God's Mechanics: How Scientists and Engineers Make Sense of Religion

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In *God's Mechanics,* Brother Guy tells the stories of those who identify with the scientific mindset--so-called "techies"--while practicing religion. A full fledged techie himself, he relates some classic philosophical reflections, his interviews with dozens of fellow techies, and his own personal take on his Catholic beliefs to provide, like a set of "worked out sample problems," the hard data on the challenges and joys of embracing a life of faith as a techie. And he also gives a roadmap of the traps that can befall an unwary techie believer. With lively prose and wry humor, Brother Guy shows how he not only believes in God but gives religion an honored place alongside science in his life. This book offers an engaging look at how--and why--scientists and those with technological leanings can hold profound, "unprovable" religious beliefs while working in highly empirical fields. Through his own experience and interviews with other scientists and engineers who profess faith, Brother Guy explores how religious beliefs and practices make sense to those who are deeply rooted in the world of technology.

God's Mechanics: How Scientists and Engineers Make Sense of Religion Details

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Scott says

A really interesting perspective on God. Although when the author starts talking about organized religions it gets awkward. He admits his lack of study in non-Catholic religions, and just powered through to explain why Catholicism makes the most sense to him. Thankfully that only lasts for a few pages in one chapter, the rest of the book is well worth a read and opens your mind to understand how intellectuals can accept and embrace God.

Julie Duffy says

Oh, how I've been searching for this book. I'm a well-educated, skeptical, modern, feminist, left-leaning Catholic in the USA.

It's hard to maintain belief and faith. It's hard to explain belief and faith. It's hard to justify (even to myself) being Catholic of all things...but now I don't have to. Most of the book was interesting but I LOVED the last section, where he riffs on why he's Catholic, how he can remain Catholic in the face of all the inconsistencies and awkward question and how it makes his (and, he would argue, your) life better that he does. I wanted to hug this chapter :)

He talks in the language of a scientist and a 'techie'. He unselfconsciously throws in language like "your mileage may vary" (which makes me feel right at home) and discusses evil with an analogy about physics that I struggled to follow, but left me confident that I was in the company of someone who doesn't accept things without thinking hard about them.

And he's funny. At one point he discusses the church's doctrine of free will and divides church teachings into three categories: the absolutes (of which there are few); the 'mores' (how we do things, which can change); and the third type of Catholic 'rule' (things like opting to abstain from meat on Fridays) which you can "ignore...at your own risk". He goes on, "There may be times when you have to use your common sense" about these kinds of rules "but you should be aware that when you open that box, you're voiding the warranty." :)

I wish there was more spiritual writing (maybe there is, I need to find it) that takes into account the questioning nature of the born Techie, and used language we can identify with.

Peter says

This was a difficult book for me to read in the beginning as I was unfamiliar with some of the scientific terminology. But as I progressed it became apparent to me how deep and thoughtful this book is. Brother Guy presents a scientific argument for spirituality and God that is engaging and challenging. It illustrates a different side of religion that I feel most people overlook. This is an absolutely wonderful book, especially

the last third, and I cannot recommend it enough.

Michael Williams says

Solid book. A little mish-mash at times, but delivers so many good insights on the science-religion front that a workable lack of cohesion is fine. Especially loved the latter apologistic (though he wouldn't call it that) section.

Mary says

Really enjoying it so far! Only in the first three chapters, and already Brother Guy is going over stuff I was yelling at my theology teachers in 12th grade and some of my favorite quotes from C.S. Lewis!
I'm not what he calls a "techie" - far from it - but I deeply appreciate his willingness to say it out loud: proof is not something that God has much to do with. Yet God (the idea, the reality, the whatever you want to call it) has so much going for it (Him) that most people in most places at most times are being reasonable when they say that it (He) is the answer.
But the questions? The questions are big, and we've only just begun! I can't wait to dive in further!

Simon says

This book tries to explain how "techies" that are believers reconcile their scientific mentality with faith.

This is not a book of apologetics, it doesn't try to proof the existence of God or the correctness of any religion. It isn't academic, nor philosophical, nor rigorous. It's merely a believer techie trying to explain how is it that some techies adhere to a religion.

If you are a techie, or if you are trying to understand how the techie mind works, or if you are trying to understand how it is that some scientists follow a religion, then this book might be of interest for you. Otherwise, might be better to skip it.

The author's treatment of religion is biased by his Christian formation. He recognises this problem in the later chapters. His treatment of non Abrahamic religions is very short. His interviewees all seem to be white Americans related to Christianity. A bit too ethnocentric for such a promising title.

The book is divided in five parts:

The first two parts deal with why a techie would believe in God and why she would join an organised religion. They are abstract and not very stimulating, but provide a framework for how to think and measure religion.

The third part is the author interviewing techie believers and trying to figure out how they make sense or religion. It's a revealing and thought provoking part. It feels very human and more approachable than the first

two parts.

