



Theology for Beginners

Frank Sheed

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Theology for Beginners is one of the most outstanding presentations of the central doctrines of the Catholic faith ever penned. For those to whom these doctrines once seemed formidable, Sheed's is a fresh voice of lucid and carefully reasoned prose. To read Theology for Beginners is to have one mind's awakened to the spiritual realities at the center of human existence.

Theology for Beginners Details

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Stuart says

I was lamenting the other day that there are no "middle-ground" Catholic books. There are thousands of beginner level books that tend to blend together after a while, and there are hundreds of advanced level books that are great for the professors and theology majors. But where are the "middle-ground books" for people who feel they have progressed past the introductory level books? Then, I thought some more and realized I was being arrogant to think I was past the introductory stage and decided to tackle a classic Frank Sheed book called Theology for Beginners.

Theology for Beginners is a 200 page book originally published in 1957. Ignatius Press re-released it for the 60th anniversary. The book is divided into twenty chapters which were originally part of a diocesan weeklies column. The book begins with a chapter on why we should study theology, and to summarize Sheed, it is because the truth is food for us and light for us. We are then treated to lessons on the Trinity, Creation, the Nature of Man, Redemption, the Redeemer, Mary, the Sacraments, the Eucharist, and the Next Life.

One of the most interesting chapters in this book dealt with the Fall. In this chapter, Sheed looks at both the Fall of the Angels and the Fall of Adam. He talks of some angels choosing self over God. This sin of pride resulted in a rejection of God and His love. With Adam's fall that resulted from Satan's temptation, man had broken his union with God and he was supernaturally dead. All future men (and women) would now be born with original sin. Additionally, our imagination and passions (two things which were good before the Fall) have been distorted and disordered and now can consume us in a very negative way. We can now become slaves to them and let them rule us, if we allow ourselves. This leads us to the truths about Hell. It exists. It exists because of Satan and the angels Fall. It is a place of suffering. It is eternal. It is important to remember that God doesn't send people to Hell. Man sends himself there by choosing self-love over love of God. Thankfully, Hell is not our only possible destination. If we love God, but have minor sins, we can go to Purgatory and receiving sanctifying purification to eventually get to the ultimate destination of Heaven!

This book is an excellent guide to theology that has stood the test of time. The writing style is concise and succinct, getting the message across without overly complicating matters. It was also a very humbling read, because it showed me that even in beginner level theology, there is still much to be learned. I highly recommend this book!

Karyn Yager says

A short but powerful book. In just 186 pages Frank Sheed takes complex theology and boils it down to its essence, and presents it in a way that's easy to digest. This book could be easily read in a week or so, but you could also linger over it's contents for months. It is that unique combination of being concise, practical, easily understood, but also with depth that can be pondered endlessly. For some, this could be the beginning of a life long study of theology. For others it could be the only theology book they ever need. For all it will deepen their awareness of who God is and what he has done and continues to do for the human race--from creation to the second coming. Sheed calls for all Christians to become better informed about their faith, and this book is his offering to assist them. The uninstructed Christian, says Sheed, is "stumbling along in the dark not even aware that it is dark, half-fed and not even hungry for more..." If you are "hungry for more" this book will feed your soul.

Mel says

An excellent primer in theology for a Catholic layman. I feel more equipped to deal with tricky questions having read it. It is not too heavy either.

J.T. Therrien says

As Frank Sheed points out, many Catholics love and practice their religion, but most are illiterate when it comes to understanding some of the basic tenets of the Faith. Theology for Beginners addresses this problem.

Every Catholic should reacquaint themselves with the Faith: the Persons of the Trinity; the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception; Heaven, Hell and Purgatory; the Sacraments, etc. Everything relevant to being a Catholic is mentioned in this short book.

What I enjoyed most about Theology for Beginners was the informal style, the dry British wit, and the hope that Mr. Sheed has for each and every serious reader to pursue these issues at a deeper level.

This book is a wonderful introduction to Catholic dogma, and it should be read by everyone, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, interested in learning what the Catholic Church truly believes and teaches.

Although the book does not claim to be about Catholic apologetics (arguing against other religious doctrines with the aim of convincing non-Catholics to join our religion), Mr. Sheed sees the twofold need for a proper understanding of the doctrines of the Faith as a necessary component of practicing our faith more devoutly, as well as being part of the apostolic mission we have been called to live.

Julia says

This should be required reading for all Catholics. Sheed explains things I never knew needed explaining! This was a challenging read for me and was glad to have two friends read it with me as I may have just put it back on the shelf, left to my own devices. I needed clarification from my spiritual director on some things. Did you know that trees have a soul? It sounds new agey, but they do!

Here's a quote: "Man is made by God of nothing, is held in existence from moment to moment simply by God's will to hold him there. God's will is the reason for man's existence; so God's will must be the law of his existence. To disobey the law is sin; to think we can gain by disobeying it is insanity."

Joe says

Sheed accomplishes just what he intends to do: convince the layman of the necessity of understanding

fundamental Christian doctrines and set them forth with clarity and freshness of description. I really appreciate how much Sheed has reflected on the different topics. He has internalized them to make them more personal and express them more clearly. A bit dry toward the middle but overall thought provoking. I could see this as a good tool for group study and discussion.

Mike says

This book was a great introduction. It is short, 186 pages, but don't be misled; read them slowly. He does an excellent job of marking off the geography to be covered by Theology but does not delve too deeply into any single topic. The book is filled with facts and observations which will cause you to stop and really think.

I would recommend reading this book prior to taking on the catechism of the Catholic Church; it will give the reader the necessary hooks on which to hang the concepts from the much larger volume.

Ivan Herrejon mfd says

loved it!

