

*Signposts to God: How Modern Physics & Astronomy Point the Way to Belief.* By Peter Bussey. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016. Pp. 222. \$23.

“A universe pervaded by causes that are in the end without cause seems strange. A universe pervaded by mathematical structure without an originating intelligence seems paradoxical. An existence in a universe whose background might be an infinitely complex set of multiple universes seems bizarre and constitutes a picture that stretches human rationality and belief to their limits and beyond” (205).

With these stirring words, Bussey wraps up his argument on how science points to God. *Not* to believe is strange, paradoxical, and requires insisting on a universe that tests both rationality and belief. He is careful to say that this only points to God, and does not constitute any sort of “proof.” And that is just as well, because in the preceding chapters of his book he portrays a universe described by modern physics and astronomy that in many ways does exactly seem strange beyond belief. It’s not only atheists who have a pretty taste for paradox.

Ultimately, B.’s argument is valid as far as it goes: belief in atheism is not more bizarre than belief in God. But I was left with a certain frustration that he rarely took that starting point to any deeper conclusion.

B., a particle physicist at the University of Glasgow, writes from his own particular situation in the United Kingdom, which clearly shapes the direction of his arguments as an active Christian and scientist. The British academic world is notoriously prejudiced against religion of any sort, an overt bigotry arising from its own cultural and historical roots that are never touched on in this book. As a result, B. spends significant time defending his faith against the assumption that atheism is the default position among academics, and that any deviation from that received creed—even agnosticism—carries the burden of proof.

This raises a fundamental question about B.’s book: to whom is it addressed? The writing is a bit too technical (including footnotes) to reach a wide popular audience, while not covering nearly enough of the already-existing literature on the topic to serve as an academic sourcebook.

His popular-level descriptions of astronomy and physics, which make up the opening chapters of the book, are fine in themselves, but they do not break new ground. Topics such as relativity, quantum theory, or the big bang have all been treated at greater depth (and with more pop-appealing imagery) elsewhere. Much of what he has to say about the history of philosophical thought should appeal to a scientist who may well be unaware of this material, but the philosophical and historical outline given here smacks of something an intelligent undergraduate might have picked up through a casual reading of the field, rather than a deep examination and summary of the contemporary literature in the field. For example, in his discussion of God as First Cause, he still carries the scientist’s presupposition of a creation *in* time, not *of* time (cf. William, R. Stoeger, “The Big Bang, Quantum Cosmology and *Creatio ex nihilo*,” *Creation and the God of Abraham* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 152–75, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511778063.01).

Writing books on science and faith is hard. I know; I have tried several times, with mixed results. In criticizing B.'s work, I find myself in the embarrassing position of recognizing all the failings of my own attempts at such work. Writing about the science that I know professionally, I have a hard time remembering what the non-expert reader is going to find difficult to understand. But when I write on theological topics, too often I dwell on the ideas of the last book I happened to read, without a confident depth of knowledge in the field. My own solution has been to find a co-author whose expertise complemented mine. B. would have done well to have found such a collaborator.

That said, B. does a wonderful job in raising topics that I have not often seen in science–religion discussions. His chapter on “Dangerous Infinities?” (chapter 5) opens a wonderful argument on the difficulty faced by materialists in contemplating an infinite universe, and his chapter on “Mental Reality” (chapter 11) bravely addresses the inherent contradictions of trying to explain consciousness with a purely mechanical description of reality.

In sum, my real complaint against this book is not anything that the author has done wrong, but rather in all the places I wish he had done more. It is a good book, which contains within it the seeds of a great book ... a book that I hope, at some point, he will find the time and courage to write.

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*Teología Pública: Una voz para la Iglesia en sociedades plurales.* By Gonzalo Villagrán, SJ. Madrid: PPC, 2016. Pp. 158. \$18.05.

How are we to produce a theological discourse relevant in societies characterized by political, moral, religious, cultural pluralism? The range of writing over the last half-century going by the title of “public theology” offers one set of answers, which this short, precise, and very well-organized introduction does much to commend. Gonzalo Villagrán is a Spanish Jesuit theologian. He has a doctorate from Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, and is now an assistant professor at the Faculty of Theology of Granada (Spain). He can thus range freely across both US and European resources. The first reason his new book is important is that it offers a distinctively European perspective on what is largely a North American current of thought. Secondly, he offers a useful mapping of a theological movement that is necessarily diverse and eclectic. Exhaustiveness is out of the question, but V. gives helpful orientations, both historical and systematic, for anyone wanting to enter this field.

In the first part of the book, public theology is presented as one possible response to both the pluralism and the privatization of religion in Western societies. It aims at “contributing to the common good in a pluralistic society by using theological categories” (33). Various models of mediation between revelation and social realities are available in theology today: natural law inherited from a long tradition; political theology (Metz); Latin American liberation theology (Gutiérrez, Sobrino); approaches