Dr. Robert Hickson 4 August 2017

Saint Dominic (d. 1221)

Asking Candid Questions About Fundamental Convictions:

Josef Pieper's Autobiography 1945-1964

Epigraphs

"It never crossed my mind [during the years 1933-1945 or afterward] to think of Adolf Hitler as the Antichrist incarnate; for me he was too small in stature. **But it became more and more conceivable to me**, from what had happened in front of my eyes, **that the most recent epoch of human history**, instead of being seen as a victory for reason or good, **could possibly take the form of a pseudo-order—through the exercise of power**, in which **everything purely technical would function perfectly and at the same time be the embodiment of injustice**." (Josef Pieper, *Not Yet the Twilight: An Autobiography 1945-1964* (2017), page 47—my emphasis added)

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"I have never felt myself to be fighting a losing battle as much as in two international conferences [in 1953] in Hamburg and Berlin, both of which were organized at great expense by the "Congress for the Freedom of Culture" [usually called, in English, "the Congress for Cultural Freedom"], an institution which was mainly financed by the Americans [especially by the Central Intelligence Agency, though covertly]—**clearly anti-totalitarian and anti-communist, but in no way 'conservative.'** When I traveled light-heartedly with my wife to Hamburg**, I did not yet know what awaited me**; it was all the more drastically brought home to me. The Congress in the Hanseatic City [of Hamburg] organized under the title 'Knowledge and Freedom' took place in the last week of July 1953 in which the half-rebuilt Hamburg was marking **the tenth anniversary of its destruction**. The English historian, J.C. **Fuller** [Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, 1878-1966] **called it a 'terrible destruction,' which 'even Attila would have considered a disgrace.'** But from a purely military point of view, **they say** that even today it counts as a brilliant attack [in 1943] carried out by the British bombers under **the macabre codename** 'Gomorrah.' **At the time the dreadful event took place**, very few of those taking part in the Congress [for Cultural Freedom] had been in Germany. Even the Lord Mayor of Hamburg had not been there. **And so it was just mentioned in passing and in conversation**; **however, the atmosphere of the gathering was, under the surface, affected by that gruesome event**. **In this city you could not get out of your head the thought of the thirty thousand people who died mainly by fire**." (Josef Pieper, *Not Yet the Twilight*, pages 130-131—my emphasis added)

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"Strangely the most exciting [personal] meeting of those years [1945-1953] had not, strictly speaking, taken place. The Paris *Semaine des Intellectuels Catholiques* which took place every year at Pentecost had as its theme in 1951 *Espoir Humaine et Espérance Chrétienne*—a formulation ["Human Hope and Christian Hope"] which was difficult to put into German [or English], as our language only possesses **one** word for **the concept 'hope'** [*i.e.*, French *Espérance* itself being much more existentially fundamental than *Espoir* and it is to be found only in the singular number, unlike *Espoir*]. On one evening of this 'week' there were four presentations on the programme, which did not, however, prevent everything being finished in an hour and a half....Here the papers were twenty minutes long. With Oliver Lacombe in the chair, **Gabriel Marcel** started off; he was followed by **Jean Daniélou** and **Yves Congar**; and I was the last to speak. I never dreamt that among the **almost fifteen hundred listeners** who filled the crypt of the St. Odile church that **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** was sitting 'at my feet.' **Only a decade later**, when Teilhard was already dead more than five years, **did I discover this [fact]** from the biography of Claude Cuénot. In it **there is a letter, written on the spur of the moment with spontaneous vehemence, in which this prominent listener passionately rejected the thesis I was putting forth at the time**. So there was some form of a 'meeting' [after all!]. **My topic was '*The Hope of the Martyrs*,' and it was my intention to make one thing clear**: **that you would do better not to speak of human hope at all if there is no hope for the person who is to be killed for the sake of truth and justice and who, in any case—locked up, isolated, ridiculed and, above all, silenced—finds himself in a 'hopeless' situation**. Besides, I did not fail to mention **that it is written nowhere that human history, in its temporal aspect, will simply end with the victory of reason or justice**. **Teilhard said in that letter that my approach to the issue was 'defeatist'**; **the determining factor was something completely different**, namely the future potential of the young human race seen **from the point of view of its 'biocosmic' possibilities**. As one could see, **the confusion of evolution with history**, which was **characteristic of Teilhard's whole thinking, was again at work**. Naturally, **blood witness** [as with the Martyrs] **can only be spoken of meaningfully in the realm of history, while evolution knows no martyrs**." (Josef Pieper, *Not Yet the Twilight*, pages 102-103—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

