

Josef Pieper and his writings from a missionary's perspective

As a missionary priest, working particularly in revitalizing the faith in a more European and Anglo context, I really appreciate how much Josef Piepers' insights have enriched my preaching work. I have just finished working through the series of books Pieper wrote on the seven virtues, along with "An Anthology", and "In Search of the Sacred" - very interesting that last one! They have proved to be quite an "ongoing education" for me, even apart from spurring me on to deepening my own spiritual life. I have tried to read each passage slowly, sometimes re-reading the parts that were most challenging over and over again to get the most out of them. A colleague of mine who lives with me in Rome is also studying the books with me, and he too is enriching his preaching with the insights Pieper has on each topic. We often share what we are discovering, even to the point of comparing the translations into English and Spanish together since neither of us is fluent in German as yet, to get a better picture of the original meaning of the phrases.

Pieper's style of writing is clear, well argued, down-to-earth, and clearly based in real life experience. What I particularly like is how he begins each topic with a kind of "phenomenological review" of the subject matter as it is generally understood in the secular world, so as to situate each topic in a real life context. He methodically goes through all the arguments associated with the theme he is addressing, leading you onwards step by step until you find yourself finally grasping a depth of meaning that you did not originally have on the topic. For that reason it fits in very nicely with the kind of preaching I tend to go for in my line of missionary work, specializing in "new" and "re-evangelizing". He presents things with such clarity and utter simplicity that I sometimes found it hard to believe it was philosophy!!!

I am also very grateful to Professor Berthold Wald, who recommended that I might read some of Piepers' books when I mentioned to him how deeply I had been inspired by Pope Benedicts' first two encyclicals, *Spe Salvi* and *Deus Caritas Est*, and wanted to deepen my understanding of them. Little did I suspect that Piepers writings on hope and love would be so similar in style and in content to what the Pope had written there!

I have of late been promoting the study of Piepers' books in almost every community where I have been over the past year. I even bought the book on the seven fundamental virtues in Spanish for another colleague of mine in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. It was the only copy left in the Venezuelan "St. Paul's Bookstores" nationwide, and though it was on the other side of the country, we had it shipped in.

In short, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend his writings to everyone wanting to deepen in their Catholic faith, and particularly anyone desiring to bring "Good News" to others; we have a lot to learn from Pieper's style of writing to effectively bring the Gospel into the lives of the people who live in our contemporary world.

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