St. Joseph’s Book Club

FRANK SHEED

A MAP OF LIFE

A SIMPLE STUDY OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH

IGNATIUS

Study Guide
Introduction

Quick Summary

Life is like travelling through a strange country. Just as we need a map of any strange country to see the whole country clearly, so we need a map of life to see our whole lives clearly. In this book, Frank Sheed proposes to outline the “map of life” that God — the most trustworthy of map-makers — has revealed to us through His Catholic Church.

Discussion Questions

1. How is life like travelling through a strange country?

2. If you had to outline God’s “map of life,” what would be the key points to the map?

Notes
Chapter 1: The Problem of Life’s Purpose

Quick Summary

“The very minimum required for intelligent living — namely, the knowledge of the purpose of our life — is dependent upon a revelation from God, that without such a revelation we cannot know our purpose and so cannot have any means of testing the value of the significance of anything we do” (19).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the problem of life’s purpose?

2. What is life’s purpose? And how do you know?

3. Comment on the following quote in light of this chapter: “Christ fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” ~ Gaudium et Spes, 22

Notes
Chapter 2: The Problem of Life’s Laws

Quick Summary

Man lives in a world of laws – both material laws (e.g. gravity) and spiritual laws (e.g. morality) – that are not of his choosing. Successful living and true freedom involves both knowledge and obedience to these laws. Whereas God has left man very largely to discover material laws, He has revealed to man spiritual laws.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the problem of life’s laws? What is an example?

2. How is freedom found within material laws and spiritual laws? What are some examples?

3. Comment on the following quote in light of this chapter: “Nature itself seems to reward chastity with health, and punish promiscuity with disease. It would certainly seem that nature has an interest in the morality that is conducive to the family, and punishes behaviour inimical to it.” ~ Professor Harry Jaffa

Notes
Chapter 3: Heaven

Quick Summary

The “map of life” is the map of a road that leads to heaven. In order to reach this place of perfect happiness where the whole soul is functioning at its very highest in the attainment of truth, goodness, and beauty, man needs to first acquire and then retain Supernatural Life. Therefore, heaven is not just the **reward** for a good life but the **result** of a good life.

Discussion Questions

1. What was your idea of heaven prior to reading this chapter? Has it now changed in any way?

2. How is heaven the **result** of a good life? Or to put it another way, how is life on earth a **preparation** for life in heaven?

3. Comment on Jesus’ words: 13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. 14 For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

4. Comment on Frank Sheed’s statement: “Our life will be a success if, at the moment of death, we have in our soul the life above our nature, the Supernatural Life. It will be a failure if, at death, we have not the Supernatural Life” (35).

Notes
Chapter 4: Creation and Fall

Quick Summary

The road on the “map of life” can seem strange, arduous and almost incomprehensible because it is not the first road that God laid down for us. In the beginning, God made a simple road for Adam and gave him the three things necessary (twofold Truth of purpose and laws and Supernatural Life) to attain heaven. Through the sin of disobedience under the influence of the devil, Adam wrecked God’s road, lost Supernatural Life and slowly frittered away the Truth. Heaven was officially closed to man and death became a roadblock on the map. To solve this problem, God built a new road for the human race (and made a threefold restoration of truth, law, and life).

Discussion Questions

1. How does the Fall — original sin — shape your worldview and thoughts about suffering and evil?

2. How do you envision the difference between the two roads that God has built?

3. Comment on this quote from the Catechism: “We must know Christ as the source of grace in order to know Adam as the source of sin” (388).

Notes
Chapter 5: The Incarnation

Quick Summary

The Incarnation is God’s answer to man’s need. The human race had lost the way, because they had lost the Life, without which the way cannot be followed, and the truth, without which the way cannot even be known. To such a world Christ, who had come to make all things new, said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” As God-made-man, Christ restored the way (re-opened heaven) through His atonement thereby giving back Supernatural Life, fully revealed the twofold Truth of man’s purpose (to love God and neighbour) and the laws by which man must live (from external actions to internal love).

Discussion Questions

1. How would you explain that the Incarnation was God’s answer to man’s need?

2. Why is it important to understand who and what Jesus Christ is?

3. Comment on C.S. Lewis’ famous statement in Mere Christianity: “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

4. Comment on this icon. This is the oldest known icon of Christ Pantocrator at St. Catherine’s Monastery in Egypt. The two different facial expressions on either side emphasize Christ's dual nature as both divine and human.

Notes
Chapter 6: The Mystical Body of Christ

Quick Summary

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. As the Head of the Body, Christ perfectly transmits the Truth, Law, and Life to His Church. As the cells of His Body, we must cooperate with the Truth and Law revealed (through exercising our free wills) to fully live the Supernatural Life of the Mystical Body.

Discussion Questions

1. What was your idea of the Church as the Body of Christ prior to reading this chapter? Has it changed in any way?

2. Frank Sheed says that “the end of the world will be not simply a decision by God that the world has gone on long enough, but will definitely mean that the race has achieved its purpose” (65-6). How does this view compare with end-time prophecies we often hear about? Has your view on the end of the world changed as a result of this chapter?

3. How should the teaching on the Mystical Body of Christ change the way you interact with other baptized Christians? Any examples?

