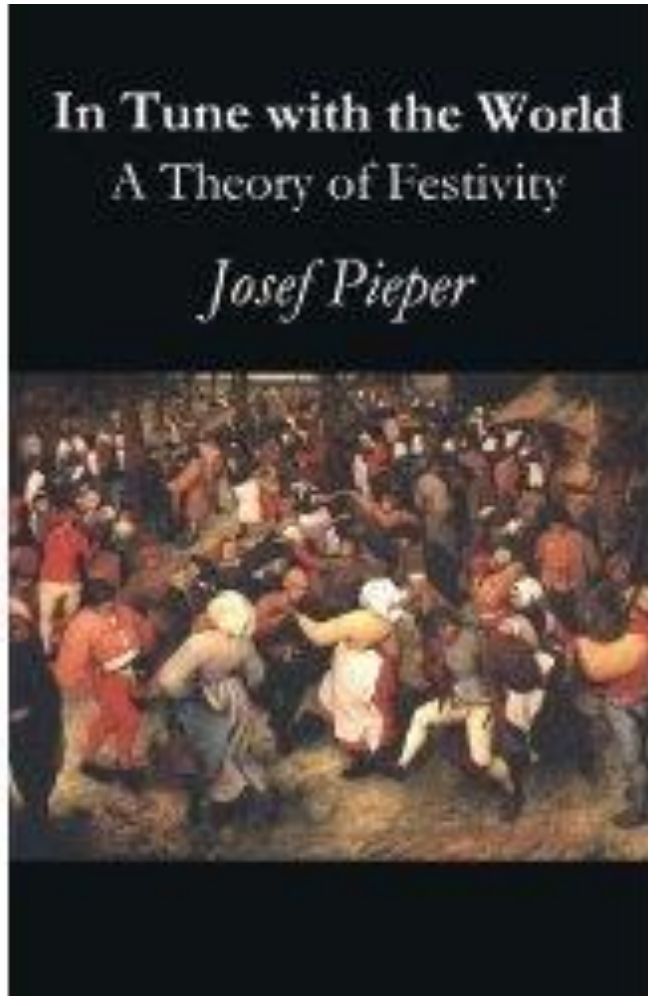


A Summary of *In Tune with the World* by Josef Pieper



A Summary of *In Tune with the World* by Josef Pieper

St. Augustine's Press, 1999

ISBN: 978-1890318338

Summary by John English, written exclusively for The Goldhead Group, Ltd.

[You can purchase the full text at Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781890318338)

About the Author

Josef Pieper was born on May 4, 1905, in Westphalia, Germany. He grew up learning Thomistic thought and continued as a Thomist philosopher his entire life. He was involved in the liturgical renewal of the 1920's and upheld Catholic belief during the turmoil of the Second World War.

After the war, he taught at the University of Munster in Westphalia, from 1946 until his retirement. He died in 1997. His mind remained sharp throughout his entire life, and he wrote around fifty-books all in line with Thomistic principles.

General Overview

In his book *In tune with the World*, Pieper demonstrates the goodness of the Created world celebrated in festivity, despite the despairing antifestival that appears to be gradually consuming the modern world. He reminds us that festival is ultimately an affirmation of the goodness of the world, expressed in a form of public worship. The Christian than can always find a meaning to celebrate even in the paradoxical situation of his martyrdom. This is because in spite of everything, the Christian can recognize and affirm Creation.

The problem with the modern world is that few individuals possess the capacity for festival. The modern work-orientated world has attempted to replace the festival with the affirmation of humanity. Pieper traces the degradation of the day of rest, through the working era, culminating in the totalitarian regimes that made festival a day of gratuitous work, and prepared the way for the thesis that the modern festival is war. Despite this outlook, Pieper maintains that there is always hope that the festival will reclaim its patent form, and that even in the midst of the greatest destruction, the Christian can look upon the world and, with the Creator, affirm that it is 'very good.'

