Stephen M. Fields, S.J.

Analogies of Transcendence: An Essay on Nature, Grace & Modernity. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 294. Hb, \$69.95.

In his book, Stephen Fields follows the general trend in Catholic theology over the last half century or so, and rejects a “dualist” approach to nature and grace in which nature is a self-contained structure upon which grace builds a kind of superstructure. Instead, he seeks a closer integration, proposing that grace is in some way the fulfillment of nature’s inner dynamism. However, this kind of theological project is far from unique as the vast majority of Catholic theologians since the mid-twentieth century would say that they also reject a two-tiered approach and embrace grace and nature as integrally related. Indeed, such a consensus might lead some to conclude that the nature-grace question is no longer relevant. However, as Frederick Bauerschmidt has emphasized, it is still very much relevant, for *how* one integrates nature and grace matters (“Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic,” *Communio* 31/1 [Spring 2004]:67–84, at 71).

In attempting to show how nature and grace are integrated, Fields divides his work into three parts. In the first (Chapters One–Three), he presents a historical overview of the debates surrounding the nature/grace dichotomy. He opens this by holding up the “Baroque Harmony” (9) of Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Ávila, and John of the Cross as exemplum of a harmonious account of nature and grace. Fields then tells a familiar story of how this was dismantled by the rise of “pure nature,” the ultimate blame for which he seems to place at the feet of Thomas Aquinas and his introduction of Aristotle into the Christian tradition and the “modern estrangement” (19) which resulted. Fields ends his overview with a summary of the theological debates over nature and grace in the twentieth century which were generally dominated by two tendencies: to naturalize the supernatural on the one hand, and to super-naturalize nature on the other. The former tendency is often associated with Karl Rahner, S.J., while the latter is linked with (the one-time Jesuit) Hans Urs von Balthasar. And Fields suggests that one of his goals is to “advance a sympathetic dialogue” (6) between the two. All of which is particularly significant for anyone interested in contemporary Jesuit studies, since it highlights the fact that, as William Portier points out, reading Catholic theology since Vatican II often comes down to reading Jesuits reading Saint Ignatius on considering “how God dwells in creatures” (William Portier, “Jesus and the World of Grace,” 1968–2016, *Horizons*, 41/2 [December, 2016]: 374–96, at 381).

It is in part two (Chapter Four), that Fields lays out *how* he sees the integration of nature and grace. Tellingly perhaps, what he calls his “sacramental” approach is largely based on Rahner and his conceptualization of the

Realsymbol which Fields portrays as being capable of maintaining the “unity-in-difference” (117) necessary for any integrated relationship. Fields argues that it does this by preserving nature’s integrity as grace’s “sacramental medium” (127) or “own other” (143)—grace “consummates” the nature that incarnates it. Fields pushes this notion in his discussion of sanctifying and prevenient grace. For instance, he argues that since the desire for baptism itself can “obtain” (120) the sacrament, then even without the waters of baptism prevenient grace can blossom into the sanctifying grace of the sacrament. Fields suggests that this kind of analogous approach can also be found in the conceptions of church-state relations in the writings of Pope Benedict XVI and John Courtney Murray, S.J.

Fields concludes his book with three chapters that look at how his approach to nature and grace is theologically significant and can be employed in what he regards as some of Christianity’s perennial problems. These he sees as primarily: the doctrine of God, God’s relation with the world, and the relation of Christianity to other religions. Chapter Five presents this kind of sacramental treatment of theological aesthetics and the task of contemporary art. Using the Ignatian notion of love as a starting point, in Chapter Six Fields looks at a more analogous way of thinking about God’s relation to the cosmos. Finally, in Chapter Seven, he suggests a way of reading *Dominus Iesus* that includes other religions into Christianity while still seeking to maintain its particularly unique claims.

Helpful in all of this would have been some treatment of the more recent discussions on nature and grace, such as the ones raised by the so-called “*Ressourcement* Thomists” and their attempts to distinguish Thomas from Suárez on these questions—Fields generally blurs the positions of Thomas and Suárez. Likewise, some discussion of other “sacramental” approaches to integrating nature and the supernatural would have helped, such as the one advanced by Kenneth and Michael Himes. To this extent, their notion of the sacred as the full depth of the secular (with the church “thematizing” the grace present in the world) shares many similarities with how Fields portrays nature as grace’s sacramental medium. Problematic for such “sacramental” approaches is that an always/already graced nature—or grace’s “own other”—ultimately bears resemblance to the self-sufficient pure nature of the dualist approach it seeks to reject. Here is where a deeper reading of Ignatius could have assisted in overcoming such problems. For, as the scholarship of Hugo Rahner, S.J. revealed, Ignatius (and other early modern mystical writers) operated from a more three-tiered theological perspective, with nature distinct from both what was sinful and supernatural. Such a perspective can move the conversation beyond a strict nature-grace (sacred-secular) binary. Some recognition of

the Quietist controversy and its legacy in breaking up the baroque Catholicism of Ignatius would have also been a strength. For as thinkers such as Maurice Blondel and Michel de Certeau, S.J. acknowledged, it was this controversy at the end of the seventeenth century that largely shaped Catholic theology and its nature-grace debates well into the twentieth century.

Ultimately, Fields has written a strong theological argument that, perhaps more than anything else, offers a good example of why struggling with *how* to integrate nature and grace continues to be important for Catholic theology. Indeed, as Dorothy Day reminded readers of her autobiography *The Long Loneliness* in 1952 (in the wake of *Humani generis*), nature and grace are spiritual forces and capacities “far more powerful than the atom bomb” (258).

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