

WORLD YOUTH ALLIANCE BOOK LIST

Only The Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation

Josef Pieper

Philosopher and writer Josef Pieper, in this series of short and thought-provoking essays, asks and answers questions about the human person. What is the difference between spare time and leisure? What does it mean to truly see or hear? To remember? Is there such a thing as an activity that is meaningful in itself?

Pieper warns his readers of the dangers of idolizing labor and productivity and therefore creating a totalitarian work state. He exhorts his readers to develop our "capacity to perceive the visible reality as it truly is." Only by truly seeing, Pieper tells us, can we gain a "deeper and more receptive vision, a more intense awareness, a sharper and more discerning understanding, a more patient openness for all things quiet and inconspicuous, an eye for things previously overlooked." According to Pieper, the fundamental nature of the human person demands this deeper vision. Without it, he is starved.

About Josef Pieper

Josef Pieper was born in 1904 in Elte, Germany. He studied philosophy in Munster and Berlin, receiving his doctorate in philosophy in 1928 with a thesis on Thomas Aquinas. Following his study, he was a freelance writer for a decade. Some of his early works were confiscated by the Nazi government.

After the war, in 1946, he returned to the academic world. He was appointed as Professor Ordinary of philosophical anthropology at the Westfalia University of Munster, where he worked until 1972. After his retirement he continued to lecture until 1996. During this period he lectured across the world, receiving many accolades. He died in 1997. He was a husband, father, philosopher, author and teacher.

Guide questions for discussion groups

- What is the personal message of the essay "Work, Spare Time and Leisure"? What is the political message?
- In "Learning How to See Again" Pieper claims we are in danger of losing our ability to perceive visible reality as it truly is. Why is this? What are the remedies?
- Discuss what we perceive when we listen to music. How could harm come from music?
- Discuss the value of art designed merely for the sake of a novelty that is "in essence false." Must art be inextricably linked with religion?
- Why is art, especially music, so important in the celebration of a feast? Why does imagery and symbolism have a place in most celebrations?
- When is art "true", and when is it otherwise?
- How is Pieper's thesis relevant to expression of the human person in your particular culture and generation? What, if any, are the differences? Discuss your answers.

