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New asteroids named for Jesuits and a Pope

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Asteroid 565184 Janusz honours Robert Janusz SJ, who currently works at the Vatican Observatory.



The Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope on Mount Graham, Arizona.

Four asteroids have been named after three astronomers at the Vatican Observatory and the Pope who began the tradition of papal patronage of its work.

The latest additions to the list of named asteroids, published on 4 February by the International Astronomical Union (IAU), include 560974 Ugoboncompagni, honouring Pope Gregory XIII, Ugo Boncompagni.

He directed the reform of the Julian calendar according to astronomical calculations by the Jesuit Christopher Clavius, creating the Gregorian calendar

still in use

(<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/16601/ukrainian-catholic-church-moves-to-new-calendar>).

The other three asteroids honour Jesuits who work or have worked at the Vatican Observatory, which is based at Castel Gondolfo in Italy but with its telescope in Mount Graham, Arizona.

Asteroid 565184 Janusz honours Robert Janusz SJ, who currently works at the observatory focusing on photometry – light measurement – in the study of star clusters and the mathematical analysis of data obtained by the Vatican telescope. He also serves as the observatory’s sacristan.

He previously worked in the philosophy of computing with Fr Michal Heller, the Polish priest and scientist who won the Templeton Prize in 2008.

The director of the Vatican Observatory, Br Guy Consolmagno SJ (<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/author/122>) (who himself has an asteroid named after him – 4597 Consolmagno) told *The Tablet* that Fr Janusz “is a true maven at data reduction and all things computers”.

Another asteroid, 551878 Stoeger, is named for Fr Bill Stoeger (1943-2014), a California-born cosmologist who studied with Sir Martin Ross and worked with Stephen Hawking.

Consolmagno pointed out Stoeger’s distinction as a spiritual director as well as a scientist: “I think he was the smartest person I ever knew. You could tell because he would never give a fast, glib answer to anything but a thoughtful, well-reasoned reply.”

The fourth asteroid, 562971 Johannhagen, is named for Fr Johann Hagen SJ (1847-1930) who was the director of the Vatican Observatory from 1906 until his death.

He was noted for devising experiments on the Vatican's grounds to demonstrate the rotation of the Earth.

He was also the spiritual director of St Elizabeth Hesselblad, the Swedish founder of the Bridgettine Sisters who saved the lives of Jews during the Holocaust.

Although the IAU invites discoverers of asteroids to name them, this is only after a lengthy verification process, during which the asteroid must be observed enough to determine its orbit – and thereby to predict its position far into the future.

The IAU's Working Group for Small Bodies Nomenclature, of committee of 15 astronomers, judges the proposed names before they are accepted.

More than thirty asteroids are named after Jesuits and others linked to the Vatican Observatory, including Christopher Clavius.

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