

## Pascals God-Shaped Vacuum: A Guided Tour of The Pensees



Blaise Pascal wrote the Pensees to his skeptical and restless friends to move them to seek God. The Pensees are widely regarded as one of the most exhilarating and effective defenses of the Christian faith ever written, particularly for today's readers who resemble Pascals friends. This comprehensive guided tour of Pascals Pensees, plus biography of Pascals courageous life, aims to benefit seekers and believers by conveying Pascals insights into: (1) Why a human being is miserable without God; (2) Why Christianity uniquely offers a winsome and efficacious cure; and (3) Why Christianity, despite modern objections, is plausibly true. The greatest significance of Pascals Pensees may be their compelling articulation of the unique relevance of Christs gospel for our time. In T.S. Eliots words, But I can think of no Christian writer, not Newman even, more to be commended than Pascal to those who doubt, but who have the mind to conceive, and the sensibility to feel, the disorder, the futility, the meaninglessness, the mystery of life and suffering, and who can only find peace through a satisfaction of the whole being. Pascals signature Pensee undergirding the themes of this guided tour is number 148: What else does this craving proclaim but that there was once in man a true state of happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object, in other words by God himself. Through this Pensee and many others Pascal wakes us up to appreciate that we may have a God-shaped vacuum in our heart, as suggested, for example, by our affinity for diversions and indifference as ways to avoid addressing our grimmest problems such as our impending deaths, unhappiness, and unjust self-absorption. The Pensees in particular address how a

person this side of the technological revolution can seriously consider Christian truth and life in the face of contemporary countervailing currents including scientism, cynicism, and entertainment culture. Pascals case for why to seek and believe is especially relevant for today because he wrote to modern secular society, to ambitious pursuers of career success, to the bored and indifferent, to intellectual skeptics. In contrast, classical rational apologetics hardly penetrate this group, because they neglect the readers psychology, mistakenly pre-supposing they are open to seeking God. By combining style, wit, and reasoned arguments to move both the heart and mind, Pascals Pensees are known for setting his listeners on fire to take up an interest in seeking. The Pensees will appeal to those who enjoy brilliant writing and wish to gain deeper insight into the human condition. As Professor Henry Phillips put it, Pascal offers a portrait of the human condition that provokes questions whose answers will be found only in the Christian religion. The Pensees are especially on target for readers who struggle with how a reasonable person living in todays technological era can be a Christian; for these Pascal is indispensable reading and the ultimate mentor. In addition to helping seekers work out their doubts about belief, this guided tour aims to make Pascals thoughts practically helpful for a Christian to live life congruently with the gospel, and in particular to better weather modern doubts and criticisms. This book was inspired by the excellent guided tour of the Pensees (Christianity for Modern Pagans, 1993) by Professor Peter Kreeft, and from learning that many fellow Christians count the Pensees as one of their all-time most helpful reads. Given the stature of Pascal as a colossal Christian thinker, it is surprising that very few comprehensive guided tours with objective to help modern seekers and believers have been published, and this book helps fill this space. Forward by Reverend Earl F. Palmer

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