
SOUNDBYTE:

"I realised that you can't be a passive pacifist, you must be an aggressive pacifist. I had to make a strong statement about what was happening, and 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' is that statement."
— Bono

BOOK REVIEW: THE SPIRITUALITY OF BONO

[@U2 July 04, 2014](#) by Scott Calhoun

I was surprised by *The Spirituality Of Bono*. Not by Bono's spirituality, but that this small book of quotes from Bono's major speeches and interviews since 2001 made reading Bono's thoughts feel like a fresh experience. I mean, I've heard Bono before on the subjects of grace and karma, on how he likes to be smack in the middle of a contradiction, on how he's a fan of the idea of America, and on how malleable the world really is. But there's something about having a lot of Bono quotes in one place that makes reading through them again revealing and refreshing. As it turns out, I discovered quotes that were new to me, and I was also glad to have the larger context in which some of Bono's more familiar remarks were made. While waiting for a new album with new lyrics and for new opportunities for Bono to give speeches, reading through this book is like finding a river in a time of dryness.

I'm reminded from time to time that many people haven't heard Bono at all, and many more are casual listeners who have sort of missed most of what Bono's been saying since U2 reapplied for the job of "best band in the world." There are actually U2 fans who love the music and haven't -- gasp! -- collected, archived and pored over every word Bono has said since his first cry from the womb. *The Spirituality Of Bono* is a great book, then, for making his "greatest hits" moments from speeches conveniently accessible and reminding us how inspiring a thinker he is outside of his lyrics. It's also a great introduction to a rock star for someone who stands out among his peers for his introspection, spiritual awareness and holistic thinking about his humanity.

You might think, by the title of the book, that it is trying to prove the point of Bono's Christian beliefs, or that it will present just how many times he's cleverly referenced Bible verses in his lyrics and public comments as a sort of covert witness. I confess that was my worry too, when I first found the book, because those arguments have been made already. But it is actually just a book of quotes. The back cover description of the book is more helpful: "A book of inspiring quotes. Bono in his own words."

Credit goes to editor Nicholas Nigro for arranging Bono's thoughts into sensible categories that acknowledge the Spirit's flow through different parts of life. For Bono, as an artist-activist, there are four categories of quotes showing how his spirituality has shaped his convictions, his causes, his creative process and his character: Spirituality and Purpose; Humanitarianism and Obligation; Art and Inspiration; and Self-Discovery and Virtue. Nigro doesn't reduce Bono to just a pious celebrity-millionaire, or a navel-gazing artist, or an Irish smart-aleck. The balance of quotes reflects a 360° Bono: He is all of the above (!), but also, truly, a man of humor, humility and honest self-assessment.

For example:

- "I'm not a very good advertisement for God. I generally don't wear that badge on my lapel. But it certainly is written on the inside, somewhere."
- "We believe the poor deserve an honorable place at the table. They deserve the head of the table. This is how God would see things."
- "I feel as at home in a Catholic cathedral as in a revival tent. I also have enormous respect for my friends who are atheists, most of whom are, and the courage it takes not to believe."
- "Deep down, if we really accepted that Africans were equal to us, we would all do more to put the fire out. We're standing around with watering cans, when what we really need is the fire brigade."
- "To make art, you've got to open your rib cage and just pull it apart. Instinct over intellect ... Being cool is the enemy."

- “I felt rich when I was twenty years old and my wife was paying my bills. Just being in a band, I’ve always felt blessed.”
- “Insecurity is at the root of most interesting endeavors, I find. If you’re totally secure in yourself, and you were told all your life that you were the bee’s knees, well, you’re probably going to wind up with a respectable job in the city or something. And that’s what I want my kids to feel, by the way. I don’t like being the ‘Boy Named Sue!’”

Nigro wrote a short introduction to Bono’s life and makes a brief comment to start each of the four major sections. Each section is further divided into subsections, such as Family, Character and Wisdom in the Self Discovery and Virtue section. I really like that Nigro provides the source after each quote and that there is a full bibliography. Although this book is enjoyable and inspiring to just read, I can imagine it being useful for someone who wants to research themes, figurative language and rhetorical devices in Bono’s speeches over roughly a 10-year period.

Of the more than 200 quotes in the book, some are a sentence long, some a paragraph long, and some a whole page. All but three were said from 2001 to 2014; one was from 1983, one from 1984, and one from 1993. That nearly all of them were said since 2001 raises a question for me. Bono has, of course, made many more high-profile public speeches since 2001 than in all the years prior of his career (not counting speeches made during concerts). Surely the Internet makes searching for and collecting the quotes for a book like this a manageable task, and will provide only what’s been uploaded into the great cloud of Bono’s life. I wonder what a similar book would have in it (and what evolutions in Bono’s thinking and public candor it might reveal) if an editor took on the much harder job of providing a chronological representation of what Bono has said in these same four categories from about 1980 to 2014? Just curious. I’m happy to have *The Spirituality Of Bono*, though. I’ll be buying copies to give as gifts to friends, foes and U2 fans of all stripes.

The Spirituality Of Bono, edited by Nicholas Nigro, part of the The Backbeat Spirituality Series, is available for \$12.99 at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

(c) @U2/Calhoun, 2014