

## **The Sign of Peace 8.1**

### **Reading Group Discussion Guide**

#### **Opening Prayer:**

Q: After having read the recent issue of *The Sign of Peace (SOP)*, what general reactions do you have?

#### **Pg. 3 : Editorial**

1. Were you aware of the controversy surrounding the presence of ROTC on Ivy League or Catholic campuses? Have you ever been a part of these discussions? What were they like?
2. Paragraph 8 suggests that something about Catholicism further inscribes students—and other Catholics too—into the culture of US militarism. Besides Catholic colleges hosting ROTC, how else does our Catholic Church seemingly advocate militarism and support military culture?

#### **Pgs. 4-5 : Peace Briefs (CPF Staff)**

3. Had you already read or heard any of these current event news stories? Which ones were new to you?
4. Which Peace Brief most interested you?
5. The first Peace Brief on Judge John Sedwick's orders to grant Michael Barnes CO status quotes Sedwick distinguishing between life (including career, health, well-being, prestige, and honor) and their soul (spiritual health and well-being)? Why don't we hear much talk of "souls" regarding war?
6. In regards to Joshua Casteel's newly-released book: Have you seen Casteel tell his story in the movie *Soldiers of Conscience*? Consider watching the movie and/or reading his book as a group.
7. In reflecting on the Boston College students' protest at their annual career fair: What in your life do you feel an unstated obligation to peacefully demonstrate or resist?

#### **Pgs. 6-9 : A Holy Man of Contradictions: A Brief Biography of Merton, by James Martin, SJ**

8. Before reading Martin's article, what did you know of Merton? Had you read any of his works? Which ones? What was your reaction to them? *Consider using Merton for Lenten reading and discussion.*
9. Who have been some of the "Privats" in your life—gracing your conversion and helping you discover your vocation? (see p. 6, bottom of col. 1)
10. Have you or anyone you know experienced a conversion or transformation *intellectually* as Merton did? (see p. 7, end of col. 1, beginning of col. 2) *artistically*? (col. 2, par. 1)
11. Is Merton's confession experience unique (p. 8, column 1, par. 3)? How is reconciliation different today? How can we reach out to those who have been hurt by those who represent the Church?
12. Upon arriving at Gethsemani, a Trappist brother asks—in a voice that "sounded too much like the voice of [Merton's] own conscience" if Merton had come there to stay (p.8, bottom of col. 1, top of col. 2). When have *you* heard the voice of your own conscience? What was it saying?
13. Merton reflects on St. Therese of Lisieux and how his opinions of her changed over time (see p. 8, col. 2, par 7). Do you know anyone who holds Merton's original impressions of Therese? Why is that so?
14. Merton's enthusiasm for the saints leads him to proclaim that "God is greatly magnified and marvelous in each [saint]: differently in each individual one" (p. 8, col. 2, par 8). What saint has made God most present to you?
15. If not accepted to Gethsemani Abbey, Merton would have enlisted in the army, stating that he would serve, but not kill (p. 8, col. 2, par 9). Can the two (serving & killing) be separated today?
16. Upon finishing *The Seven Storey Mountain*, James Martin *knew* "what [he] wanted to do with [his] life" (p. 9, col. 1, par 1). When have you experienced a sense of vocation, or *call*? What spurred it?
17. Martin, in describing Merton, says that in him you can easily see "both the sins and the sanctity" (p. 9, col. 2, par 1). Do you prefer that a model of faith embody these seemingly contradictory qualities?

#### **Pgs 10-14: The Duty is Evident: The CPF Staff on Merton and the apostolic work of peacemaking**

18. Merton believes that in order for Christians to mobilize against the war, we must first be "willing to sacrifice and restrain our own instinct for violence and aggressiveness in our relations with other people" (p. 11, col. 1, par cont'd from p.10). What violence and aggression in your own relationships needs to be addressed?
19. Describe the difference between apostolic work and prophetic witness (see p. 12, col. 1, par cont'd from p. 11). To which do you feel most naturally called? How do the two complement each other?
20. Merton calls for "patient, constructive, pastoral work [for peace] rather than acts of defiance which antagonize the average person without enlightening them" (p. 14, col. 2, par 2). Do you agree? In what kind of pastoral work for peace can you get involved now?

