

Book Review

Georges De Schrijver, S.J., *Imagining the Creator God from Antiquity to Astrophysics*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015. 234 pp.

Historical consciousness is maintained throughout Fr. Georges De Schrijver's book, *Imagining the Creator God from Antiquity to Astrophysics*. The historical development of humanity's systematic view of creation and study of the stars is neatly and profoundly laid out for readers.

De Schrijver's historical approach is manifested as early as the first chapter of the book. Instead of simply eliciting the religious message from the creation narrative found in the Hebrew Testament of the bible, he looks at the Genesis story (Gen. 1:1-2, 4a) as a document that has its own history of study. His view highlights the reality of God as transcendent in history and creation given an accommodation of the research of secondary causes in the world including "the wondrous workings of history and the universe."

His sustained historical research efforts provide moving insights from every section of the book and allows for an adequate grasp of the transition at every age of systematization. Readers who would like to see the unfolding of man's view of the world and the stars

are given a profound grounding of the study from Plato and Aristotle through medieval assimilation of Greek cosmology and the Copernican turn in modern science reaching unto Newtonian and Quantum physics. Students of science therefore would find a helpful guide in Fr. De Schrijver as they navigate through their study of man's thought on creation, the stars, and the foundation of reality.

Clarity is maintained for learners such that Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *Physics* are likened to a musical construction and cosmic orchestration of reality. Readers may find interesting notes that give the ears a hearing of the "music of the spheres" and the dance of the planets. In a discussion that moves through Galileo, Newton, Einstein, Bohr, and Planck, it is a happy surprise that Fr. De Schrijver's book does not shy away from citing diagrams that are lifted from Wikipedia side by side with those taken directly from the Hubble telescope data. This book does not sit snobbishly on top of formal academic research to miss an opportunity for clear presentation. For as long as the student is helped, Fr. De Schrijver allows for straightforward learning about the wonder of the stars, the move from precise prediction to uncertainty, preference to speak of orbitals in place of orbits, and the *anthropic* principle that explains man's place in the universe. Making use of popular books and resources available, he succeeds in giving a flowing presentation of a systematic understanding of the modern history of astronomy.

Depth is not lost, however, for Fr. De Schrijver's view is systematic and historical in the same breath. In a section titled "Lessons from the Past," he recovers the thought of Thomas Aquinas's *On the Eternity of the World* to effectively respond to

Stephen Hawking's claim that through the theory of the multiverse, "God Creator" is no longer needed. For Hawking, "It is reasonable to ask who or what created the universe, but if the answer is God, then the question has merely been deflected to that of who created God."¹ De Schrijver decries this lack of respect given to the metaphysical reality of Origin. That is, while the cosmos may well be eternal, this absence of its beginning in time does not negate its ontological beginning from the hand of an Original Creator. De Schrijver argues, through Aquinas, that creation does not always coincide with beginning in time. The endlessness of nature does not exclude a Creator God, who may well make use of both chance and necessity, in composing from all eternity.

The digression to Aquinas may come across as presenting the wisdom of De Schrijver's book as flowing forth from a metaphysical wellspring. While that may not be excluded, the true profundity of De Schrijver's book lies somewhere deeper.

In his course, "Mediations in Philosophy and Theology," De Schrijver responds to John Milbank's critique of Rahnerian thought. Milbank claims that Karl Rahner has fallen into the formalism that may be true of his mentor Joseph Marechal. De Schrijver retorts by saying that Rahner effectively avoids such failing because of his acquaintance with Hedegerrian philosophy. On top of this, however, De Schrivjer highlights Rahner's being a Jesuit who lived the spirituality of *contemplatio ad amorem*, which in

¹ Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (London: Bantam Press, 2010), 172.

practice shuns a formalism that flies away from the very palpability of the cosmos. Interiority that sees God in all things and all things in God is free from such a *fuga mundi*, or escape from the world.

What is true of Rahner is all the more true of Georges De Schrijver. The real intensity of *Imagining the Creator God* is the mysticism that pushes St. Ignatius deep into spiritual consolation as he beholds the grandeur of the stars. De Schrijver's look at the cosmos, albeit more nuanced given his knowledge of the Schrodinger Equation of probability calculus and Pauli's Principle of Exclusion, is nonetheless a direct perception of the innocence, simplicity, and sacredness of heaven. This book is a doorway that allows entry into the contemplation of the very depth, creativity, complexity, and generosity of the Origin God who is present in the simplicity and innocence of the very basic stuff that makes up the universe.

The philosopher Baruch Spinoza came to be known as the mystic of nature with his assertion *Deus sive natura*. It is a pity that De Schrijver had to let go of the section where he goes through Spinoza's view of nature and interrogation of the cosmology of his time to come up with a panentheistic God who is *natura naturans non naturata*—God as he who conditions nature but is not conditioned by nature. This nuanced yet direct contact with God that is provided by nature earned Spinoza his title of being a mystic. It is in this sense, though further deepened by his Ignatian life of prayer, that Georges De Schrijver's thought can also be named as mysticism of the stars: *Deus sive astra*.

Author

V Fullente Suarez has a Licentiate in Philosophy from the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome), and teaches philosophy in the Ateneo de Manila University, San Carlos Seminary, and Mother of Good Counsel Seminary. He serves as a parish vicar at the Sto. Niño de Pandacan Parish, Manila. His interests and writings are on metaphysics, philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, and Filipino culture from a religious philosophy perspective. <vfsuarez@gmail.com>