



Letters to a Young Doubter

By William Sloane Coffin

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In *Letters to a Young Poet*, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke advises to "be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves," for gradually, "you will live into the answers." These words have long struck renowned preacher and activist William Sloane Coffin as a wise way to view a growing and evolving life. Thus inspired, Coffin, former university chaplain at Yale, imagined a similar volume of letters.

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Letters to a Young Doubter By William Sloane Coffin Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Modeled after Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet, Coffin's year-long correspondence with an imagined college student, Tom, offers insights from the fund of wisdom Coffin has collected over the years. Former senior minister at Riverside Church, chaplain at Yale during the turbulent 1960s, civil rights Freedom Rider, and president emeritus of the anti-nuclear weapons movement SANE/FREEZE, Coffin has made a career of asking hard questions of the Christian faith while courageously bringing the demands of social justice to the center of it. Over the course of the academic year, Coffin counsels Tom on matters of sexuality, grades, grief, narcissism and humility, war and the draft, and prayer. In almost every letter, Coffin finds a moment to quote a passage from writers such as Dostoevsky, Auden, Shaw or Melville. It's always unfortunate in collections of this sort that we only get one side of the correspondence, for Tom is little more than a mouthpiece for Coffin's own concerns. In that sense, the letters offer little that is fresh from Coffin. Despite the book's artificial form, however, there is no finer mind on these matters than Coffin's. His letters demonstrate that doubt plays an integral role in a strong and flourishing faith.

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Review

"Humorous, eloquent, righteously indignant, and ruefully wise, this book is suffused with Coffin's special tone: a mix of high moral expectation and love of humanity in all its incompletions and imperfections. It's excellent that he, who inspired so many of the young in the Civil Rights Movement and related causes in the last century, should begin a new century with a new address to the young." - Richard H. Brodhead, President, Duke University "Not only a fiery preacher and a social prophet, Bill Coffin is also a wise observer of life, and as he has grown older his wisdom and counsel - like a fine wine - have become ever more valuable. These letters can and should be placed in the hands of anyone - young or old - who has ever entertained doubts. And that means all of us." - Harvey Cox, author of When Jesus Came to Harvard"

From the Back Cover

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