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LIVING FAITH: How Faith Inspires Social Justice

By Curtiss Paul DeYoung

Reviewed by Christopher M. Petersen

“Mystic-activists” face down the structures that dominate and oppress the poor as they personally discover the “interrelationship between contemplation [and] a vision of hope that longs for a socially just world.” So says Curtiss DeYoung in his superb new book, *Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice*, in which he outlines the lives, philosophies, and impact of three mystic-activists: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Malcolm X, and Aung San Suu Kyi.

He has provided a challenging primer on these three individuals and a compelling call to action for those invited to activism from a contemplative perspective. The strength of DeYoung’s book lies in his comprehensive view of mystic-activists, whom he defines as individuals directly engaged with their culture’s injustices while drawing on their personal connection with the divine. He chose Bonhoeffer, Malcolm X, and Suu Kyi not only for their compelling stories and committed activism but also because each of them, while rooted in his or her spiritual tradition, moved beyond that tradition to embrace and work alongside those of other faiths.

In his closing chapters DeYoung clearly marks for 21st-century mystic-activists what he believes is essential to envisioning social justice from a contemplative perspective. This includes undermining the assumptions on which a culture’s institutions are founded, outlining a “remoralization” of society, and providing prophetic leadership.

By examining the lives of his three protagonists alongside the lives of several other mystic-activists from various traditions, DeYoung helps readers broaden their grasp of the various avenues of mystic-activism.

A final mark of mystic-activists is the intertwining of their personal integrity and social ethics. Here is where DeYoung falters, especially in his presentation of Malcolm X and Suu Kyi. Although he attempts to present them as humans who have flaws, I sensed an over-idealized view. I contrast this with James Cone’s comprehensive perspective of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X in *Martin and Malcolm in America* in which he dissected their shortcomings while still recognizing their revolutionary spirits. While DeYoung has refrained from a full critique of his primary examples, except in the case of Bonhoeffer, it in no way detracts from the terrific inspiration of his invitation to contemplation and action in the 21st century.

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