Chapter One

Josef Pieper introduces festivity as one of those things which cannot be discussed without looking at the entirety of life. Utilizing our concept of work, Pieper is able to introduce some notion of what festivity is not, and some of its essential components. A festival is certainly a break from the normal routine, without the routine the festival would not be the unusual event that it is. Thus, it is more than the dead time that was experienced by the rich and the nobles in kings' courts. The parties arise more from the *horror vacui* which is to say that they are an attempt to escape from boredom.

Pieper suggests that both work and festival spring from the same root. Work is neither to be glorified as the be all and end all as it is in a totalitarian regime, but neither is it to be reduced to mere drudgery. The world should be accepted for what it is. Here he introduces the idea of work as a just punishment; one can benefit from the justice of the punishment, by recognizing it as that, a means to make recompense. Thus, good can come from the malum.

Festival, then, is an interruption of the routine, a break from the performance of servile work. By servile is meant the work which is done for some other purpose. And if it is the nature of work to be servile, then it is the nature of the festival to be liberal. But what is a liberal activity, one done for its own sake?

Pieper then proposes a common concept used to introduce the idea of an activity that is liberal: play. The characteristic of work seems to be seriousness, a need to acquire the basic objects necessary for life, thus, play would seem to be an essential component of man's life of festival. But Pieper proposes the possibility that play is more a mode of action, which is truly meaningless in itself. Equating festival would then be tantamount to saying that religious activities are meaningless.

Chapter Two

It is not necessarily that one does not know what festivity is, but that one is hard put to try to *explain* what it is with words. Quoting Nietzsche, Pieper wonders if the problem is not so much that festivity is disappearing from the world, so much as that the type of person capable of the correct spirit needed to enter into festivity is becoming difficult to find. But what is the necessary spirit for one to celebrate festively? It is not the 'empty and wearisome pomp' which could be found in Greek 'festivals'. There is no study of historical celebrations that can enable the individual to see what that spirit is. It is necessary to understand man and the fulfillment of human life in order to grasp the necessary disposition with which to approach festival.

When asking the more profound questions of existence, it is crucial that one depends not on the thoughts of any individual, but that he turns to the tradition of thought into which the wisdom of generations has been poured. From tradition, one learns that the highest perfection of man is that "seeing which confers bliss." Another name for this seeing is contemplation. It is the recognition of the divine foundations of the universe. This view is not one that has merely been advanced with the rise of Christian thinking, but extends back to the traditional beliefs of the Greek philosophers as well. Even they speak of a type of seeing which can be explained as a kind of earthly contemplation.

It is from this concept of an earthly contemplation that one can come to an understanding that contemplation is not an *exertion* of the argumentative intellect as much as it is a relaxation of the mind in order to acquire a receptive disposition of the reality that is before one in the world. This disposition of alertness and openness is essential to the festival, though as experience confirms, it does not fully constitute the festival in and of itself. However, it is this awareness which must penetrate beyond all the externals of the festival in order for those externals to be truly festive.

One of the essential aspects of a festal day is that the time which would otherwise have been dedicated to useful labor is offered up as a sacrifice to the Divine Being. That is, the servile arts which may have achieved material benefits for man are laid aside in order to make room for some other activity. This offering up of the arts which are aimed at achieving something more only makes sense if there is something replacing them which can be done for its own sake. This is why a society marked by a total work ethic, can never achieve festivity.

It is true that man does not perform this renunciation without reason. This renunciation is an act of giving, a free giving that springs from a comprehensive affirmation, and there is no other term which more precisely embodies this reason than love. Pieper says that there is no other comprehensible reason for renunciation than love.

Chapter Three

Despite a hesitancy to refer to festival as a day of rejoicing, festival is clearly a time of enjoyment. Joy plays an essential role in the festival day. But this does not mean that festival consists merely in joy. Joy by its very nature is a secondary reality. It follows upon some other truth. That is, there is always some cause of the joy that is expressed. It is true that joy is desired for its own sake. There is no denying that, despite the fact that joy only follows upon the acquisition of some cause.

The reason for joy is the obtaining of something loved. The receiving of the loved object constitutes the cause of rejoicing in either the present, past, or future. Without love, there is no joy. But more than there being a reason for joy, man must recognize that reason for what it is. There are those who have posited that there is festival even when nobody is aware of them. This is absurd if we are speaking of festival as a human reality. The human person must see, recognize and rejoice in the loved reality.

