



Feet Of Clay

By Anthony Storr

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Every generation has its charismatic spiritual leaders, its gurus. Some are true saints while others conceal unspeakable depravity. Anthony Storr, Oxford professor of psychiatry, analyzes an interesting array of gurus and finds many commonalities among them--an isolated childhood, a need for certainty, a demand for obedience. He also elucidates aspects of this psychological profile in various intellectual, artistic, and political figures of history. This eye-opening book invokes a larger issue: in our search for guidance and truth, when and why do we cross the line from reasoned inquirer to unquestioning follower?

From Publishers Weekly

"The wisest men follow their own direction and listen to no prophet guiding them," wrote Euripides. Storr (*Music and the Mind*), a psychiatrist, uses this ancient caution as the epigraph to a fascinating yet frustrating investigation into the appeal of guru figures. He analyzes the lives and works of the destructive, unbalanced cult leaders Jim Jones and David Koresh, and he uses their symptoms--isolation, narcissism, paranoid delusion--to take the measure of other, generally more respected, "gurus," including Gurdjieff, Freud, Jung, Rudolf Steiner, Rajneesh, St. Ignatius, even Jesus. While insisting that none of these latter can be described as insane, Storr considers their authoritarian certainty an ominous sign. Stressing that there can be a charisma based on goodness and genuine devotion to truth rather than on the power of personality, Storr warns against teachers who claim to know what he judges no single person can know: "No one knows in the sense that Gurdjieff or Rajneesh or Jung believed that they knew and were supposed to know by their disciples." But Storr's elegantly written account is tarnished by his own unacknowledged authoritarianism. He never entertains the notion that there may be states of consciousness--states of knowing--that exceed customary bounds, so that a strange cosmology like Gurdjieff's might be understood not as a paranoid delusion or mere belief, but as a challenge to habitual modes of perception and cogitation that is composed with a clockmaker's care.

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From Library Journal

Storr (*Music and the Mind*, LJ 10/15/92), a former lecturer in clinical psychiatry at Oxford University, considers the minds, motives, and missions of seven influential thinkers: Freud, Jung, Rudolf Steiner, Gurdjieff, Bhagwan Rajneesh, Ignatius of Loyola, and Jesus of Nazareth. True to his training, Storr closely considers the family background; transcending clinical psychiatry, he finds meaning in the message of each thinker. Storr's earlier *Solitude* (LJ 8/88) showed how artists such as Beatrix Potter, Beethoven, and Kafka found stability and truth in their work despite disconnection from other humans; *Feet of Clay*, in contrast, shows how "gurus" depend upon other humans for devotion and obedience. The title, however, is somewhat misleading, since Storr finds a core of value and truth in even those (e.g., Gurdjieff) whom he labels "confidence tricksters" and those (e.g., Rajneesh) who eventually rotted from adulation and drugs. Storr's work is a rich, thoughtful, well-documented, and accessible work, easily recommended for most academic and larger public libraries. --Bill Piekarski, Southwestern Coll. Lib., Chula Vista, Cal.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Deborah Brantley:

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Fabiola Stewart:

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Pat Tran:

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