

EXPLORING THOMISM

Reinhard Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

Duke University professor Reinhard Hütter has written a rich and inspiring exploration in the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Although speculatively intricate and worthy of deliberate study, this volume affords readers much more than mere academic divertissement. Indeed, the author provides a compelling portrait of the authentic pursuit of wisdom. “This book is an exercise in ressourcement” that explores “Thomas’s theology as a path to the source of perennial wisdom, a path that if traveled again more frequently will lead to an overdue theological renewal after a dire period of pervasive theological fragmentation and disorientation” (5).

The author’s own theological pilgrimage beautifully inspires and informs the shape of the volume. In the book’s acknowledgements, Professor Hütter references an article he contributed to the journal *Nova et Vetera* entitled “Relinquishing the Principle of Private Judgment in Matter’s of Divine Truth: A Protestant Theologian’s Journey into the Catholic Church,” in which he chronicles the various theological, moral, and ecclesiological issues that contributed to his conversion to Catholicism. Those who have read this touching and personal essay cannot help but observe the fuller development of the same themes within this present volume. Thus, considered under a personal aspect, *Dust Bound for Heaven* emerges as something akin to an intellectual chronicle of the Lutheran-convert’s “seven-year-long journey of becoming a Catholic theologian” (ix).



VASILY POLENOV - AMONG THE TEACHERS

This is a book of profound theological hope, and it is “written in the confidence that Thomas is still today able to guide this search [for perennial wisdom] and lead the seekers of a sapiential perspective up-stream to the source of all wisdom” (4). To clarify this point, Hütter draws a careful distinction between what he calls the contemporary “revival of Aquinas scholarship” and an authentic “*ressourcement* in the philosophy and theology of the Common Doctor.” The difference between revival and *ressourcement* “depends on whether the end of the inquiry is Thomas as an eminent figure of thought,” or rather “what eminently preoccupied Thomas’s thought and what is found in his teaching.” In short, “the latter and only the latter is true *ressourcement*” (5). The author finds attempts to identify the “historical Thomas” interesting but, ultimately, penultimate in significance. Like the *Doctor Communis* himself, Professor Hütter is interested in the truth.

The author defends the traditional Thomistic distinction between reason and faith, and he educes its perennial value in the light of contemporary thought. Although a Thomistic philosophical *ressourcement* differs from a Thomistic theological *ressourcement*, the author expressly maintains their mutual (and

necessary) complementarity. Rationalism and fideism both betray their adherents. Only the Thomistic synthesis resolves what the author calls the dual “crises of faith and reason” which saturate our modern period. On this point, Hütter claims no fundamental originality. Rather, he grounds his proposals in the observations of Blessed John Paul II’s 1998 papal encyclical, *Fides et ratio*.

“Human nature’s ordination to glory” constitutes the material focus and unifying thread of the book (18). Thus, the author articulates with care and charm the subtleties of Saint Thomas’s theological anthropology. Professor Hütter explains why this topic warrants particular attention with regard to the errors of “angelism” and “animalism” on the one hand (80), and modern liberalism and secularism on the other (124). The truth of human nature matters both in the here and now of human existence and for our supernatural fulfillment in the state of glory. Wading into the heated controversies surrounding the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, Professor Hütter offers a fresh summary of the debate and an intriguing articulation of Saint Thomas’s teaching on the relationship of nature and grace. Here, one particularly admires his perspicacious engagement with the contributions of theologians past (e.g. Henri de Lubac and Marie-Joseph Le Guillou) and present (e.g. John Milbank and Lawrence Feingold). Professor Hütter also considers the complexities surrounding the infamous controversies regarding the active interplay between human freedom and divine grace. He argues that the “Augustinian synthesis” (282) of the Angelic Doctor offers theologians a “golden thread” which can extricate contemporary students of this controversy from a seemingly endless cycle of dialectics and polemics.

With remarkable breadth of consideration and depth of penetration, the author explores the relevance of these ostensibly esoteric topics to contemporary issues like the theological virtues and the Christian life, the formal unity of *sacra doctrina* and its study, and the role of philosophical wisdom in both theological science and modern university education. A tremendously moving

account of Saint Thomas's Christology in relation to Eucharistic transubstantiation serves as the book's "postlude" and conclusion. Indeed, this section constitutes the exploration's summit and climax. The postlude shows how "all aspects of Thomas's theology and philosophy are needed in order to contemplate the utterly Christ-constituted and Christ-centered liturgical practice of Eucharistic adoration and the theological truth entitled therein—Eucharistic transubstantiation" (18). In a word, the contemplative encounters the sublime height of "mystery and metaphysics" in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar (425).

Dust Bound for Heaven is dedicated to the Thomistic Institute of the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. As direct beneficiaries of this institution, the Dominican students would like to thank Professor Hütter for this generous dedication, for we treasure the privilege of referring to the *Doctor Communis* as not only our teacher but also our brother. The sapiential rhythm of the regular observance in Dominican life resonates deeply with these Thomistic explorations. The reason for this is simple. As the author himself notes: "In Dominican life, there is an aspiration toward the unity of proclamation and contemplation of prayer and study, to which this volume aspires as well" (6).

Cajetan Cuddy entered the Order of Preachers in 2009.