What causes could there truly be for festivity in reality? Ideas and past experiences do not constitute a sufficient cause for the joy that becomes festivity. Pieper tells the reader that there are no ideas about freedom, paternity, humanity, nor the memorials of past events that can ever touch the lives of the person directly. In order for a person to celebrate anything festively, the cause must affect his very existence.

It is not sufficient, however, that the event merely touches the person directly in the present. Birthdays and the like are clearly events with contemporaneous significance. Yet in the face of all of reality, how can a birth be celebrated if, with Sartre, one holds that existence is futile? Along with any celebration there must be an accompanying purpose for one's very existence. This is why Pieper points to Nietzsche's insight that in order to have joy in anything one must affirm everything.

Ultimately, to partake in festivity is to say that life is good. There is a meaning for my existence. To truly rejoice, when one looks around, he must affirm that fundamentally everything is good. So to rejoice for even a moment is to affirm the totality of being. This takes place in spite of the disasters that do occur in this world.

When the martyr goes to his death, it is difficult to see how he could view the entire world as good. Yet it is a striking fact that in the face of torture, the martyr never utters a word against the goodness of creation. Pieper tells us that in spite of all, the martyr still looks at everything as "very good." In contrast the man, who has everything, until he affirms the goodness of totality, is incapable of true joy. If one fails to approve of his own existence, the ephemeral pleasures he experiences can never claim a festive aspect, as they are mere diversions from the futility of his existence.

Pieper defines celebration of festival to be that living out "for some special occasion and in an uncommon manner, the universal assent to the world as a whole." His discussion up to this point leads to a conclusion with three parts. First, Pieper states that the most intense heart of festivity lies in the affirmation of God as the Creator of the world; secondly, festival's richest form is the ritual festival; and thirdly, the refusal to participate in the ritual affirmation is the surest road to the destruction of festival.

Chapter Four

To state that ritual festival is the richest form of festival is not to say that 'secular' festivals do not, or cannot exist. A secular festival is not a profane festival. It is impossible to separate festival from its 'religious' roots. Festival only finds meaning in its religious roots. Thus, it is often almost impossible to distinguish between a ritual festival and a secular one upon observing the mere external trappings. Any festival given free reign leaves no dimension of the human existence untouched.

From whence does the festival then arise? If, in any festival there is a dimension that cannot be established by the mere dictum of government or society, from whence springs the heart that makes festivity, festivity? Pieper, drawing on the ancients, points to tradition as the source of all festivity. Tradition contains a special seed of the divine. It is received from the divine and only in connection to the divine does it contain meaning. Thus, even if the external trappings remain the same, if the receiver of the tradition forgets the reason for them, festival becomes meaningless. It becomes an even more strenuous type of 'work.'

Festival is intrinsically linked to the 'holy' or 'divine.' The affirmation that is at the heart of all festival is the same as is found in ritual worship – the affirmation of life. Pieper maintains that, virtually, the only cultural worship coming from Europe that may claim the dimension of festival is the Christian culture. At the heart of Christian ritual and festival is that very affirmation of the meaning of life found in the praise of the Creator, and the recognition of the goodness that He has formed in creation.

Pieper then goes on to discuss the fruit of all festivity, the idea of rebirth, renewal, or reincarnation. This fruit is not something attained by the participants of festivity as if by their own labor. It is a gift. The reception of

this gift is a fundamental component of festivity. It can be experienced in recreation or some other way, but is essentially a profound resting, being at peace with the world because of the fullness of meaning found in the affirmation. This fruit can never be wrested from festivity by any effort. In spite of all, we remain more capable of work in order to obtain an end rather than that serene disposition in which we can receive from another, that to which we have no claim. Yet the renewal that is the essence and fruit of festivity can only be obtained in such a state. It is just this fruit, however, that we wish upon our neighbors, whenever we wish them the best in holiday seasons, even in its latent form that contemporary society has used to express those wishes.