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While slowly reading the second of the three volumes of Josef Pieper's Memoirs, *Not Yet the Twilight* (*Noch Nicht Aller Tage Abend*), I came more and more to think of him as a cultivated and disciplined man who so graciously asked candid questions about fundamental convictions.[1]

1 Josef Pieper, *Not Yet the Twilight: An Autobiography 1945-1964* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2017). All further references to this 304-page book will now still be found above in the main body of this essay, in parentheses. For example, while Josef Pieper was a visiting professor at Stanford University in 1956, he noted how his colleagues often drolly responded to some of his fundamental questions about meaning. Writing in 1978, almost twenty years later, he reports the following vignette: "The title of the course on which I was to lecture and which was to run over two years was *The Western Traditions* [to include the *Graduate Honors Program in Humanities*]....**and of course here I had my 'candid questions' to ask, as my colleagues used to call them in a friendly and ironic tone**." (158-159—my emphasis added)

In his conversation, as well as in his many books, he posed keen questions — often directly — about one's own convictions and about those of others (even soon after meeting them for the first time, as he once did with me, in Spain in July of 1974). Such was also my experience of him down the years that I knew him — from July 1974 until his death at 93 years of age on 6 November of 1997. (Dr. Pieper was born on 4 May 1904, being thus in his early forties at the end of World War II in 1945 and only sixty years of age when his eldest and beloved son, Thomas, suddenly died in the United States in July of 1964. This interval of time — almost twenty years — is covered in this poignant, often very moving, second volume of his memoirs, which was written in German in 1978 when he was already seventy-four years of age.)

It may be helpful to a reader of Dr. Pieper's memoirs to know a few things about his own intellectual convictions as a Catholic, and as an abidingly grateful student of his mentor, Saint Thomas Aquinas. (He often modestly told me — and reminded me — that he was not a very pious man — but I still dispute that!)

He once summarized Saint Thomas' own fundamental orientation to reality, as follows: "reality is intelligible, knowable, and yet unfathomable"; and there was thus both an **order** and an enveloping **mystery**. Dr. Pieper once even intended to entitle an Anthology of Saint Thomas' thought with two conceptual words: "*Ordo et Mysterium*." Like Saint Thomas, Josef Pieper was especially attentive to the reality and implications of Creation and of our finite and dependant Createdness. He believed that "God dwelt in an abyss of light, not of darkness," and that even created reality was always more (and more abundant) than we thought or perceived it to be. Josef Pieper, like G.K. Chesterton, was a man of gratitude, even amidst intimate sorrows, such as the loss of his son, Thomas (b. 1936), whom he had often sheltered during the Second World War.

Dr. Pieper could still say, also about the Catholic Mass, "wherever charity takes joy, **there** is the presence of true festivity" ("*ubi caritas gaudet,* ***ibi*** *est festivitas*" —St. John Chrysostom). While further considering the matter and the meaning of a Feast, he once told me how he had candidly asked a learned Hindu scholar in India about one of their own feasts and its fundamental meaning: "Since a Feast implies joy, what in this feast are you joyful about, and why?" The learned Hindu had no answer to this fundamental question. He remained in his contemplative silence, and Dr. Pieper decided, in his courteous prudence, to ask no more.