The last two parts are about the author explaining why he is a Christian and a Catholic. He explains the foundations of his Christianity and how he stays Catholic despite all the shortcomings and sinners of the church. He also mentions how his journey to becoming a Jesuit began. He paints an image of how imperfection, forgiveness and love are central to Catholicism. It's a vision that is attractive and inspires hope.

Argum says

Wonderful book on the way that scientists with science framework brains make religion a part (or not) of their lives. Brother Guy is a wonderfully engaging man in person and in print. He has a gift for taking complicated, detail laden subjects and making them sensible to the non specialist. The book starts with some BIG QUESTIONS that can alone lead to a general acceptance of God by science minded folks or techies. It moves then to some specific attributes or things observable to make it work in this techie mindset. The third section was Brother Guy attempting qualitative research on what actual techies had to say about religion broadly and specifically in their life. The book concludes with an explanation of how this specific man makes his specific religion in his specific life.

That is an important bit there at the end. Brother Guy may be a Jesuit brother, but this books isn't trying to sell you on Catholicism or even Christianity more broadly. He isn't trying to prove God or organized religion. He is setting out how a science loving brain and mindset can be reconciled with religion. He also points out how silly a question that is since belief in an ordered creation is what makes science seem like a non pointless thing to do.

Aaron says

Often times, I choose books that I'm pretty sure will get me into my own head and rattle some of the foundations that have settled in up there. This book was one of those. Unfortunately, I'm not sure I agree altogether with some of what he says, and my own beliefs are starting to solidify as well making it challenging. This is a good book, with some great insight, and there are some wonderful answers to some excellent questions. There are also sections that I don't think needed to be there and don't really do anything but stroke the faith content of the author. But, it is a good book.

Malory says

The last 1/3 is the most interesting, but it takes awhile to get there. Lots of opinion.

Matthew Rasnake says

Spirituality has always been a huge part of my life, despite the fact that, for quite some time, I've not been a church-going, God-fearing bible-thumper. I've also been (an amateur) student of the sciences since grade-school. If the lure of the amber screen (my first computer) hadn't been so great, and I hadn't sucked quite so

badly at all forms of mathematics, I probably would have pursued a career in theoretical physics. Because of these facts, a large part of my inner journey has been involved in the reconciliation of religious faith and scientific knowledge.

God's Mechanics' intention is to share with the reader this peculiar journey, which is, to some extent, common amongst those in the science and technology fields. It asks and attempts to answer some common questions: how **do** we reconcile science and religion, are they really at odds with one another, what good does faith do in this world of facts and theories, and finally, why do we need a god in the first place?

The author—a Jesuit astronomer in the Vatican observatory—takes great pains to impress upon the reader that he is not a professional interviewer, a professional philosopher, a professional writer, or a professional sociologist. He's an astronomer, a scientist, and a student of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is those last two, he feels, that give him any qualifications to write the book.

The first two parts of the book were based on older work that he'd done—magazine articles, and talks that he'd given. These are actually quite good, with some interesting ideas and explanations concerning the common questions specifically and the "techie" worldview in general. Reading these first few parts, I had high hopes that some serious discoveries were to be found in the later chapters as the author should certainly get closer and closer to the heart of the matter.

Instead, what I found was that the rest of the book was a study in contradictions, apologies, evasions, and finally some good old-fashioned catholic rah-rah. In the author's defense, he as much as said (several times) that he was biased, and that the problem with theorizing is that often you have to begin with the conclusions... meaning **his** mind was made up, so it was hard for him to talk as if it wasn't.

The interviews, as described, seemed haphazard and probably a bit too leading. Often he mentioned discussing with the current group or individual the things that previous groups or individuals had said, thereby seeding the discussion rather than allowing it to define itself. Ultimately, I felt the interviews were mostly non-revelatory, and only served to confuse the issues.

The end of the book mostly dealt with the author's own spiritual quest, which essentially reads: i was born Catholic, I never left the church, and my attempts to define my faith, my beliefs, and the spiritual needs that drove them was an exercise in recursion—I believe, therefore I think I need to believe, therefore I believe.

Despite the book's faults, it was still a worthwhile read. If you're interested in philosophy, spirituality, or the areas in which those things and science collide, the first two sections are great. If you're looking for an unbiased discussion of religion in the lives of techies, this isn't really it. Likewise, if you're looking for a guidebook for your own spiritual journey, this book may make too many assumptions to be truly helpful.

Juan Russo says

Enjoyed the book, the reasoning, the candid discussions. As the reading progressed, it seemed to concluded in what I consider circular arguments. Nevertheless, I am glad I read it. Recommend to anyone interested in the topic reconciling science and religion.

Chris Callaway says

Not a tightly-argued treatise, but it offers some interesting perspective on how certain kinds of people view the world. It really reads like a few mini-books patched together in one volume.

P. Es says

absolutely fantastic book. Jesuit brother and Vatican Astronomer Guy Consolmagno is a truly fabulous writer. especially revealing about why/how techies think the way they do (and WHY they think the way they do about the way they think...), about religion. gives profound depiction of how and why many of these peculiar people believe about the big things. gives justification for his religious convictions and depicts others fairly and sympathetically.