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BENEDICT XVI AND SETI

Abstract

The discovery of other civilizations in the universe would clearly have deep religious implications. Despite this, when I started getting involved in SETI only very few theologians had seriously reflected about the subject, while there was no official position of the Catholic Church as such, whose attitude could be summarized as "wait and see". So, one day I wrote to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, asking for his opinion about some theological issues related with extraterrestrial intelligent life, first of all, of course, whether it can exist from a Christian point of view. On 6 June 2014, he sent me a reply letter with some very interesting and open-minded considerations, but, being strictly personal, so far I used it only as a reference point for my reflections, without discussing it in public. However, when at the beginning of 2021 I decided to publish a university textbook about extraterrestrial life and its cultural implications, I asked him to authorize me to include the letter as an appendix, what he did. So, now I finally have the opportunity to present and discuss this historical document, where, for the first time in history, a Pope, although no longer in office, has taken an open position to the possible existence of other intelligent species besides humanity.