

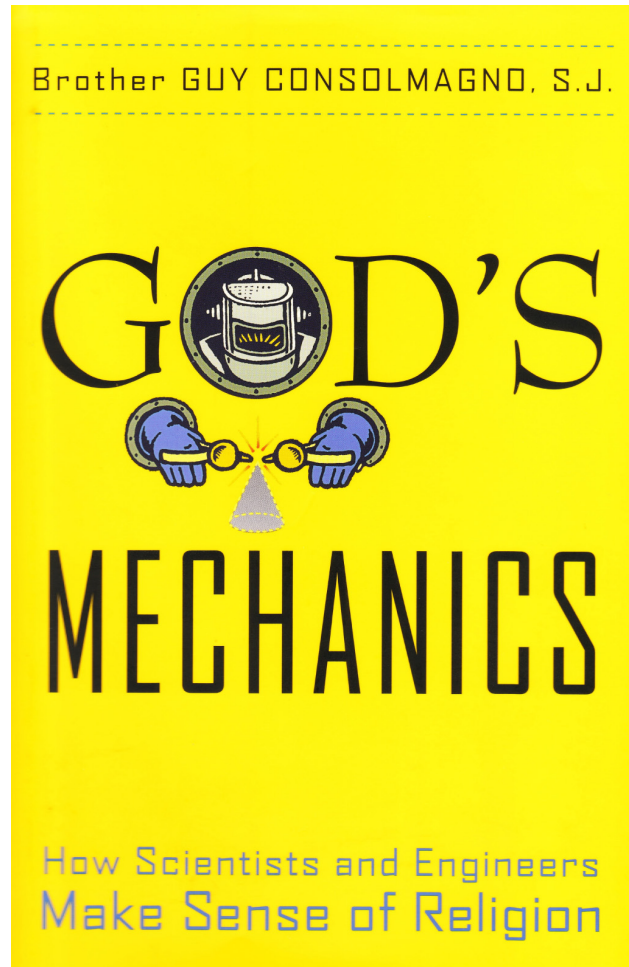
## Book Review

*God's mechanics: How scientists and engineers make sense of religion*, by Guy Consolmagno, S.J. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008, cloth, 256 p., \$24.95 (ISBN 978-0787994662)

In early 2008, Guy Consolmagno and I met at a conference and he told me about the subject of his new book—a discussion of science and religion. Over the years, I have had several stimulating discussions with Guy about the relationship between science and religion and was ecstatic to learn that he had written a book to address this relationship. I have practiced Tibetan Buddhism for approximately 15 years and have listened to every kind of interesting (and often taxing) discussion about the nature of science and its interaction with religion. Usually, the outcome is that people seem to understand what religion means to them, even if they do not articulate it well, but have essentially no clue about science either what it is or what it is not. Even before opening the book I was confident that I would enjoy reading *God's mechanics* (a short version of the title) and I was not disappointed in any way.

What I did not realize, but was not surprised to learn, was that his book would be, without question, in his own voice. A voice that is open and honest, and that shares his life experiences, how people, science, and religion have influenced him, and how these experiences have shaped his view of the universe. In a nutshell, *God's mechanics* very clearly captures how an internationally recognized scientist and a Jesuit Brother (perhaps not in this order) chronicles in a humanistic fashion the relationship between science and religion and touches on something much more. Brother Consolmagno allows us to experience aspects of what I think of as the divine throughout his book, largely by allowing the reader to experience his own search for answers to critical life questions. At the same time, Dr. Consolmagno clearly shows that his experiences, of which some are every day and others are not, are in of themselves, divine.

As any self-respecting scientists would, Guy sets up the issues he is investigating within the text logically through an exploration of four basic questions. He shares how scientists are trained to view certain issues in life and describes why it is important for them to approach religion in the fashion that they often do. Through blending the culture of science and religion, Guy relates his experiences and his interpretation. For me, one of the great pleasures of reading through this book (which I could not put down once I got started) was that as I read, I could hear Guy in my mind reading the book to me!



Guy explores issues such as the functions of religion, the dangers of organized religion, the tools of “techieism,” the root of his religion, why he is a Catholic, and various popular misconceptions relating to all of them. Brother Consolmagno even dives into a discussion of his own motivations—which from the Buddhist perspective is all anyone really can do—so that we can check our own motivations for doing anything and express them when appropriate so that others may learn. By example he is helping the reader to view the world in a way that is divine without confusing science, religion, and an individual perspective on the divine. Although Guy told me that one of the only religions he did not discuss in any detail in his book is Buddhism, the fact is that much of the discussions and presentations are akin to Tibetan Buddhism. Of course, there are a few critical differences, but that’s for

another book. Guy also uses humor throughout the book in a way that makes very serious issues become light of heart, making such issues even more meaningful.

Several years ago, the news media in the U.S. covered many aspects of a debate between those that championed a concept termed Intelligent Design (ID) as a means of understanding life and how or if it changed in relationship to time and those that argue the science view of evolution. Many of my colleagues in different areas of science refused to discuss ID because, as they seemed to view it, ID is not science and thus can be ignored if it is being sold as science. Whereas I agree that ID is not science, I do not agree that scientists should ignore it or any proposed idea that attempts to mask itself as science. It is our job as scientists to educate those that do not understand the nature of science and how it works. I see no problem with science or religion exploring issues in the way they do. One sets up issues to be refuted (science), while the other often sets up issues that cannot be, by their very nature, refuted (religion). *God's mechanics* makes the distinction between science and religion very clear, and everyone involved in this "debate or lack thereof" should

read it. Guy has done the community a tremendous service by writing this book.

In closing, the book is perfect in every aspect in part because it contains the well-written experiences of one person and those that have influenced his life. Through this book, Guy shows how a scientist and a religious person, indeed leader in both areas, views and experiences the world. He shows us the nature of science and religion and how to view the sacred in the world. I cannot recommend this book enough; you will enjoy and learn from it without having to read one graph or say one prayer. This is not the first book written by Brother Consolmagno that I have read and reviewed, and I enthusiastically look forward to reading and reviewing Dr. Consolmagno's newest books.

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