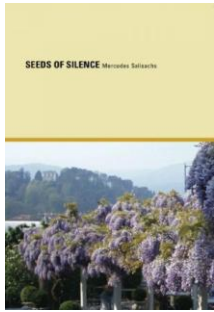


LITERARY

Ten years after publishing *El Secreto de las Flores*, Mercedes Salisachs' novel was translated from Spanish into English and titled, "*Seeds of Silence*" (Jorge Pinto Books, 2007, \$17.95). Although she is little known in the States, Salisachs is a major Spanish writer, whose some thirty novels have been widely translated.



But why translate a title so, especially when it could have been easily rendered "the secret of the flowers"?

A friend well acquainted with flowers suggested to me that the ambivalent suggestiveness of the English, "secret," is a clue. All seeds secrete their essence, such that no seed is kept entirely unto itself. A unique kind of phytology, all is eventually brought into the light and revealed (cf. Mark 4.22 and parallels): Seeds of silence mortally mature into blooms of disclosure.

This book is especially occupied with the weight of the past, the obscurity of motivation, and the moral complexity of relationships. Although metaphysically challenging, Salisachs' vision is lyrically wrought. And while her novel is profoundly Catholic, its delicate insight is not forcefully predetermined by doctrine.

Seeds subtly alludes to our first parents' primordial sin. During the course of two summers, the mystical greenhouse of a writer's deceased wife grows and grafts experiences of longing and transgression. What happens at *Mas Delfin* will leave you aching for the revelation of a new beginning.

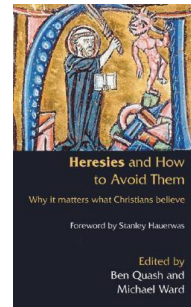
RELIGIOUS

Peter Gay insightfully (and approvingly) described the attraction of modernism in art and literature as "the lure of heresy." Modernity's increasing skepticism and ultimate rejection of tradition and form was not simply the result of thinking outside the box, as the cliché goes. It was an act of impiety that furthermore yielded the postmodern era of relativist secularism (nihilism in disguise).

Dostoyevsky knew that if God doesn't exist, everything is permitted. Alternatively – in an existential if not strictly logical sense – if one may believe anything, one believes nothing.

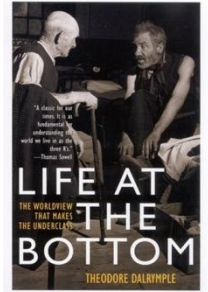
But "heresy" is a nasty word that most Catholics are either hesitant or resistant to appreciate as a necessary notion. Consequently, it could be helpful to read *Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why it matters what Christians believe* (eds. Ben Quash & Michael Ward, Hendrickson Publishers, 2007, \$16.95).

This ecumenical collection of essays about the theological and moral positions the early Church deemed "heretical" is eminently readable. One learns the basic historical context and intellectual stakes. Some of the essays suffer from want of metaphysical understanding, and one in particular manifests anti-Catholic bias. It's not perfect. Yet still, each short chapter of ten pages gives convincing reasons why the Christian ought to consider heresies precisely as such, which is not merely to say "out of bounds," but moreover "false."



CULTURAL

The Christian must have an orienting concern for the poor, however much they will be with us always. This commitment does not only cry for the creative resolution of practical problems in social administration and organization. Moreover, it requires reflection about what it actually means to be "poor," and what it means for a poor person to think of himself as "poor" or in need of social welfare.



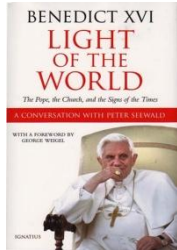
Theodore Dalrymple (the pen name of Anthony M. Daniels) has spent decades working as a psychiatrist at a public hospital and prison in Birmingham, England. The tens of thousands whom he has counseled are mostly white, composing that stratum of society Dalrymple calls "the underclass." In *Life at the Bottom* (Ivan R. Dee, 2001, \$16.95), he is convinced that this social group is not identified merely by its (first world situation of) economic poverty but also by its alarming familiarity with brutality and a general lack of a sense of responsibility. Whether they are criminal or suicidal, Dalrymple's patients have consistently exhibited the inability to see themselves as moral agents, who originate their own actions. This observation is evidenced by the myriad conversations the doctor-writer clearly and wittily recounts. In addition, Dalrymple opines that an intellectual elite that views "the poor" as socially determined has effectively imbued them with their sense of helplessness and unreflective expectation of social aid: And this has made them "underclass." Not a misanthrope, Dalrymple is worth the read.

