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Edward T. Oakes, *A Theology of Grace in Six Controversies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 270. \$28.00/£18.99.

The death of the Jesuit theologian Edward Oakes in 2013, at the age of 65, deprived us of a well-loved scholar, known both for his work on Hans Urs von Balthasar, notably in *Pattern of Redemption* (1997) and in editing the *Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (2004, with David Moss), and for his unstinting commitment to evangelical–Catholic dialogue, as reflected in *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (2011) and his writings for *First Things*. The desire for better understanding between evangelicals and Catholics also animates this posthumously published book. In *Infinity Dwindled*, Oakes had sought for rapprochement through attention to christology, a topic of substantial agreement. In the book under review here, Oakes turned to a yet more ambitious task, choosing a theme – grace – that has been rife with disagreements between Catholics and Protestants. That makes the points of profound agreement he unearths all the more valuable.

Oakes marshals his material in terms of the six ‘controversies’ in the title, which are ‘grace and nature’, ‘sin and justification’ (but also merit), ‘evolution and original sin’, ‘free will and predestination’, ‘experience and divinisation’ and ‘Mary, Mediatrix of Graces’. He adds a short introduction, and there is a warm foreword by Robert Baron, auxiliary bishop in the Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles and, like Oakes, a notable theological communicator.

The book was written, the author notes, with class teaching in mind: namely a single semester course on the theology of grace. This is, however, in no normal sense a ‘textbook’. For one thing, it is far more animated than typical examples of that genre. Nonetheless, the profusion of quotations here, often of some length, serve it well as a resource for discussion, especially given its dialectic approach, surveying seemingly opposed positions to find points of fundamental agreement. As might be expected, given the author’s desire to build bridges with evangelical readers, attention is given to biblical texts throughout.

No one with any interest in the theology of grace (or, in fact, in theology in general) is likely to be anything other than delighted with this book, and that would also hold for anyone with a significant commitment to ecumenism carried out in a theological register. Oakes would no doubt be pleased that almost every page is liable to send the reader off to follow up some quotation or citation. The book is a treasure-trove, compiled and worked through by a lively and constructive intellect.

The book’s one significant shortfall is its poignantly unfinished quality. Many chapters conclude abruptly, and in some chapters what is delivered

differs significantly from what has been promised. The final chapter, on 'Mary, Mediatrix of Graces', provides the clearest example. The question of mediation simply falls by the wayside, leaving us instead with a study of Mary as recipient of grace, approached in terms of her proposed immaculate conception. Almost nothing is said about her role as mediator in the wider economy of salvation, and less still about mediation in prayer. Fortunately, the chapter works splendidly on its own terms, if not on the terms that had been stated. Oakes delivers a *tour de force* argument that the doctrine of the immaculate conception serves to underline what Protestants have most wanted to stress about grace.

The abrupt conclusion of chapters often involves the invocation of a particular, resolving figure. Matthias Joseph Scheeben is given proper space in relation to grace and nature, but that is not the case with Thérèse of Lisieux on justification and merit, nor is it particularly clear why she, and not any other saint-theologian, is called upon to perform this particular task. The discussion of what Pius XII and John Paul II bring to considerations of original sin and evolution does not feel cramped, but Karl Barth's contribution to free will and justification does. Augustine is an ever-present figure throughout the book, receiving both high praise and strikingly trenchant criticism. Thomas Aquinas is never one of Oakes' end-of-chapter log-jam breakers, but it is he, nonetheless, who usually offers the underlying framework for a reconciliation. The overall theological tone is set by the author's discipleship on the works of Balthasar.

Such is the breadth of what is treated in this book – offering almost, if not quite, a survey of systematic theology in relation to grace – that it would be impossible to offer any significant degree of comment here on specific detail. From the perspective of my own work on theology and natural science, it would be true to say that while Oakes' chapter on evolution offers a good deal, his understanding of common ancestry is flawed. In particular, he misses the significance of the point that the historical figures that can be singled out as the 'most recent common ancestor', or as genetic Adam or Eve, are defined *relative* to the current human population. Over time, their identity would change. That makes it difficult to see what use they serve in relating the doctrine of the fall to biological history.

I note in conclusion that this excellent book has no index. It is a disappointment that the publisher did not choose to provide one, since that would have made this already valuable resource even more useable.

Andrew Davison

Corpus Christi College, Cambridge CB2 1RH

apd31@cam.ac.uk