Dr. Pieper could also be succinct and candid. For example, when he had been exchanging some fundamental views with the *Frankfurter Hefte*, "among whose editors I had some friends with whom I was constantly arguing about the 'direction' [purpose] of the periodical." (72-73) Furthermore, they asked:

> What was I objecting to? I said: "**Too little identification with the German people; basically too much distrust of tradition; a romantic overestimation of labor; a frivolous involvement with radical ideas; a fascination with the merely 'finely expressed.'** Above all, however: if there were among the German periodicals a conservative opponent, then perhaps everything would be alright; but opposition could not be voiced in the current political situation [to include the military occupation government]." (73—my emphasis added)

Earlier Dr. Pieper quoted his conversations with his courageous friend, Bishop (later Cardinal) Clemens August von Galen, the Bishop of Münster (1933-1946):

> **The Bishop was extremely unhappy with the occupation regime; he spoke about it like someone who felt he had been deceived**. **If the Anglo-Saxon press had believed that they could take him over as an ally because he was a prominent opponent of the National Socialists, that soon proved to be a blatant error**. At the beginning of April [1945] he had already officially declared, in correcting a Reuters announcement, that **he was sympathizing and suffering with the German people**, and that he refused to express himself before the end of the war on political questions in public and that he wished that his name **not** to be mentioned in England or America either **in the press or on the radio**. The **ban** on "**fraternizing**," and the **dismantling** plans in the Ruhr area, which in part belongs to his diocese, exercised him a great deal. "I said to [British General] Montgomery's representative **straight to his face** when he visited me: 'If you continue as you are doing, then the Germans will choose a new Hitler and they will do it in the most democratic way in the world.'" The Bishop was now making things **as uncomfortable for the new rulers** as he had done for the National Socialist Regime. And it would probably have come to a public scandal **had not the sudden death of the valiant man [on 22 March 1946] put an end to it all**. I saw Bishop von Galen **on 16 March 1946**, on his return from Rome, wearing the robes of a cardinal. **It was moving to see him celebrated by the people**. I stood shivering among the thousands in the cathedral square. **For the first time** there had been a great drive to move debris **to make it possible to move** through the city; in front of the west side of the cathedral **under the big cross** which had been made from half-charred vault beams, a bulldozer had **pushed the rubble** to form a type of podium **on which the heads of military government sat**—likewise freezing and clearly not very enthusiastic—waiting for [the] cardinal, who was very much delayed. With a distressed booming voice the terminally ill man offered his appreciation for the wonderful reception. **A little more than a week after that, about a hundred paces from the place of his reception, he would be carried to his grave in the cathedral church—but nonetheless in the open air**. (3-4—my emphasis added)

Dr. Pieper's later presentation of his father's death (158-160) also shows us some of the deeper heart of his son, a gracious and an admiring son. It is fitting to consider this portion of his Memoir, before we then consider the gradual and poignant manner (97, 120, 187, 209, and 265) in which Josef Pieper himself comes to disclose the loss of his own son Thomas (his eldest child, as well) with whom he had had some estrangement. It was a difficult matter for him to discuss, even after many years, as he told me more than once — even twice when, with our candles, we walked to the cemetery and were at Thomas' gravesite. Let us first return to Dr. Pieper's father.

Josef Pieper first frames and reports the fact:

> In December of this same year, 1950, **my father died**. In the summer [of 1950], the German Institute for Pedagogical Science, **which had been closed down by the National Socialists and deprived of its bookshop**, was formally reopened. **It was planned that I would give a lecture entitled "Thomas Aquinas as a Teacher." My father, who had been involved in no small way in the foundation of the Institute in the 1920s, had sat in the back row of the auditorium near the exit**. While I was speaking, I saw him getting up. He went to the door **with uncertain footsteps**. An old man's illness was making things very difficult for him. A few days later he traveled to Fulda to be operated on by my brother. **On the way there, he spoke to my wife, with whom he got on particularly well, about nothing but his childhood**. **When she told me this I knew he wouldn't be coming back. Maybe death did not even take him by surprise**. **The simple desire**, about which he spoke every now and then, **to sit one more time on the couch with my mother**, had an almost unreal sound. When his speech failed he gave out a slurping sound from time to time which only the night nurse understood; it said: **Please help me!** Sometimes he counted out all the fingers of his right hand, one after the other, and held them in front of his eyes—**he was calling his five children to mind**. (98—my emphasis added)

