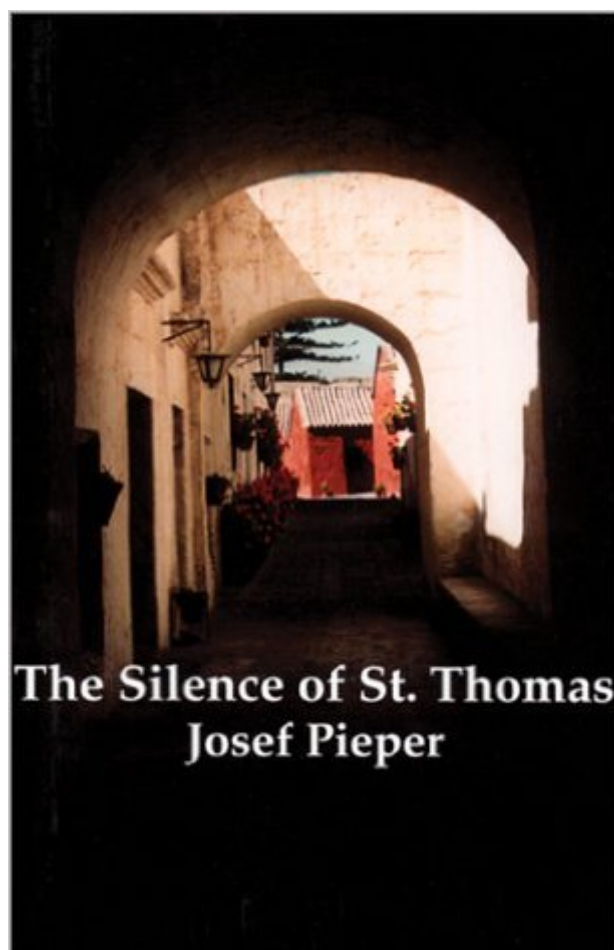


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Silence Of St Thomas



Synopsis

A single theme runs through the three essays on St. Thomas gathered in this book. It is the theme of mystery or, more exactly, the response of the searching human intellect to the fact of mystery. Both the fact and the response are suggested in a short biography of St. Thomas that forms the first essay and are then sketched out in detail by a presentation of the "negative element" in his philosophy. The third essay shows that contemporary Existentialism is in basic agreement with the philosophia perennis on this fundamental element of philosophical thinking.

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Customer Reviews

Pieper, in these three essays, describes what we have to learn from the works and life of Aquinas. The essays detail the scholastic arguments of the day and how Thomas, in the true spirit of open mindedness (his life and method are the definition of this oft abused term) brought some peace and understanding to the various sides, a very serious matter in his day. The book explains how much of an Aristotelian Aquinas was, and more importantly how much he was not. Mainly by showing how the characteristics of the Latin Averroists have been unjustly attributed to Aquinas by his detractors - the Latin Averroists (Averroes was an Arab) were whole hearted Aristotelians. This book is an excellent addition to reading Etienne Gilson's "Unity of the Philosophical Experience" as Pieper gives further explanations as to the behavior of the Augustinians and Latin Averroists. It could explain also why modern Muslims are so singularly textually dogmatic - it is in reaction to Averroist's attempting to rid religion of faith altogether - and thus the violent reaction in mixing reason and rationalism. It tells how

Aquinas circumvented this problem. The last essay also compliments Gilson's book in that it shows what Existentialism has in common with Aquinas, some interesting things, despite some gapping fundamental differences at their very root and conclusion. The first essay vividly describes what an attitude of academic pursuit and teaching should look like. Too many teachers are dogmatic and are only interested in pursuing and supporting an idea that is presently clear in their minds and propagating it, rather than treating the moment as an active pursuit of truth. Thomas was a model teacher and the book is an active description of his method.

If you want to find a succinct compendium of Thomistic Epistemology then this is a must read. While some of other reviews do a good job describing the details of the book, I will focus on what I believe to be Pieper's true intent. The book should be read once to grow in knowledge and another time as spiritual reading. Pieper begins with an overview of Thomistic realism and shows the link between anthropology and cosmology and faith and reason. For St. Thomas, human beings are created to love and know the creator. Creation is capable of being known through reason, and leads one to knowledge of the Creator. But, here lies the paradox as it pertains to silence. Pieper shows that while Thomas believes that the human mind can grasp the existence of many things, and since they have an existence they must also possess an essence, the essence of things in themselves cannot be known. Creation is a gift from God, yet, in itself remains a mystery. Why? Because even though the human mind can know a great deal about nature, it seems to know even less about creation. How much more does the mind fail to grasp the utter incomprehensibility of God? Reason is speechless before the infinite gap between God and the human mind. In the silence, Pieper shows that God allows us to gaze into the depth of the mystery of creation and divinity. God creates or speaks creation into being, and it is this Word that holds creation in existence. Via reason, the mind "knows" through a participation in the Word, Jesus. Per St. Thomas, Pieper demonstrates the necessity of faith to truly gaze and contemplate God, a place where reason alone cannot go. In the second essay, Pieper again refers to the theme of creation.

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