Ultimately, the festival is not in the here and now. It is a passing beyond the present reality and resting before the Deity. Thus the inability to enter into festivity is to be restricted, almost imprisoned, in daily existence, whereas the ability to enter into festivity imbues this daily existence with deeper meaning.

Chapter Five

Despite all the research done on ancient cultures and methods of life, the festivals they celebrated remain inaccessible to us. That is, though we can learn a lot from the study of the celebration which accompanied festivals in the past, the nature of the festival remains hidden. This is because the true source of festival is something not seen, some affirmation that can only be affirmed by the initiates of the festival.

This is why the Christian festival is the one most ‘accessible’ to us. In order to understand the Christian festival, it is necessary to look to Easter and Sunday. All Christian holidays may be reduced to these two. And what is Sunday? Despite the opinion of some that Sunday does not in any way originate in the Jewish Sabbath, Pieper asserts that it is. He points then to the idea of Sunday as something not entirely founded by man, but pointing to a divine origin.

The Seventh Day is a celebration of the accomplishment of creation. It is on the seventh day that the Lord rested. But Sunday needs to be more than just a day off from work in order to become truly festive. The Seventh day is also the day on which the Creator looked on His creation and affirmed that it was very good. It is this gift of being created that becomes a primary source of joy and festivity. Sunday also becomes the day on which man looks forward to the eternal bliss for which he was created. But these sources of festivity are not sufficient to explain the Christian aspect of Sundays.

The Christian Sunday is marked specifically by its celebration of the Incarnation and Resurrection of the Son of God. The culmination of this celebration takes place at Easter, and every Sunday is an emanation of that Easter. Yet Easter is more than a memorial of a past event. It contemporizes the event through the gifts of grace and new life that Christ gives to each man in every age.

The celebration of the goodness of Creation, the expectation of eternal bliss, and the continual source of Grace found in Christ, with these reasons of celebration it is impossible to single out a particular day for the celebration of such reality, unless there is a sense of the eternal festival. It is impossible to celebrate them in any single moment because they are the very truths upon which the entirety of the Christian life is based. Thus, the idea of an ongoing festival which is manifest only on particular days belongs to the present modern life, just as much as it belonged to the festivals of the past.

Chapter Six

In this chapter, Pieper connects art with its festal source. A festival cannot be divorced from its visible manifestations of rejoicing, and these manifestations take the form of art. Art is that which is out of the ordinary. The praise of the world, which lies at the heart of festivity, is only accessible to man through the senses; so it is clear that art plays a key role in the celebration of festivals.

Though the affirmation of Creation is only manifest in the arts, the arts depend on festivity for their meaning; they are derivative upon festival. It is when the arts are bent to serve some utilitarian purpose that they begin to lose their significance. It becomes a perfection without meaning, a dilemma presented to many of the more contemporary artists. Despite the attempt to deny it, any art participates in the very affirmation of the created world. A negation would be formless, but all art no matter how twisted, carries in its core a form. So dependent is art on form that as an attempt at negating the world of order; art is an inherent contradiction.

Worse than the negation of art is what Pieper calls the mendacious affirmation of the world. Here art and festival are presented in a sham affirmation of man. They become mere entertainment and distraction from man's daily existence. Since man desires to enter into that otherworldly aspect of his nature, there is a deep need for true festival. But when pseudo-festival and pseudo-art imprison man in an empty existence, he no longer even realizes the need that he has in him, and the loss is sealed. This is the "period of dearth". It is the 'existential poverty' of a humanity that can no longer celebrate festivals festively.

Chapter Seven

As long as man is concerned with the loss of festivity in the world, there is still hope for its recovery. Yet throughout the recent history, the festival has been under heavy attack. Some of the festivals are so deeply entrenched that society as of yet is incapable of ignoring them, Christmas for example. Despite the commercialization of Christmas, it continues to be celebrated as the festival of the Incarnation. The falsification of the festival is only one of the ways though in which men have attempted to replace festival.