Silver Swan says

Deeply profound, brilliant, and insightful. It is a definitive volume that should be included on every bookshelf devoted to the subject. The writing is clear, yet eloquent and filled with Truth. It is paradoxical in that it is complex, yet simple, in approach and content. Then again, the greatest paradoxes often contain the most beauty and truth.

A cursory glance at the table of contents may lead the reader to believe that he is sufficiently knowledgeable about the subjects under discussion. But I urge you against passing it up due to such an assumption. Despite prior knowledge, I found that I grew in understanding because of the philosophical bent of the material. It provides, therefore, a deeper understanding of that which we may already "know". Theology is the greatest and truest form of philosophy, and this is a wonderful example of it.

Fox says

This is a good introductory text to the general beliefs of the Catholic faith. While accessibly written, the text tends towards a density and dryness that can make it difficult to digest. I found myself needing to reread paragraphs, and even chapters at times to get the ideas to fully sink in. That having been said, I cannot fully imagine how the ideas could have been better conveyed. Theology is a very tough subject, and so far this is the most accessible book I've been able to find *on* it, at least in terms of the Catholic faith.

The book is helpfully arranged into individual chapters that build off of one another to ease the transition into deeper topics. A whole chapter, for instance, is dedicated to better defining what precisely the *spirit* is.

Other chapters include one on the concept of the Trinity, on what happens after death, how to read the Bible, and why in general one should familiarize themselves with theology and its tenets.

All in all, this is a difficult but rather good book for anyone interested in the subject. I'm glad I had a chance to read it, even though it took me forever to finish.

Matthew says

The title of this book says it all. Sheed has created the perfect introduction to Roman Catholic Theology for the average layman. Using logic, reason and excellent analogies, Sheed explains to the reader the basics on everything from Original Sin to the Eucharist. This book is the perfect prequel to his more lengthy volume, 'Theology and Sanity.' For anyone interested in doing an independent study of the Roman Catholic Faith, this book is the absolute best place to start.

Mike says

This is an excellent starting point for delving into Catholic thought. It is not an easy read, but only because the subject matter is hard. It is clearly and readably written, it's phrasing is carefully considered for accuracy, and, while it doesn't go into great depth on things, it doesn't dumb them down, either. When I first read this book, there were elements that I didn't quite understand, and claims that I did not necessarily accept. It, however, gave me the grounding (and the questions) to explore a number of theological issues more deeply, and for several years after reading it I found myself realizing what Sheed meant by the things that he said, or why things that I hadn't quite embraced were, in fact, correct. If you're looking to start investigating Catholic theology and are frustrated to find that everything you read is either beyond your current knowledge level or is dumbed down too much to get you anywhere, this book just might be what you're looking for.

Tom says

This book proved to be helpful in my getting a more in depth look at the Catholic religion. It was an enlightenment in many aspects.

However, although it was printed in 2011, there were some faulty statements in the book. In one case, it was explained that only the priest celebrant could receive Holy Eucharist in both species, that is bread and wine. According to the book, all other could receive the host only. It seems the proofreading was in need of a second proofreader.

booklady says

August 3-November 14, 2016: Have read this at least twice before. This time my reading was very disjointed and frequently interrupted by other activities and required reading (for classes I'm conducting) so I lost the flow of the author's ideas more than I followed them. I'll just leave my rating from last time and try to come back to it again when I can concentrate on this better.

Dec 22, 2008: This is my second reading of *Theology For Beginners* -- mostly because I can barely remember the first. What I do remember was at the time (probably sometime between '02-'04) it didn't seem a book 'for beginners'. This time, perhaps due to the reading I've done in the interim, it was much easier to understand. It's still very theoretical. Theology, after all, being 'the study of' God -- the most impenetrable mystery of all time -- it now amazes me Mr. Sheed has made this book as accessible as he has.

There were many things I liked about this book including the explanation of spirit/soul/body and their relationship(s) to each other. The whole spirit-soul 'thing' actually made sense after reading this explanation, spirit being not only a key word, but *the* key word. It 'is the element in us by which we know and love, by which we therefore decide.' Souls, on the other hand are marvellous and they animate the bodies, the life-principles, of all living things including plants and animals. So my cat has soul, but not a spirit, if I understand Mr. Sheed correctly. However, the human soul not only animates the body, it has powers of its own, powers utterly outside the possibilities of matter. (p. 62)

And then there were other pearls of Wisdom scattered throughout which I tried to collect (highlight) and add to memory, such as:

- . . . evolution and creation. These are answers to two totally different questions. Creation answers the question why does anything exist, why isn't there nothing? Evolution is a theory as to how the universe did develop once it existed. Upon how it came to exist, evolution sheds no light whatever. (p. 58)

- We are born without sanctifying grace. That is what is meant by being born in original sin, which is not to be thought of as a stain on the soul, but as the absence of that grace without which we cannot . . . reach the goal for which God destined man. (p. 80)

- It is by the saints, and not by the mediocre . . . that the Church is to be judged. A medicine must be judged not by those who buy it but by those who actually take it. (p. 116)

Theology For Beginners is really very basic theology. For some it will just whet the appetite. For others, it will saturate. Whichever is the case, as Mr Sheed says in his Foreword, 'you cannot love someone you do not know. You cannot love God well if you know Him poorly.'

"While it is obvious that an ignorant man can be virtuous, it is equally obvious that ignorance is no virtue."
~~Frank Sheed

Steve says

A good introduction to the great mysteries of the Christian faith. Within these short 186 pages Frank Sheed brings light to many of the harder things to understand about our faith: the Trinity, Nature vs Person, the Soul, the Sacraments to name a few. Starting from who God is and ending with our final destination, Sheed walks us through the outline of what we need to know to be effective Christians.
