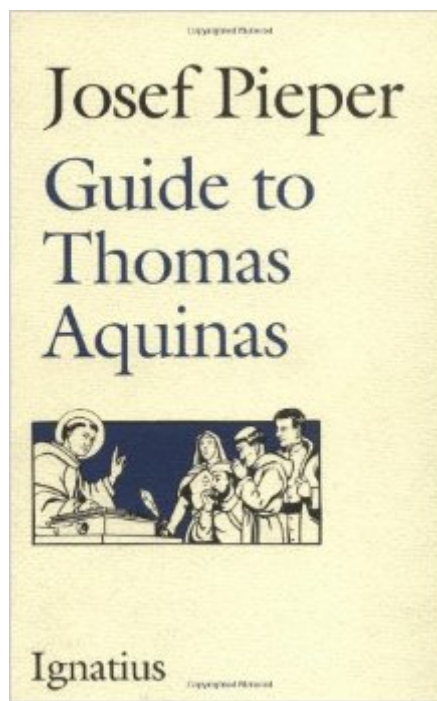


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# Guide To Thomas Aquinas



## Synopsis

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.

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## Customer Reviews

This book is one of the essential studies of St. Thomas's life and thought. It is especially valuable because it preserves some of the profound insights of two other Thomists whose books have either never been translated into English (Grabmann) or are, alas, out-of-print (Chenu). Pieper's treatment of St. Thomas's (and Aristotle's) use of language is absolutely essential reading for beginning students of Aquinas who have not read the more thorough treatments (by Chenu and Blanche - now largely forgotten) upon which it is based. Pieper also captures better than most biographers the importance of Thomas's decision to embrace both of the apparently opposed movements of his day,

the back-to-the-Bible movement of the mendicant orders and, the modern, scientific movement of Aristotelianism. There are a few points on which I think Pieper is wrong, most importantly on the question of Thomas's "Aristotelianism." In his justifiable attempt to show that Thomas is not an unqualified Aristotelian, Pieper goes too far the other direction and leaves the reader with the impression that Thomas was a defender of Plato. Especially troubling is Pieper's citation of passages from Thomas's Commentaries on Aristotle's *De Anima* and *Metaphysics*, which he, Pieper, claims defend Plato against Aristotle's criticisms: I cannot figure out how Pieper could construe the cited passages in such a way. Also, Pieper's criticism of the Inquisition, the Dominican order's role in it, and Thomas's defense of it seems surprisingly naive coming from an author steeped in the history of the Church. But these are relatively minor flaws in an otherwise worthy study of St. Thomas. My rating of other books on St. Thomas: (1) Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas*. \*\*\*\*\* One of the very best books on St.

I discovered Josef Pieper's work entirely by accident while researching another modern philosopher. I'm very glad I did. Pieper's *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* was a short but solid read crammed with good information, one of the best such books on St. Thomas Aquinas that I've read. Pieper interweaves examination of Aquinas's life, works, philosophy, and theology, making this short book a biography, explanation, and critical analysis at the same time. He carefully explores Aquinas's historical context, explaining the philosophical and theological temper of the time and how Aquinas was influenced by it--and eventually how he altered it forever. Pieper is extremely well-versed in the sources and it shows--he quotes liberally both from Aquinas's huge body of work and the works of other medieval philosophers--from contemporaries like Albertus Magnus or Siger of Brabant to philosophical forebears like Boethius and St. Augustine--not to mention modern scholars. Pieper writes skilfully, never letting his examination of, say, Aquinas's epistemology bog down, or his analysis overwhelm his emphasis on St. Thomas himself. It's Pieper's portrait of Aquinas as a person that made this book especially valuable to me. Books on Aquinas tend to emphasize his intellectual output to the point of diminishing the human being behind it, so insights into Aquinas's character--his patience, intellectual voracity, dedication to God, and love and respect for ostensible enemies--were an outstanding feature. Pieper's book is very good, but I'm not sure I'd recommend it to those just beginning to study Aquinas. It's a bit difficult in places and, as a series of university-level lectures, assumes a certain amount of knowledge of the medieval philosophical world on the part of the reader.

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