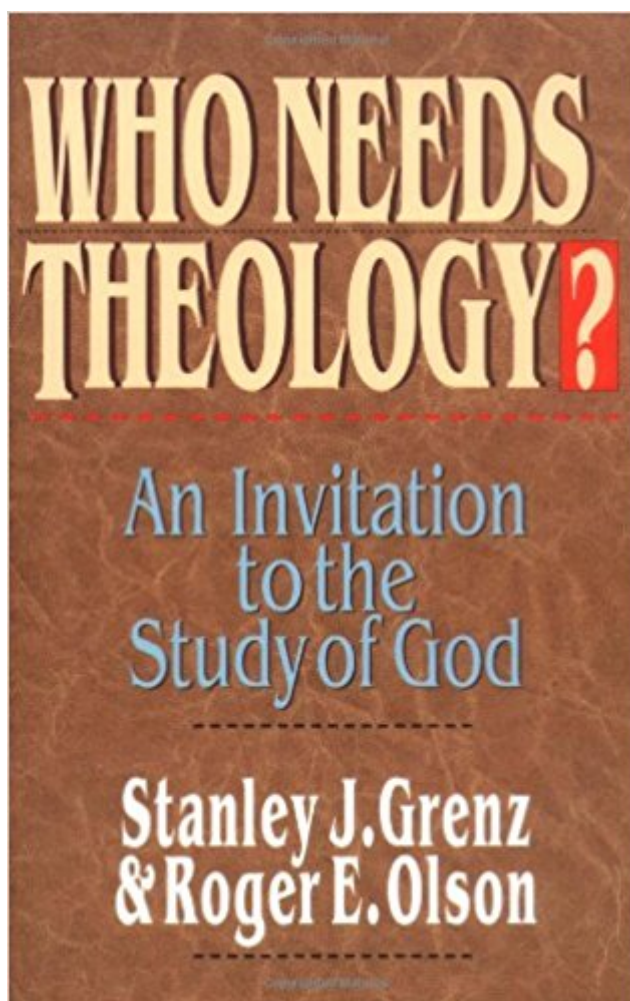


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# Who Needs Theology?: An Invitation To The Study Of God



## Synopsis

To many Christians theology is something alien, overly intellectual and wholly unappealing. Even seminary students are known to balk at the prospect of a course on theology. Yet theology--most simply, the knowledge of God--is essential to the life and health of the church. In this short introduction, Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, two theologians who care deeply about the witness of ordinary Christians and the ministry of the church, show what theology is, what tools theology uses, why every believer (advanced degrees or not) is a theologian and how the theological enterprise can be productive and satisfying. Their clear, easily understood book is ideal for students, church study groups and individual Christians who want to strengthen understanding, belief and commitment by coming to know God more fully.

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## Customer Reviews

Easily acceptable to the lay-people within the church, while at the same time retaining enough critical thought and depth that seminary students and pastors would still appreciate the work that has gone into this book. (Nathan W. Bingham, Calvinist (cal.vini.st), May 4, 2009)

To many Christians today theology means something alien, overly intellectual and unappealing. Even seminarians are known to balk at it. Yet theology - most simply, the knowledge of God - is essential to the life and health of the church. In *Who Needs Theology?* two theologians who care profoundly about the witness of ordinary Christians show what theology is, how every believer (earned degrees or not) is a theologian, what tools theology uses, and how lay - as well as

professional - theologians can do better theology. This clear, eminently accessible book is ideal for students, church study groups and individual laypersons who want to enrich their discipleship through the riches of theology.

If you come to this book look for an introduction to a particular theology you will be let down, but that is never what Grenz and Olson claim to be doing in their book. They set out from the beginning not to give you a theology from any perspective but rather to invite you to live more fully into the theologian you already are. On these accounts they do a very good job of defining what Christian theology is and then showing the way forward to thinking theologically. Do keep in mind that this book is very basic, but again that is what it was intended to be. It is not a book about becoming the next great thinker of our time but about taking the first infantile steps toward learning to have a faith that interacts with the world around you. Their last chapter is especially helpful on this front as they circle back to the theory of thinking theologically that they have put forward in the previous chapters and give practical steps that a person might take. They don't claim to be an exhaustive work on theology but if you read this work well Grenz and Olson will point you in the right direction.