Dr. Pieper then gradually reveals some things about his father's birth and early life, which he only discovered "in 1972, almost twenty years later." (99) The whole narrative here (99-100) should be reverently read, but a few words may now be politely said, with the indispensable help of a certain "old widow of a civil servant" (99):

> Many of my questions remain unanswered....Even so, I found out things about my grandmother [and, thereby, about my father]: she was a serving girl in the family of an aristocratic Hussar officer; **the son of the house became the father of her child**; after that she lost her job; in her parents' eyes there was no room for the new-born child; her father had died early and her mother had remarried; there were children from the second marriage there; **there was no home there for her** [my grandmother] **anymore**. The **foster** mother, however, who was the wife of a master builder, took on the child **and loved the boy [my father] as much as her own children**. When she [his foster mother] was dying and received news that he [my father] had passed his teaching examinations, she said that now she could die in peace; and actually by the

> time the traveler [my father] had rushed home she was already laid out in her coffin. **The working mother** [*i.e*., my father's true biological, or natural, mother at birth], whom her son had thought was the widow of his natural father, refused many offers of marriage because of the boy [my father]. When my father took up his first position as a teacher she [his natural mother] was promoted to being a housekeeper of a woman's clinic at forty-eight years of age and enjoyed the greatest of respect everywhere. In the house of the woman ["this old widow"] who was giving me all the information, **the good china was put on the table whenever my [paternal] grandmother was there as a guest** [in Münster]. (99-100—my emphasis added)

Now comes Josef Pieper's memorable final paragraph in his Memoir's fifth chapter. Once again his modestly heart-revealing honesty and candor about some newly fundamental convictions reaches, as well, our own empathy and understanding heart:

> **Losing your father has a deeper impact on your life than you expect**. It is unexpected because, **without much reflection**, you have experienced and practiced the old wisdom that your wife and children are closer to you and belong to you more directly [and even sacramentally, thus more intimately]. But suddenly **you realize** how much your life was related to that of your father, **how much you owed him and how much you remained in his debt**. The unusual modesty of his life style [style of life], for example, was, when you look back, nothing but the reverse side of **his concern for the future of his sons and daughters**. When he returned from a visit they [father and mother] made together to a colleague who maybe had a particularly nice house, he used to say to my mother comfortingly: "Our possessions are not dead things. They are alive." **After the death of my father the thought came to me with a new intensity, and perhaps for the first time, about what I may have meant to him, in terms both of joys and sorrows**. (100—my emphasis added)

Earlier in 1950 — 7 June 1950 — Dr. Pieper "traveled back to Germany" (96) from the University of Notre Dame and his teaching there. Soon it happened that someone said to him: "'It's starting again. There's war in Korea.'" Pieper was stunned and he wrote reflectively:

> **At a stroke, life can change; everyone thought in fright about a third world war**. They bought crazy amounts of food. My bookseller complained that his shop was deadly quiet. Into this atmosphere came **an official request** about whether I would take up a permanent position in the Philosophy Department....**Were my children to experience yet another war?** I needed time to give an answer....**I took the letter** [the second one from Notre Dame, even an urgent invitation] **on a cycling trip on the Rhine-Main which I had been promising my son, Thomas; he had just turned fourteen**. **Imagine if someone had said to him (or me) that half his lifetime was already over** [d. July 1964] and that he would die in the country [the United States] in which they were sending for me? **But, "at that moment" I was thinking about the danger of war** and particularly about the letter [of invitation] from Notre Dame,