The creation of false festival demonstrates the emptiness of a festival without meaning. Though in one sense festivals are made by man, insofar as man establishes the when and how a festival is to be celebrated, they are truly independent of man insofar as man can never establish the 'what' that is being celebrated in true festivity.

Pieper then goes on to give an account of the false festivals established by the government during the times of the French Revolution. Here, these festivals were particularly aimed at replacing the public worship of the religious holiday, and the celebration dictated by the government is a hollow exercise which compels men and women to comply with the dictates of government. They truly 'reek of boredom'.

Oddly enough though, the false festival often emphasizes that which is overlooked in the true festival: the public character of the celebration, the lowering of social barriers, and the true 'fraternization' of man. The sham festival is most revealed as such not by looking at its exterior manifestation however, but more in the 'what' that is being celebrated. What is being celebrated is human happiness, but happiness achieved on the basis of ameliorating the social condition through the government of man. There is nothing wrong with an attempt to better man's social condition. What is lacking is the affirmation of the Goodness of Creation. It is a Goodness which man cannot make, but which is there in Creation and can be received by man only as 'gift'. The true eradication of festival is not to be negated in the extravagance of the French false festival, but in the reduction of man at a later date to the pure form of 'rationally calculated utility'.

Chapter Eight

Pieper goes on to describe the progression of May first, from a date of memorial to a festival of labor. Originally a day for demonstrating workers to demand shorter working days, it was declared a day of festival by the Labor Congress in Brussels. It was to be a day of rest, commemorating the *economic* struggle of workers. Thinkers began to proclaim the idea it embodied to be one which triumphed over any religious, pagan or Christian, holiday. It was the beginning of a glorification of work over any other form of existence.

In the totalitarian regimes, the ideas proclaimed by the original May holiday, had to be adopted into something new, because the existing order was the Bolshevik regime. It can no longer be a day that stands out for its

resistance to the existing order. Thus, it became a day set apart from others by its spirit of holiday work. On May first, the workers would dedicate their day to working for the commune without pay. It was voluntary work.

Of course the ‘voluntariness’ of such work is to be doubted. The newspapers always carried instructions with the rubrics that were to be observed, and latent in all such instructions was the overtone of threat. On these days, in both the Bolshevik regimes and Nazi Germany, May first, became more and more a day to demonstrate military might. This artificial holiday, bordering on a preparation for war, touches so close to counter-festivity, that it can almost be called an ‘antifestival’.

Chapter Nine

Pieper then considers the thesis that the modern equivalent of festival is war. In no other time does it seem that the characteristics of festival are seen so much as in war. There is a general squandering of resources that are normally hoarded, an extravagance of expenditure, a wild *éclat* of pent up energy, and a merging of the individual into the whole. Pioneered by Nietzsche, the ‘will to nothingness’ seems to be embedded in modern life. So much so that war becomes a desirable annihilation, the great ‘affirmation of negation’, and the desirable outcome.

In spite of this, Pieper rejects the hypothesis that war is the modern equivalent of festival. Granting that such an extreme of negation would make festival impossible, Pieper maintains that such a hypothesis is not only a simplification, but plainly wrong. In today’s world, festival continues to take place, though often in a latent form. Viewing the world, there would seem to be a temptation to despair were it not for the reality that at the core of everything and in spite of everything there is a fundamental goodness of the world to be affirmed.

At the heart of man’s nature there lies the necessity to penetrate beyond his daily existence. Man seeks an escape not in forgetfulness, but in a recollection of the reality beyond work. Whether it is in an experience of artistic beauty, the shattering reality of love or death, the mind of man touches that very reality. This is itself not festival, but it can once again become the preludes to festival, as the source of true festival remains unalterably present in the world.

The core of festivity, taking place in ritual worship, continues today as much as ever. Though it is no longer as public as in former time, this latent form of festivity is still real. Thus, the blatant unfestivity of the world is not altogether without hope. Though the possibility of the ultimate antifestival remains a possibility, the Christian will always retain the conviction, that no destruction, no matter how grand in magnitude or power, can ever eliminate true festival. No antifestival can ever eliminate the goodness of Creation, and this goodness of Creation remains the undying source of celebration.