

# HAWKING MISREPRESENTS POPE JOHN PAUL II

Astrophysicist Stephen Hawking said yesterday that Pope John Paul II once told scientists that “It’s OK to study the universe and where it began. But we should not inquire into the beginning itself because that was the moment of creation and the work of God.” The news story says Hawking did not say when the pope allegedly made this remark.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented as follows:

“There is a monumental difference between saying that there are certain questions that science cannot answer—which is what the pope said—and authoritarian pronouncements warning scientists to back off.

“On p. 120 of Hawking’s book, *A Brief History of Time*, he says that at a 1981 Vatican conference on cosmology Pope John Paul II said that ‘it was all right to study the evolution of the universe after the Big Bang, but we should not inquire into the Big Bang itself because that was the moment of Creation and therefore the work of God.’ Importantly, there are no quotation marks around those words and no citation is offered. Ergo, this is Hawking’s impression of what the pope said.

“Here is what the pope actually said: ‘Every scientific hypothesis about the origin of the world, such as the one that says that there is a basic atom from which the whole of the physical universe is derived, leaves unanswered the problem concerning the beginning of the universe. By itself science cannot resolve such a question....’ The pope then quoted Pope Pius XII as saying, ‘We would wait in vain for an answer from the natural sciences which declare, on the contrary, that they honestly find themselves faced with an insoluble enigma.’

“In 1988, John Paul said that ‘Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.’ Hawking, who claims—without any evidence—that space and time have no beginning and no end, would be wise to refrain from positing false absolutes and learn to realize when he’s out of his league. Most important, he should stop distorting the words of the pope.”