> which was burning a hole in my pocket. **Suddenly I made a decision**. It was Saturday; you had to search for a place for the night; in Ingelheim we found **the right guest house**. So I was sitting in the late afternoon on a summer patio, in front of me a tankard, **a quarter-liter of the red wine produced there; Thomas was swimming in a branch of the Rhine** (or in the Selz, I don't know any more); **while I was watching him, the bells which heralded Sunday rang out all over the Rhine valley**. **At that moment it became clear to me: I will never leave this country of my own free will!** Fate giving me a sign? Instinct? Sentimentality? In any case, my letter of refusal was sent the same evening to Notre Dame. (97-98—my emphasis added)

Dr. Pieper had for many years been interested in the roots of some of the great and ancient religious cultures such as Hinduism, to include their ritual practices as well as their doctrines. In 1962 he had the opportunity to go to India for a semester, and then also to travel and see other parts of Asia, especially east and south east Asia, to include Japan, Taiwan (Formosa), and South Vietnam. Before he left, he met with his mother:

> And so I flew on **13 September 1962** from Frankfurt to Bombay with the prospect of not returning until shortly before Christmas. Before the day of departure I went to the clinic to say farewell to my seventy-eight-year-old mother. **It was fairly certain that I would not see her alive again**. I held her hand in mine, let us say, a second longer than normally. Naturally she noticed the unusual behavior and afterwards said to my sister: "He said goodbye so peculiarly; **does he think he's not coming back?**" I myself had **this** time, differently to [from] the flight to Sicily some years before, the **certain** feeling—even if there had been no reason for it—that it would *not* be a trip without a return. When I greeted my mother after I returned happily after some months, she was not healthy, but relatively well. I did not know that two much younger people [his son Thomas himself "who was to die some months before Bergengruen" (187), and his Baltic German friend himself, Werner Bergengruen] in my close circle would die sooner that she did. (209—my emphasis added)

Almost two years later, after he had returned from his East Asian trip, including Saigon, Vietnam in early November of 1963, Dr. Pieper again spoke of his mother and her approaching birthday:

> In May of 1964, on the occasion of my sixtieth birthday I was to be conferred with and honorary doctorate in theology....**On my birthday I always thought of my mother** in a particular way, not only because she gave birth to me but also because she was more or less exactly twenty years older than me [sic]. **Her eightieth birthday, soon to be celebrated, was to be her last, as we all knew; she lived only a little time after it**. When I asked her on the day [of her death] itself **how she saw the past** she did not understand the sense of my question at first. So I had to say it again: "Was life good for you?" After some hesitation came the answer in Low German [dialect]. "Ah, I was always able to put up with it." (287-288—my emphasis added)

A year before that farewell to his eighty-year-old mother, Dr. Pieper also said what would be a final farewell to his twenty-seven-year-old son, Thomas:

> The East Asian trip was taking shape in those weeks [late summer 1963] and the preparations were in full swing....**And so I said goodbye to my eldest son Thomas, who, as I had done a good forty years previously** [in a journey to Iceland in 1923], was beginning **with carefree decisiveness to take leave of his father** and fence off his own separate existence. More or less by chance **he had just come into the house after having, for some time, not wanted to live there. So, standing in the hall on 8 September 1963** [the Feast of Blessed Mother's Nativity], **I said farewell to the twenty-seven year-old who had just finished his final examinations in physics**: "All the best then and take care!" Thomas had a USA research scholarship in his pocket and was going to set off [for California] only a few weeks after me on his first big trip, to the University of Berkeley, in the far, far west—at first for a year, but perhaps even for two. **Then the starkness of our farewell depressed me considerably** at the thought of the long separation; and so I sent a warm greeting to welcome the newcomer to the California I knew well. He responded with a thank you and a cheerful report from the other hemisphere. And **since neither he nor I would have ever dreamed that we would not see one another "here" again**, we both set off completely light-heartedly and full of curiosity [as] to what for each of us was a new world. (265—my emphasis added)

