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U.S. Jesuit Br. Guy Consolmagno, director of the Vatican Observatory is pictured at the observatory in Rome in this Dec. 12, 2007, file photo. (CNS/Annette Schreyer)

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A nerdy love of science fiction, a yearning for adventure, a passion for science and a foundation of Jesuit education all helped in some way to lead a man from Detroit, Michigan, to become a master of meteorites and the head of the Vatican Observatory.

Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, who has led the observatory since 2015, shares his journey of becoming a Jesuit astronomer, explains the compatibility of science and faith and guides readers on how to look at the heavens in a new book released Feb. 4 by Loyola Press.

Titled, "A Jesuit's Guide to the Stars: Exploring Wonder, Beauty and Science," the book also features full-page color astrophotographs taken by astronomers of the Vatican Observatory and NASA.

Consolmagno, who has authored hundreds of scientific publications and several popular books, uses the new guide to describe his journey of faith and academic and professional pursuits through the lens of Jesuit spirituality.

"Ignatian spirituality emphasizes engagement with the world and 'finding God in all things,'" he wrote. "This aligns exactly with the work of a scientist because scientists find joy in studying things; to find joy is to find God."

"If we believe that God created this universe, and if we believe that God so loved it that he sent his Son to become a part of it, then science becomes an act of growing closer to the creator. In that way, it becomes an act of prayer," he wrote.

A common question the Jesuit astronomer gets is how faith and science can be compatible, and he wrote that the topic came up when he just happened to be chatting with William Shatner, the actor who played Captain Kirk in the original Star Trek.

"How I wound up talking to William Shatner," he wrote, "is too long a story to go into here. But when I told him I was a Jesuit astronomer, he was flabbergasted."

"He saw religion and science as two competing sets of truths. Two big books of facts. And what should happen if the facts in one book contradict the facts in the other?" Consolmagno wrote.

Science is not a big book of immutable facts about everything, he wrote. Science comes up with insights and "laws" to help explain phenomena, but that knowledge is always incomplete and always open to revision.

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And, he wrote, Shatner thought faith was a kind of "blind faith" that meant "accepting something as certain without looking; or worse, closing our eyes to the facts and proceeding on emotion."

"But that's not faith at all," the Jesuit wrote. "It's proceeding even when we can't see everything we wish we could see. We never have all the facts, and so faith is how we make essential choices anyway.

"All of life is making crucial decisions on the basis of inadequate or incomplete information," he wrote. But "what does Jesus constantly command in all the stories after the Resurrection? 'Do not be afraid.'"

"Don't be afraid of poor people; don't be afraid of freshman physics. Don't be afraid of death; don't be afraid to be alive. Don't limit yourself with the lies you tell yourself: I can't do that," he wrote.

"Of course we're inadequate! But that is precisely what forces us to make room for God to enter in and help out," he added. "If we knew it all, there'd be nothing left to learn. If we could do it all, there'd be nothing left to do. If it weren't hard, it wouldn't be an accomplishment; it wouldn't be any fun."

Consolmagno used Scripture, poetry, Ignatian insights and nuggets of scientific discoveries in the book to show readers what makes a Jesuit astronomer tick and to encourage them to become curious about discovering one's own neighborhood: Earth's galaxy.

"'A Jesuit's Guide to the Stars' is my way, as a Jesuit and an astronomer, of introducing a wider audience to the nighttime sky," he wrote.

"Encountering this universe with the mindset of a Jesuit means going beyond just looking up and thinking, 'Oh, wow, look at the Moon,'" he wrote.

"Engaging the universe with the heart means not only appreciating its beauty but also recognizing the love that lies behind that beauty and feeling the joy that is the sure sign of the presence of God in his creation," he wrote.

"A Jesuit's eye on the sky means beholding it with both nostalgia and amazement, familiarity and mystery, awe and joy — in everything. That's why they call it the Universe. It is the 'all things' where we find God," he wrote.