PAPAL

Our Holy Father released two quite different kinds of texts this past year.

Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times (Ignatius, 2010, \$21.95) quickly became known more for what it might have been wanted to say about a specific topic than what it actually did about that and others.

One of the few true public intellectuals left, Pope Benedict is too thoughtful to be buzzed in blurbs. So, if you want to discover what he really thinks about the current project of preaching the Gospel, you'll not only have to appreciate the unchanging basics of Church teaching, but also be willing to think seriously about how it is *nuancé* by our cultural situation. The pope's interviewer, Peter Seewald poses the major controversial questions – both age-old and new (cf. Matthew 13.52).



If the state of biblical interpretation in the Church and the role of the Bible in your own spiritual life is of concern, then *Verbum Domini* ought to be on your nightstand. This exhortation is not only available for purchase, but also available online at www.vatican.va. The Pope “encourages all the faithful to renew their personal and communal encounter with Christ, the word of life made visible, and to become his heralds, so that the gift of divine life – communion – can spread ever more fully throughout the world.”

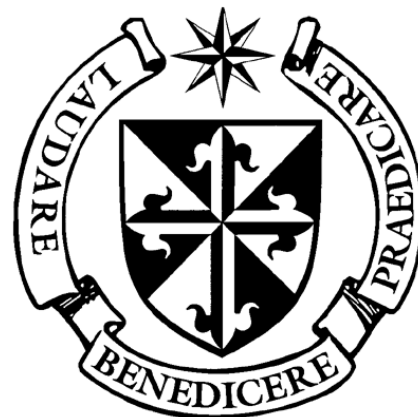
St. Vincent Ferrer is staffed by the Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Joseph (www.op-stjoseph.org).

The Order of Preachers was founded in 1216 by St. Dominic de Guzman. The Dominican charism is to preach the truth for the salvation of souls. This “holy preaching” is an apostolic work that flows from elements of monastic observance and contemplation.

Our mode of contemplation is specified by a commitment to study – “*nailed to the wood of the desk,*” as we say.

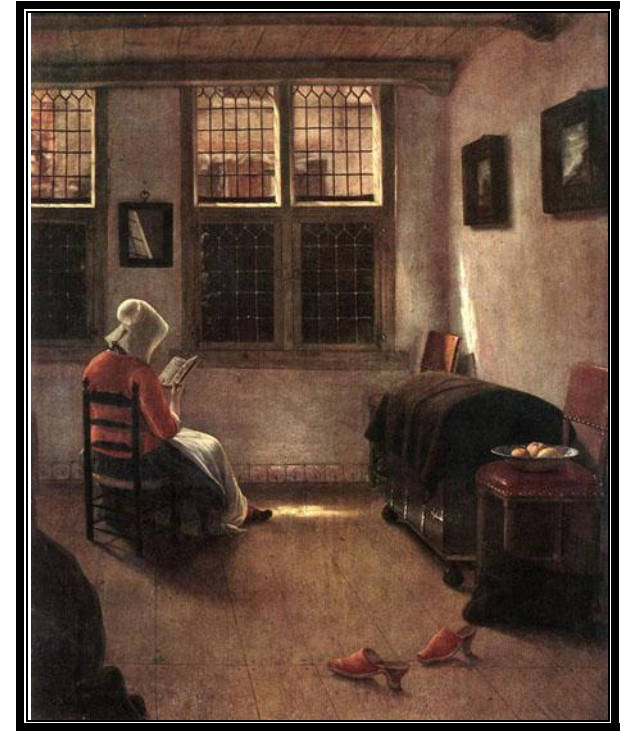
During the year, we offer “Theology in the City,” a theologically rich catechesis series, as well as two major lectures in honor of Sts. Albert and Thomas, delivered by prominent scholars.

Call the parish offices at 212.744.2080, visit www.csvf.org or www.csvfblog.org, or stop in for more details about all our parish’s activities.



WINTER READING PROVOCATIONS

Rev. Bruno M. Shah, O.P.



Pieter Janssens Elinga – *Reading Woman* (mid-17th c.)

The Church of Saint Vincent Ferrer



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