A few months later, in early November 1963, Dr. Pieper records the following:

> Barely a fortnight after my return [to Germany from East Asia], John F. Kennedy was **murdered** [on Friday, 22 November 1963] **in a manner which still remains a mystery** to this day. You can hardly imagine now [in 1978] **the shocked reaction** of the students in the autumn of 1963 to the death of this man, who was after all a representative of political power, of the establishment. My son Thomas described in his Californian diary **the immense dismay which paralyzed life** on the University of Berkeley campus. For my part, I said to myself: **the "year of the dead"** [June 1963-July 1964] **was continuing**. It had still not come to an end. And the dates of death and dates of birth [as with his mother in 1964, and then Thomas] are often close to one another. (287—my emphasis added)

In Manila in late October 1963, after his enlivening trip to Taiwan, Dr. Pieper now prepares us for another shock or so, and he also thereby reveals to us some of his own deepest convictions:

> I was to speak to the professors about Thomas Aquinas. **Several hundred** had arrived in the lecture room of the seminary [in Manila] and, it seemed to me, were **interested above all in a discussion**. **It began immediately with the aggressive question** about what there was to object to in Thomism [often called "Neo-Thomism," as at Notre Dame in the USA]....**For better or for worse I had to nail my colors to the mast**. The **positive** result for me was that **the slightly polemic inquisitorial tone of the challenge had mobilized me too**. And so I said it was, firstly, **not only an error, but a falsification**, to call an "Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy" separated from

> theology a **philosophical** world view of Thomas Aquinas; and secondly, that **Thomas does not express himself in artificial "terminology" but in "language" which is alive and has a liquid clarity**; because of that, it was **impossible** to bring what he says about the world [*i.e.*, Creation] into the form of **a closed system of propositions**; and, thirdly, the Thomism of the schools ["textbook Thomism," as some called it] **lacked the element** of the *philosophia negativ*a which characterized the master, the first sentence of which, in its authentic formulation, says: "The essences of things are unknown to us." **As was to be expected, a lively, many-sided debate ensued, in which the wonderful but rare combination of passion and objectivity was preserved—which was as refreshing as a swim in the sea**. (281—my emphasis added)

Those who have widely read Josef Pieper's own writings know that he follows his Master and Mentor with his perspicuous language and thought. As his editor, Kurt Wolff of Pantheon books, once said to him in New York:

> "How should one expect **language culture** in a country [Modern Germany] in which Alfred Weber is seen as something?" [But,] For me he [Kurt Wolff] had compliments; **however, he feared at the same time that the sober clarity of my language** could easily become **shallow banality** in [a poor and defective] English translation. (86—my emphasis added)

Kurt Wolff's wife, Helen Wolff — also his key and indispensable editor — said something about language herself, likewise importantly true, as well as deftly witty:

> There was a lot of trouble with **unsuccessful translations**, which **even** had T.S. Eliot **up in arms**, while Helen Wolff, the publisher's wife and head editor, felt justified in her complaint: **Should I die young, please put on my headstone: *Killed by Translators***. (86—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

The matter of fair and clear language especially concerned Josef Pieper throughout his life, as did his enduring combat (as was the case with Plato) against the Sophists and the larger Phenomenon of Sophistry, which he saw, not only as a danger, but as a **recurrent temptation** of the human mind.