Notes
Chapter 7: Truth: The Teaching Church

Quick Summary

Christ gave to his Church, in the person of its first officials, the apostles, a mass of truth concerning God and man that has been passed on throughout the centuries. Some of it, by the inspiration of God, was written down (the Bible) and some of it has developed by seeing further truths as the Church thinks about, meditates on, prays by, and lives out the truth. With the body of bishops and the Pope at their head, the teaching Church progresses by the ordinary work of men’s minds and the overruling protection of God (infallibility) in matters of faith and morals.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you explain the Church’s development of doctrine?

2. How would you explain that the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption dogmatically defined in 1854 and 1950 are not “new”?

3. Explain the difference between the development of scientific progress and theological progress.

Notes
Chapter 8: Truth: The Mystery of the Trinity

Quick Summary

The mystery of the Trinity, like all mysteries, is not a truth of which we cannot know anything but a truth of which we cannot know everything.

The doctrine that in the unity of the Godhead there are 3 Persons truly distinct who each possess the 1 divine nature in totality is the supreme mystery revealed by Christ because it deals with the highest truth and it is the most inaccessible to the created mind.

God the Father eternally "generates" God the Son by an act of the divine intellect and their mutual love "proceeds" as the Holy Spirit by an act of the divine will. Although God acts upon creatures in his unity, rather than in his Trinity, God has given us warrant to "appropriate" certain actions to one or other of the 3 Persons: the Father creates, the Son redeems, the Holy Spirit sanctifies.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Sheed’s explanation of mystery help us in understanding the Trinity?

2. Why is the doctrine of the Trinity the supreme mystery of faith?

3. How would you explain the Trinity to a friend who has never heard of this doctrine?

Notes
**Chapter 9: Law and Sin**

**Quick Summary**

God established laws for the guidance of man's actions to fulfill the twofold duty of man to love God and love neighbour. Although God has given man a conscience - the practical moral judgment of the intellect - to determine the right course of action, due to sin - which is a breaking of God's law - our judgments can be wrong. Therefore, God established laws - or "Maker's instructions" - to direct us in the right use of ourselves.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why are God’s laws helpful to man? Can you provide an example?

2. What is our conscience? What bearing does this have on law and sin?

**Notes**
Chapter 10: Law and Suffering

Quick Summary

Since human life is a preparing for the life of heaven, the soul must conquer the body through suffering and bring it into full obedience to God’s law. This resistance to sin nearly always involves some degree of suffering — which can immensely enrich the soul through voluntary acceptance and even voluntary infliction (like the saints).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the opinion on suffering in today’s culture? How does this contrast with Catholicism’s view?

2. What can be the value in personal suffering? Can you provide an example?

Notes
Chapter 11: The Supernatural Life: How it Comes to the Soul

Quick Summary

Since man’s destiny is above his nature, he must receive Supernatural Life to reach his destiny.

The channels by which Supernatural Life come to the soul are prayer and the sacraments. In prayer, man approaches God. In the sacraments, God approaches man. Both culminate in the Mass.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is prayer “the condition of all life in God”? How do you view prayer in relation to your life in Christ?

2. What is the value of the sacramental system in regards to Supernatural Life? Why 7 sacraments?

3. Why is the Eucharist the “source and summit of the Christian life?” (CCC 1324)

Notes
Chapter 12: The Supernatural Life: How it Works in the Soul

Quick Summary

The possession of Supernatural Life:
1. Gives us access to God by 3 paths — faith, hope, charity — all of them totally above the natural powers of our soul.
2. Enables man to perform actions that will merit a supernatural reward (heaven).
3. Makes man’s soul fit for the life of heaven.

“The whole purpose of man’s life upon earth might be stated as the obtaining, preserving, and increasing of this life of grace in his soul” (131).

Discussion Questions

1. How does faith, hope, and charity give us access to God?

2. What is the relationship between being a “son of God” and the Supernatural Life working in the soul?

Notes
Chapter 13: Hell

Quick Summary

“The ending of our life upon earth will find us either with the Supernatural Life, with our wills united to God, or without the Supernatural Life, with our wills set away from God. The one state means heaven, the other hell” (137).

The man in hell is eternally separated from God because of the permanent fixture of his will. This separation produces great suffering.

Discussion Questions

1. How does a man end up in hell? What is the decisive factor?

2. Is it possible for the souls in hell to one day turn from evil to good?

3. Why is hell not a mystery of God’s cruelty?

Notes
Chapter 14: Purgatory: Heaven

Quick Summary

Purgatory is a place where, by God’s mercy, cleansing and compensating suffering is undergone to satisfy the debt of justice for either venial sin not repented or of mortal sin repented of but not sufficiently.

Heaven is a place of perfect, indescribable and unimaginable happiness where we shall know God directly in the Beatific Vision and live in perfect relationship with God and all other lovers of God.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Purgatory a result of God’s mercy?

2. Comment on C.S. Lewis’ statement and explain why other Christians seem to disregard Purgatory completely: "Of course I pray for the dead. The action is so spontaneous, so all but inevitable, that only the most compulsive theological case against it would deter me. And I hardly know how the rest of my prayers would survive if those for the dead were forbidden. At our age, the majority of those we love best are dead. What sort of intercourse with God could I have if what I love best were unmentionable to him? I believe in Purgatory.” ~ Letters To Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer, chapter 20, paragraphs 7-10, pages 108-109

3. How would you explain Heaven in relation to the Supernatural Life and the Map outlined by Sheed?

Notes