

the reader that while the immersion of baptism demands death, the covenant of baptism promises life in community with God and the saints.

R.'s inclusion of numerous stories, including his own pastoral experiences, makes this book appealing to a broad audience. It is a fine resource for pastoral ministry, and I recommend it for students, pastors, and general readers.

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*In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez.*  
Edited by Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block.  
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013. Pp. xv + 206. \$24.

The theology of liberation has spawned a range of coordinates for mapping the theological and pastoral imagination: the preferential option for the poor, theology from below, structural sin and violence, social suffering, social analysis, accompaniment, solidarity, and praxis, to name a few. Taken together, these ideas constitute a theological framework for doing the work of the gospel. Yet theologians outside of a Latin American context have often found it challenging to transpose this framework into a context beyond Latin America. For instance, how does one actually practice solidarity with the suffering poor of the majority world? This highly readable book, the outcome of a three-day, 2011 symposium at the University of Notre Dame featuring conversations between Farmer and Gutiérrez, offers some inspiring indications. Gutiérrez, the “father of liberation theology,” is joined by Paul Farmer, founder of Partners in Health, a nonprofit organization delivering health care to and advocacy for the very poor in developing countries, notably Haiti and Peru.

The book contains some already published material from both interlocutors and, for theological leverage, leans primarily on Gutiérrez's earlier *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (1984), which is an intermittent point of reference. In that regard, the book serves as an excellent introduction to liberation theology. Gutiérrez's passionate, even lyrical, pastoral voice sounds clearly here, particularly in his symposium contribution, “Saying and Showing to the Poor: ‘God Loves You.’” Here Gutiérrez demonstrates how Farmer's work is a realization of the principles of the gospel and of the aims of liberation theology.

The impact of the book comes in Farmer's essays, however; in particular his “Conversion in the Time of Cholera: A Reflection on Structural Violence and Social Change.” I have read nothing, not even by a theologian (which Farmer is not), as compelling and clear an exposition of what liberation theology means and requires, namely, that theology start with and engage the problem of social suffering and its structural causes. Farmer unfolds here (and in other parts of the book) his own journey toward a preferential option for the poor in health care, partly through his encounter with Gutiérrez's theology. Farmer's analysis of the genealogy of disease (in this case, cholera and a drug-resistant form of tuberculosis) out of entrenched poverty and his

depiction of the odds against breaking the cycle through conventional means vividly illustrate what liberation theologians have been trying to get across. Farmer calls for conversion of the structures of medicine, and even of the nongovernmental organizations that serve the most poor. He understands that not all can become physicians or Harvard professors, but he argues passionately that we cannot be bystanders either and that each of us is called to an analogous conversion, whether we are Christian or not. I highly recommend this book for undergraduate and graduate courses in either theology or public health.

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*The Problem with God: Why Atheists, True Believers, and Even Agnostics Must All Be Wrong.* By Peter J. Steinberger. New York: Columbia University, 2013. Pp. 210. \$29.50.

It is impossible to conceive of an uncaused cause. The logic of cause and effect compels us to ask of any candidate for the title “first cause”: “What caused this cause?” and to expect an answer. Thus epistemology entails an infinite regression of causality, making it impossible to identify an “uncaused cause.” No thing can come out of nothing. The very idea makes no sense. Thus God as an unmoved mover is a conceptual impossibility. “Just as there’s nothing to believe, there’s also nothing to disbelieve” (107). In his easy conversational style, Steinberger makes this point repetitively and somewhat irreverently.

Just as the idea of God makes no sense, so any position on God makes no sense. This is why atheists, true believers, and even agnostics must all be wrong. This much is established in chapter 1. Subsequent chapters simply rehash the argument and tease out consequences. In chapter 8, S. admits that he cannot get his mind around Big Bang theory either, or any other explanation of how the world came to exist. However, he concludes on an optimistic note: “The world of cause and effect . . . cannot be all there is” (160). Precisely what else there is, he does not venture to suggest. Once again, epistemology dictates ontology.

Would I read this book? On a slow afternoon. Would I spend money to buy it? No.

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