After his challenging exchanges with the professors in Manila, he had "a long sleep and waking up late, I had a call from the German Embassy: 'Do you really want to go to Saigon today [Saturday, 2 November 1963—All Souls' Day]?'" (281) Pieper with pluck said "Why not?" (281)

The Manila newspaper said "The Head of State Diem is said to have been overthrown and has left the country on a foreign warship" — which was, in part, an erroneous report. Nonetheless, Pieper said:

> I did not want to decide yet and inquired in the Pan Am office: "No, we are *not* flying to Saigon today! But Air France has a flight about the same time." So I arrived in the South Vietnamese capital in the afternoon [likely on Saturday, 2 November] on an Air France aircraft, at this stage not without some concern.... On [Friday, 1 November]

> All Saints' Day in 1963 they [?] had taken the Head of State—who had mysteriously escaped from the locked [Presidential] palace—and his brother out of a church [in Cholon, Saint Francis Xavier] during [actually AFTER] Mass and killed them in a barbaric way while they were still on the transport truck [sic]. The following day was Sunday [3 November 1963] (281-282—emphatic italics are in the original)

Dr. Pieper's report here has some slight errors in it, regrettably. President Diem and his brother together were taken away — on All Souls' Day, Saturday, 2 November — from the Church grounds in Cholon (the Chinese section of Saigon); and taken away in a Vietnamese-operated Armored Personnel Carrier (APC), inside of which vehicle they were truculently butchered by a South Vietnamese officer, under orders from the leaders of the Coup. The Catholic Church of Saint Francis Xavier in Cholon was guided by Father Raymond de Jaegher, S.J., a former Chinese Missionary from Belgium, and later a trusted Counsellor to President Diem, who was also himself, like his brother, a devout Catholic.

Dr. Pieper first told me, during our first and intentionally private conversation in Spain in July of 1974 — ten years after the death of his son Thomas — that he had explicitly flown to Saigon from Manila in order to meet a certain Belgian missionary and Jesuit Priest. He did not mention his name, however. And so I then said: "Was it Father Raymond de Jaegher?" And he said, "Yes, yes, yes! Do you know him?" (I told him "Yes, I do." And then I told him more.)

In his Memoir, Josef Pieper still does not give his name, but he speaks of a recommendation he had earlier received in Tapei, Taiwan.

> In Taipei I had been told that **there was no better informed man than a Belgian priest, Diem's personal advisor**. But when I mentioned this clearly well-known name to the [German] ambassador, **he immediately demurred**. Regretfully he could not put me in contact with him, at least not now; he was probably not in the city anymore, possibly even dead. **I then tried to contact him myself, and to my surprise this courageous man suggested a meeting place for the following day**—where he would be visible literally to "the whole world": in the journalists' restaurant [in the Caravelle Hotel?] near the parliament. **On this my last day in Saigon I learned more**—admittedly confusing things—**than in all the earlier conversations**....What I heard was the story of the attempt, doomed from the start, to free the country from the after-effects of colonialism, without seeing it immediately fall into a new dependence on Soviet Russia or Red China. This attempt met with resistance from their largely corrupt upper class, who were both fascinated by and dependent on Paris. However, this liberation could not be achieved without "dictatorship," without control of foreign exchange, without invasive and perhaps even secret surveillance—and so on. **This was something which again did not fit in with the completely un-historical American notion of "democracy."** All this and still more (*e.g.*, family politics, the opium trade, the rivalry of religious groups) had, at that time, **before** the actual American Vietnam war, become tangled into such an

> impenetrable jungle that I could only feel surprised when someone claimed that you **only** needed to do this or that, and already everything would be smoothed out. On the contrary, **I began to suspect**—not, of course, what horrors would begin to befall this country—but **that from now on** [after 2 November 1963] **it would be less and less possible to extricate all the parties concerned from this frightening entanglement, and that the end would be an unthinkable catastrophe**. (283-284—my emphasis added)

These insights are profound and lucid, and they also show Josef Pieper to be a very courageous man, and so persevering, as well. And we honor him still for this — as I first did in July of 1974 in Spain when he revealed to me many matters of moment. Indeed, at once I felt a deep bond with him. (He had just suddenly and directly and candidly asked me if I had been in Vietnam as a military officer; and I then told him that I had, and that I had first arrived in Saigon in early September 1964. He then stunned me by saying: "You know, I was in Saigon, too: in early November of 1963, less than a year before you arrived." Thus began our longer discussion and ever deepening bond. However, after the late summer of 1992, and thus during the last five years of Dr. Pieper's life, I never saw him again in person, despite our ardent and resourceful plans to have done so, even after he had become ninety-three years of age. And that protracted deprivation was an abiding sorrow for both of us.)