Clearly proposes that any person who ponders about the deep things of life and poses questions about God is a theologian, that there are levels of theology that meet different needs, that theology goes beyond mere head knowledge and involves both brain and heart as well as application with integrity of our beliefs to our thoughts and actions, and that it seeks to find agreement between the what the Bible teaches, our Christian legacy and the needs of our culture.

The subtitle of Grenz and Olson's book bears the words "An Invitation to the Study of God". Indeed, while the title "Who Needs Theology?" may seem like a rebuttal to theology proper, it is immediately clear that both of them intends to offer an answer to those who might be skeptical towards theology thinking that it is a purely man made enterprise or those who might have succumb to the idea that it is counterproductive towards faith and "experiencing God". The question is answered promptly at the beginning of book with the chapter titled "Everyone is a Theologian". There, theology is defined as "any reflection on the ultimate questions of life that points towards God". As such, it is clear that ever since men looked up into the heavens, wondered about the reasons for his existence and pondered on the beginnings of the universe, its

machinations, life and ultimately whether there is a being of higher order. “out there,” he is a theologian! Insofar as Christians are beings of thoughts seeking to reflect on their existence, the revealed Word of God and how they are to respond to the world as followers of Jesus Christ, towards its people and its culture, or as the authors put it: “faith seeking understanding,” they are already doing Christian theology. The authors strive to separate folk theology and sound theology in the proceeding chapters, arguing for the need for Christians to develop good theology “because it grounds their lives in biblically informed, Christian truth.” We are all too familiar with happenings at church, bible camps and study groups where a Christian would answer a question by another fellow Christian with a curt statement that when asked to be substantiated by scripture or doctrine, often relegates to a defense of “It is my own experience!” or “I have heard that from a man (or woman) of faith.” The authors point to the fallacy and indeed the dangers of reducing the Christian faith to experience (which has no objective method of accessing its validity) or hearsay (which often involves blind faith) and instead beseech all Christians to “examine beliefs and teachings about God, ourselves and the world in light of Christian sources, especially in the primary norm of the biblical message.” While the typical objections to theology are expounded and rebutted, the authors nevertheless reminded us that the Lord desires Christians to pursue theology in our own context with all the limitations of life that our context involves. Perhaps even more importantly, it is this limitation that ultimately surfaces good theology and the richness that it entails. Expanding on the need to involve theology “in our own context,” the authors presented two approaches to theology and culture and argued instead for a dialogue, that approaching culture by beginning from biblical theology or vice versa only “presents a dimension of what remains a mystery.” This is a cogent reminder to the lay theologian and seminarians alike that theology is ultimately undertaken not to amass knowledge, precepts and doctrines but rather to approach the infinite mystery with the intent to enable Christians to engage their culture and to articulate the Christian message such that the faith continues to be a living and transformative force in their lives. The warning against intellectual substitution is perhaps most vivid in the authors’ depiction of a person who, because of a love for travel, began studying maps (engaging in the activity of cartography) and eventually confused cartography with seeing the world. In very practical chapters near the end of the book, the author detailed safeguards that should be in place for anyone studying theology as well as forewarnings of discouragements and even misunderstandings by others in the

process. Closing aptly for a book written by authors with a love for Peanuts characters, we hear Linus making the declaration to Lucy that she cannot bluff an “old theologian.” We also hear the words of Grenz and Olson exhorting Christians to embark on this journey of discovery as they themselves did and experienced first-hand its great rewards and richness in order that Christians might enhance and enrich their lives of discipleship as well as the strength and influence of the church of Christ.

As advertised

Grenz is such a great author and he unpacks the reality, regardless of your disposition towards God, that each and every person is a theologian. This truth is one that we all need to realize and understand that our thoughts and musings are important in our development and understanding of God. This book should be considered and should work through you as you continue your study of God.

Good read that has led to some incredible conversation. Seems to have a few thoughts that are repeated or a little drawn-out, but still provides some great points!

An excellent introduction to theology. Good reading for anyone seeking understanding, at pretty much any level.

Simple clear concise this book shows why this is a necessity in all our lives! I learned I already am a theologian but now I can expand on that. This book is on a level for all so boredom and big words needing a dictionary are not required. We all need to add this to our library even when two religions or beliefs collide you need to know what you believe and why.

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