



Guide to Thomas Aquinas

Josef Pieper, Richard Winston (Translator), Clara Winston (Translator)

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One of the great philosophers of the 20th Century, Josef Pieper, gives a penetrating introduction and guide to the life and works of perhaps the greatest philosopher ever, St. Thomas Aquinas. Pieper provides a biography of Aquinas, an overview of the 13th century he lived in, and a wonderful synthesis of his vast writings. Pieper shows how Aquinas reconciled the pragmatic thought of Aristotle with the Church, proving that realistic knowledge need not preclude belief in the spiritual realities of religion. According to Pieper, the marriage of faith and reason proposed by Aquinas in his great synthesis of a theologically founded worldliness was not merely one solution among many, but the great principle expressing the essence of the Christian West. Pieper reveals his extraordinary command of original sources and excellent secondary materials as he illuminates the thought of the great intellectual Doctor of the Church.

Guide to Thomas Aquinas Details

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From Reader Review Guide to Thomas Aquinas for online ebook

Miguel Dominguez says

This book is a series of essays outlining the biography and the practices of Thomas Aquinas. It talks about his approach to writing, teaching, and language. It discusses his beliefs on the interplay between theology and philosophy: especially his attempts to unite the worldly Aristotle and an otherworldly church into one coherent belief system. It doesn't delve deeply into any of his writings in particular, but it does whet one's appetite for more Aquinas.

Steve says

Good summary that corrects many misconceptions.

Conor says

This is one of the best books I have read in a long time. Incredibly readable introduction to Thomas Aquinas. Pieper does a wonderful job of making very dense subject matter come alive. The 13th Century and its intellectual ferment and the various disputes of the day come alive as well. I highly recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in philosophy and Thomas Aquinas.

Myra says

Wonderful overview of the 13th century of Thomas Aquinas. Peiper's description of the life and times of Aquinas gives context to Aquinas' thoughts on faith and reason.

Erik says

suggested by Michael Novak

Greg says

This is probably the single best introduction to Thomas Aquinas and his works. It is more lucid than the standard work, M-D. Chenu's, which presents the subject in a sort of florid fog of theological and mystical discourse. The book is a collection of lectures and therefore is slightly disjointed when transitioning from chapter to chapter, but well worth reading as an entry into Aquinas.

JR McCravy says

A smooth but disorganized Intro to Aquinas' world and ideas. Have your Latin dictionary handy if you're rusty- most Latin Aquinas quotes are untranslated.

Brett Salkeld says

Vintage Pieper. This should be read alongside Chesterton's classic as an introduction to the Angelic doctor. And, like reading Chesterton, reading Pieper inevitably brings one into contact with a great deal of common sense along the way.

Charles Lewis says

I've been hovering around St. Thomas Aquinas for years. I finally began to read the Summa Theologica a few months ago and now believe I will never finish. But that's okay because as Josef Pieper points out in his wonderful book on St. Thomas that the Angelic Doctor didn't actually finish the Summa Theologica and instead turned to silence. Pieper's book is not breezy. I would suggest that if you really want to start to understand Thomas read Bishop Robert Barron's book about Thomas and the Denys Turner's biography. But I think Pieper gets to the heart of Thomas more than the others. It's also a great book to read while starting to read the summa. Reading the summa is not difficult if you understand a little about Aristotle. (I had no background in philosophy or Aristotle. But I was pointed to an excellent little book by the late Mortimer Adler called "Aristotle For Beginners.") In fact at times it can seem easy. Especially with his questions, objections and counter arguments. But Pieper helped me understand that there are many layers and facets to Thomas that helped me understand what was going on below the surface.

Michael says

The author is brilliant, up to the task of deciphering (at an introductory level) the mammoth genius of Aquinas.

Carlos says

This book does a great job of placing St. Thomas within his context and of explaining how his thought unfolds. Pieper begins the work with biographical notes, and intersperses these with commentary on the major issues and influences which shaped St. Thomas' thought and his approach to teaching. In subsequent chapter (which are transcribed lecture) he delves more deeply into particular areas of St. Thomas' writing. This is certainly a good introduction to the writing of St. Thomas.

Harman says

Pieper offers a thorough treatment of St. Thomas Aquinas the philosopher, approaching the saints' genius through the consideration of Thomas' desire to hold together two cultural phenomena that in his day seemed mutual exclusive: the newly discovered philosophy of Aristotle and the evangelical and biblocentric voluntary poverty movement.

While this gives a solid account of St. Thomas as the philosopher, his philosophical emphasis neglects the fact that Thomas was, first and foremost, a priest and therefore a practitioner. To be fair, Pieper does reflect occasionally on Thomas' theological and pious contributions to his day, but always and only as an aspect of the saints' philosophy. Therefore, Pieper never entirely follows through on his approach: while he purports to emphasize Thomas' holding together of both 'Aristotle and the Bible', Pieper is almost entirely concerned with 'Aristotle', that is, Thomas' philosophy.

Donald says

Helpful introductory lectures to the sorts of theoretical problems that Aquinas faced in his life and how he went about solving them. Pieper focuses on Aquinas as a teacher and the development of a theory of education and knowledge.

Kirk Lowery says

I have found that European scholars in the humanities always do the best job of providing a "guide" or "introduction" to a discipline. That is certainly true here. Pieper uses his profound knowledge of Thomas Aquinas to choose out what would best help a student new to the subject. The book is a series of lectures prepared for his university classes. It puts Aquinas in his 13th century historical context, especially the rise of the university, and explains the nature of the literary genre that Aquinas used. Pieper's view of Aquinas: a person committed to knowing Things As They Are; hence, he embraced Aristotle (just then becoming known in the West) and the Bible, seeing the task of the philosopher and the theologian to be the same: the right understanding of reality. Highly recommended for those interested in reading Aquinas himself.

Brian Murphy says

I've read a number of books on Aquinas now, and often you think you're reading a biography but it turns out to be something else. I think this one was aptly titled: it is clearly a Guide to Thomas Aquinas. There is some biographical information, but I think more so the focus is on helping you understand his approach and the challenges he faced.

It's easy to write a story about someone that sees them with rose colored glasses; I don't think that is the case here. Pieper certainly isn't critical of Aquinas, but he is realistic. Aquinas faced attacks from both sides. Some wanted to follow Aristotle completely; others wanted to reject him completely. Aquinas on the other-hand sought what was true and rejected what wasn't. I think this is great about this book, because Pieper seeks to do the same here; he follows Aquinas' example and in a way looks to inspire the readers to do the

same. To be a Thomist is to accept faith and reason, revelation and science, some of what Aquinas said and perhaps some not. In the end, if we want to follow Aquinas in seeking the the Truth, then that means accepting what is true and letting go of what isn't.
