

Untitled Review of *Theology and Sanity*

By Dorothy Day

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*Summary: Heartily recommends reading *Theology and Sanity* by Frank Sheed—to study about God, “this is happiness and joy.” Notes that it is theology written by a layman, and the importance of their retreat work in learning to know and love and serve God. (DDLW #430).*

(Published by Sheed and Ward, 63 5th Ave.)

You can read ten pages of it on the Eighth Avenue subway from Canal Street to 207th Street. You can read three more pages of it while you stand on a street corner waiting for a Spuyten-Duyvil bus. You can read five more pages of it in the bus on your way to visit your family. That’s how I was engrossed by Mr. Frank Sheed’s **Theology and Sanity**, one of my Christmas presents.

At first I thought, this is a book you cannot mark up because if you started underlining it, you’d be at it all the time. And then I had to start underlining it because there were so many definitions I wanted to remember.

To think about God, and to study about God, whom “heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain” whose power is upon all things, “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” “the Father of lights with whom there is no change or shadow of alteration” “in whom we live and move and have our being,”—this is happiness and joy.

When I started out this morning from St. Joseph’s house at Mott Street, thinking that “God must contain in Himself all the perfections we find in things,” and when I surveyed the dirt and filth of the slum streets, the dull grey city skies in winter, the hideousness of the drug addict whom we had prevented from beating his pregnant wife the night before, I thought sadly to myself that the senses did not convey much of God to us at that moment. We are assured by St. Paul that “from the foundation of the world, men have caught sight of His invisible nature, His eternal power and His divineness, as they are known through His creatures.” So I remembered and comforted myself with the memories of porpoises and babies, of symphonies and storms, oceans and fragrant hot fields.

We always want to find God in beauty and talent and strength of mind and body and spirit, in glory and honor. We are like the Jews looking for a king. We do not expect to find Him in a stable, between the ox and the ass or as a vagrant or a criminal on a cross. That is one of the dangers in trusting to our senses, our imagination.

“To many the idea of bringing the intellect fully into action in religion seems almost repellant,” Mr. Sheed writes.

“The intellect seems so cold and measured and measuring, and the will so warm and glowing. Indeed the joy of the will is always figured in terms of warmth,

such words as ardor, fervor and the like come from Latin words for a fire burning; there is a fear that intellect can only damp down the fire. Many again who do not find the use of the intellect in religion actually repellent, regard it as at least unnecessary—at any rate for the layman—and possibly dangerous. One can, they say, love God without any very great study of doctrine. Indeed, they say, warming to their theme, some of the holiest people they know are quite ignorant . . . It is a strange God who could be loved better by being known less . . . Love of God is immeasurably more important than knowledge of God, but if a man loves God knowing a little about Him, he should love God more from knowing more about Him, for every new thing known about God is a new reason for loving Him . . . Light is the joy of the mind as warmth is the joy of the will. But warmth and light are both the effects of fire . . . In the appallingly difficult struggle to be good, the will is helped immeasurably by the intellect’s clear vision of the real universe.”

Which is the reason we are so intent on running retreat houses, for the benefit of our readers and those who come to us for help. Retreat houses are not houses of penance, as some of the objectors in our midst seem to think. They are part and parcel of the agronomic university which Peter Maurin envisioned. They are the basis and the beginning for all our work. If we are not learning to know and to love and serve God, we are not even making a beginning toward that “new heaven and new earth wherein justice dwelleth.”

Another reason why we want to recommend this most important book by Mr. Sheed is that it is theology simply written by a layman. We are lay people. *The Catholic Worker* is a lay paper, and we are engaged in the work of the lay apostolate, answering the call of the Holy Father who has urged all, without exception, to work for the salvation of souls. It is good to think of Mr. Sheed as a father of a family, a busy man who has a publishing house and has to be concerned with earning a living and the price of paper and food. He knows the man in the street because of his years of work in the Catholic Evidence Guild, and for all the hours on the platform, there has been the rule that there must be double that time spent in prayer. If you read this book, I am sure you will love God more and you will pray and praise Him more.