict truth.”

In that same talk, Pope Saint John Paul II briefly reminded the scientists of the “Galileo question,” in which the Church condemned Galileo for his discovery that the Earth revolved around the sun, and not the other way around. (In 1992, Pope Saint John Paul II officially apologized for the Church’s condemnation of Galileo.)

This unnecessary clash between scientific truth and the Bible resulted from an incorrect interpretation of God’s word. As Pope Saint John Paul II reminded the scientists: “It is necessary to determine the proper sense of Scripture, while avoiding any unwarranted interpretations that make it say what it does

not intend to say. In order to delineate the field of their own study, the exegete and the theologian must keep informed about the results achieved by the natural sciences.”

In other words, the biblical expert and theologian must communicate with the scientist in order to come to a proper understanding of God’s work in the universe. In this kind of communication, the role of the Catholic scientist, or any scientist who believes in God, is particularly important. Because most people seem to assume (as the high school student quoted previously did) that all scientists are atheists, it is up to scientists who believe in God and who believe in biblical teaching to make their profession as scientists known to their church-going friends and neighbors. Scientists are not always isolated in labs; some of them are likely sitting next to us in church!

## Explore It!

Exploring the question of science and the Bible can be done within your own faith community and can connect the youth with local people who accept both science and faith.

- 1. Ask the teens to identify professions that they would identify as “scientific” in nature:** medical professions, math teachers, biologists, and so on. Facilitate a reflection on the ways faith can also shape these professions.
- 2. Challenge the young people to identify members of their parish who work in the above named scientific fields** and see how many people they can identify.
- 3. Organize a panel discussion on the topic of the Bible and science.** Invite your pastor, a local scientist, a Catholic school science teacher, a member of a local religious community, and a thoughtful parishioner to sit on the panel.
- 4. Invite the teens to choose one of the named professions and explore the daily activities of that field.** Facilitate a discussion to identify what activities would be difficult for a person of faith.

### *The Catholic Youth Bible™ Connections*

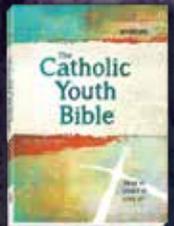
Use *The Catholic Youth Bible* in

your consideration of science and the Bible in the local community. The following elements from it are just some of many that are helpful:

“Heart and Head,” near Mark 16:20

“Core Catholic Understandings about Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation,” in the Being Catholic section (p. 1720 CYB NABRE or p. 1502 CYB NRSV)

“How Do Catholics View the World?” in the Being Catholic section (p. 1722 CYB NABRE or p. 1504 CYB NRSV)



# Consider the Purpose

So, what is the take-away? We cannot look at the Bible as a science textbook. It was never intended to be one. Our job is to facilitate the movement from understanding the Bible as a text that contradicts science to the recognition that the Bible serves a different purpose.

The Bible has much to teach us about our humanity, our origins in God, our relationships with God and with one another, and the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as God-with-us. The Bible unfolds God's plan for our lives and for our world, a world that science helps us explain. The biblical writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, conveyed God's message of salvation, answering the questions we all ask: "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "Where am I going?" "How am I to live?" These are the questions the Bible can answer. These are the questions to explore with youth when engaging Scripture.

The entire created universe is evidence of God's love. It is ours to care for and to explore. As in any other human endeavor, the study of science presents us with moral dilemmas that we must confront with honesty, love, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But we can look to the universe for evidence of God's marvelous work that informs and sustains our precious human lives:

*The heavens declare the glory of God  
the firmament proclaims the works of his hands.*  
(Psalm 19:2, NABRE)

## Additional Resources

### Consult the following resources for further exploration of science and the Bible:

*Genesis, Evolution, and the Search for a Reasoned Faith*, by Mary Katherine Birge, SSJ, et al. (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2011)

*God's Mechanics: How Scientists and Engineers Make Sense of Religion*, by Br. Guy Consolmagno, SJ (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008)

*The Heavens Proclaim: Astronomy and the Vatican*, edited by Guy Consolmagno, SJ (Huntington, IN: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2009)

"Pope Francis's Address to the Vatican Academy of Sciences," 27, October 2014, at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141027\\_plenaria-accademia-scienze.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141027_plenaria-accademia-scienze.html)

*A Window to the Divine*, by Zachary Hayes, OFM (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2009)