And now, by way of conclusion, we finally come to the sudden and shattering loss of Josef Pieper's son Thomas. It is fitting that we now contemplatively savor these four pages (289-292), at least a portion of them. Later on we may also then want to consider them in their entirety.

In July of 1964 — only one month after my own graduation from West Point as a callow 21-year-old, new second lieutenant who was soon to be *en route* to Saigon,Vietnam — Dr. Pieper was having some of his own tests and personal shocks as they suddenly involved his impaired hearing and healing:

> Clearly, I thought..., **you did not cross the threshold into the seventh decade of your life with impunity**. The doctors spoke quite seriously about "one-sided deafness," which recently was not altogether rare. **Neither they nor I knew how quickly I would be freed of this affliction**—forever, it appeared, **and with one blow [**shock]. On the way to the clinic, I was already standing at the hall door [at home] when the telephone rang....Then an overseas call was announced and the daughter of the London brother **announced the bad news** that her cousin Thomas, **our son Thomas, had suddenly become very ill** and was in [a] hospital in Seattle in Washington State. I asked: "A car accident?" No, not an accident, but **a brain haemorrhage...cerebral haemorrhage**....It was 24 July 1964, late on Friday shortly before the beginning of the weekend....But by midnight there was already a second call, from Seattle. **Thomas was unconscious; his face had an expression of deep astonishment; he was going "rapidly downhill," the doctor said**, and he expressly advised me *not* to travel, as there was no point. **Before the night ended we were**

informed that he had died. (289—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

Thomas' father soon gathered more facts:

> On the evening after spending a wonderful almost boisterously happy summer's day, Thomas had suddenly collapsed into unconsciousness at the campsite on the slope of Mount Rainier. Then, accompanied to Seattle by a doctor who had also been camping, he [Thomas] was brought to the King County Hospital **and died twenty-four hours later, after a priest from the cathedral**, called by the thoughtful cousin, **had administered the last sacrament** [sic]....**A letter [from Thomas] really had been on its way; it reached us two days after his death**....**The letter had a new tone which had long since been missing between us; suddenly I could hear the language of trust, of devotion, of humor**; very early forms of address were there again....**clearly it had been necessary to travel to the other side of the world to make this return possible**. (290-291—my emphasis added)

We may now expand and splice together a few more details which Josef Pieper presents:

> [We then heard from] a student friend of Thomas whom we only knew by name; he had been at Berkeley for a while and had only returned from there two or three weeks previously. He rang us up completely distraught; he simply could not believe that Thomas, **to whom he had just bade farewell**, was no longer alive. He was particularly upset that he had **not yet** visited us and told us about Thomas, **although he had been urgently asked [by Thomas] to do so.**....**I said if he did not mind I would like to ask him something else—to which he immediately replied that he could imagine what it would be**. And then I was **amazed at the wonderful blunt address of young people**. He said he would catch up on his visit [to us] soon; but now **he wanted to say something concrete to me: his friend Thomas had gone to Mass and Communion with him at Easter for the first time in a long time, and then regularly; Thomas had requested him to tell us this personally, and it was very painful for him [Thomas' friend] now to have done this too late**. (291—my emphasis added)

Up to the very end, Josef Pieper has a candid reply to Thomas' friend, and it is a reply that also shows his own Catholic Faith and fundamental conviction:

> But of course **it was not at all "too late." The message about my son's homecoming—a much deeper homecoming than to his father—still came at the right time....Things would never be the same again**. (292—my emphasis added)

--FINIS--