Andrew Dean Swafford

Nature and Grace: A New Approach to Thomistic Ressourcement. Foreword by Edward T. Oakes, S.J. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2014. Pp. xiv + 205. Pb, \$25.

In *Nature and Grace: A New Approach to Thomistic Ressourcement*, Andrew Dean Swafford provides a primer on a key twentieth-century theological debate, specifically that over nature and grace inaugurated by the Jesuit Henri de Lubac's 1946 work *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946). Swafford proves a deft guide in explaining de Lubac's argument that the human person has a natural desire for the beatific vision. He also examines recent critiques of de Lubac by Lawrence Feingold (*The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* [Rome: Apollinare Studi, 2001]) and Steven A. Long (*Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2010]), and proposes the work of the nineteenth-century theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben as providing a balanced approach to nature and grace.

The Christian tradition has always affirmed both "Christocentrism," that "Christ is the center and end of all things" (1), and the transcendence and gratuitousness of God's grace. These truths, however, have proven difficult to balance, leading to two poles in the tradition: intrinsicism, putting stronger emphasis on human nature's fulfillment in Christ, and extrinsicism, sharply distinguishing human nature from grace to preserve the latter's gratuitousness. The debate over de Lubac's work is one episode in this ongoing back-and-forth.

In the second chapter, Swafford explains the context for de Lubac's work. He points the reader to the seemingly contradictory texts of Thomas Aquinas, some suggesting human nature does indeed have a natural desire for the beatific vision, others suggesting two human ends, one proportionate to our natural capacities and another obtainable only with the assistance of grace. Swafford then traces the development of the hypothesis of "pure nature," beginning with Thomas de Vio Cajetan in the sixteenth century. This theory proposed that God could have created human beings without the desire for the beatific vision experienced by actually existing persons, but sharing the same human nature. The theory ensures the gratuity of God's grace, that it is not something God "owes" human beings by reason of their nature. De Lubac took aim at this theory, arguing not only that it misrepresented Aquinas's thought, but more importantly that it made humankind's encounter with God extrinsic to, and therefore irrelevant to, everyday experience, contributing to modern secularism. Swafford also notes the right-wing, authoritarian affinities of de Lubac's opponents, the tail-end of over a century of anti-revolutionary French Catholic politics.

The third chapter presents the heart of de Lubac's argument. Swafford rightly makes clear that de Lubac did not merely dispute this or that theological conclusion, but rather the very rules of the theological game. He insisted on the inadequacy of the neo-Scholastic concept of "nature." Drawing on Aristotle's concept of *physis* and his dictum that "nature does nothing in vain" (75), the neo-Scholastics defined nature in terms of the ends a being is capable of achieving through its own capacities. De Lubac, by contrast, described the human person as a "created spirit," a being by its very nature self-transcending and animated by a divine spark. Swafford also notes de Lubac's insistence on the centrality of paradox in Christian doctrine, seeing neo-Scholastic rationalism as ultimately harmful.

In the second part of the book, Swafford considers Feingold and Long's recent criticisms of de Lubac. Feingold's points closely mirror those of the neo-Scholastics. He argues that de Lubac made crucial mistakes in his interpretation of what the neo-Scholastic theologians meant by "obediential potency" and "*debitum naturae*" (88–106). Long argues that de Lubac failed to grasp the "theonomic" ontology characteristic of the best of the neo-Scholastic tradition (118–26). The natural order draws its being from God's eternal law, and so a true understanding of the natural order does not contribute to modern secularism, but rather is its antidote. Both Feingold and Long insist on the intelligibility of the "pure nature" concept for ensuring the gratuitousness of God's calling to the beatific vision.

In the final section of the book, Swafford presents his case that Scheeben reconciles the valid insights of de Lubac and the neo-Scholastics. In works such as *Natur und Gnade* (1861) and *Die Mysterien des Christentums* (1865), Scheeben affirms the pure nature hypothesis, ensuring the gratuitousness of grace. But he also presents a distinct form of "Christocentrism." Scheeben, like de Lubac, asserts that the incarnation is key to interpreting human nature, but his treatment of divine adoption allows him to affirm both our fulfillment through participation in the divine life and the utter gratuity of this fulfillment.

This volume would have been well-worn and dog-eared if it had been available during my graduate studies, and will be invaluable to students of twentieth-century theology. De Lubac and his contemporaries like Karl Rahner, S.J. were steeped in neo-Scholastic theology, but today's students are hardly exposed to it. Swafford's definition of terms such as natural desire, obediential potency, and *debitum naturae* in the introductory chapter helps make sense of the otherwise arcane prose of some of modern theology's key texts. He provides a fair-minded and clear overview of a debate receiving renewed attention, and his work is essential reading for scholars interested in this issue.

It is, however, not without problems. Swafford fails to see that Feingold and Long's criticisms depend on the very definition of "nature" that de Lubac himself disputed. These criticisms "all stem from the abstraction of the nature of a thing, in precision from its existential conditions (or states)" (106). But for de Lubac the human person is by nature a "created spirit" in history, a dreamer, a builder, a lover. The "existential conditions" of human life are "what ultimately makes man a man" (73), and abstraction in this case is mutilation. It is precisely in the existential drama of life that we encounter God. Likewise, Swafford is careful to provide the historical context for de Lubac's work but provides no contextualization for his critics. Does a renewed defense of "pure nature" signal uneasiness with secular democracy? Swafford also recognizes de Lubac's influence on the Second Vatican Council—and in particular on the theological anthropology found in *Gaudium et spes* (1965)—as marking that "the hegemony of the pure-nature tradition had undeniably come to an end" (61). Is the revival of this tradition tied to dissatisfaction with the council? Swafford leaves these questions unaddressed, although they make clear the profound significance of the discussion to which he has made a substantial contribution.

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