**Pgs 15-20: Blessed are the Meek: The Roots of Christian Nonviolence, by Thomas Merton**

21. Define Christian Nonviolence in your own words.
22. What role does humility play in nonviolent resistance, according to Merton? How does his approach to nonviolence reflect something greater of the way God loves us (see p. 20, col. 1, par. 3)?
23. How can you live more *eschatologically*—as a citizen of the Kingdom of God? (see p. 15, bottom of col. 2)
24. How are the processes of transformation and conversion inherently communal? (p. 16, top of col. 1)
25. Whom do we generalize as “wicked” (p.17, col. 1, par 2)? What can be “learned from the adversary” (see p. 18, #7)?
26. Discuss a time when you did the right thing for the wrong reason (p. 17, col. 1, par. 2). Reflect.
27. Can you be wealthy AND nonviolent? How can wealth be an obstacle to nonviolence? (p. 17, col. 1, par 3)
28. Merton attests that being apolitical risks “being ineffective.” How can we be “neither Left, nor Right” as Michael Baxter says, but still be “political” and not “merely symbolic” (p. 17, col. 2, #1)
29. Do you agree with Merton’s warning against public protest (p. 19, col. 2, par cont’d from col. 1)

**Pgs 21-25: Neither Left, Nor Right: The Heart of Christian Peacemaking, by Michael J. Baxter**

30. Michael Baxter writes about how the Catholic-US narrative has shaped Catholics’ national identity (p. 21). What is your family’s Catholic-American narrative? Did they belong to an “ethnic parish”? Do those ethnic ties still exist, or has your family fully “blended” into the American culture?
31. Do (should) Catholics make good citizens? Good soldiers? (p. 21, top of col. 2)
32. Baxter claims that after 9/11, Catholics fell into an “unconditional support of the nation as it went to war” (p. 21, top of col. 2). Is this your experience of Catholics’ view of (and response to) the Iraq War? Has this view changed or evolved since the war “began” six years ago?
33. How and why does casting a presidential vote fall short of fulfilling our duty to be peacemakers? (see p. 21, bottom of col. 2)
34. “For many complicated historical reasons, we in the Church are now afflicted with a deep division between ‘Democrat’ and ‘Republican,’ ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative,’ ‘left’ and ‘right.’ These divisions are tearing apart the Catholic Church...” (p. 22, bottom of col. 1). How has this division manifested in your life? How do you respond to it?
35. Dorothy Day responds to this division by writing, which she understood as her vocation (p. 23, col. 2, par 1). *What is your vocation?* How do you carry it out? What role does prayer play in helping to know and live out your vocation?
36. Do you recognize the “strong appeal for peace” that Baxter says is “embedded in the Just War doctrine” (p. 23, bottom of col. 2)?
37. Have you read Bishop Botean’s letter (mentioned on p. 24, col. 2, par. 1)? If not, see *The Sign of Peace* from Easter 2003, Volume 2.2: pgs 6-7.
38. Who, or what, has recently “startled your conscience?” (see p. 24, col. 2, par 4)
39. What value do you see in going to jail for refusing to participate in war? (see p. 25, col. 1, par. 1)
40. To what challenging work is your conscience calling you? (see p. 25, col. 1, par 2)
41. Do you agree with naming nationalism as idolatry in some cases? Why/not? (see p. 25, top of col. 2)
42. How did this article change your understanding of (and appreciation for) the sign of peace ritual at Mass? Did it affect your opinion of political identity as ir/relevant to Christian peacemaking?

**Pgs 26-30: Children of God: Profiles of Peacemakers, by Brenna Cussen**

43. Were you aware of Bethlehem’s decreasing Christian population? (see p. 29, top of col. 1)
44. Have you ever visited the Holy Land? When? What was it like?
45. Discuss the irony of the Prince of Peace being born into a land historically wrought with conflict.
46. Which peacemaker profiled by Brenna Cussen most spoke to you? Why?

**Closing Prayer: *Intentions, Our Father, Exchange the sign of peace***

*The Reading Guide for The Sign of Peace is a new initiative for CPF to help facilitate group discussion stemming from the topics raised in our journal. We appreciate your feedback, suggestions, and evaluation of our efforts. Please direct comments to Aimee Shelide -- [shelide@catholicpeacefellowship.org](mailto:shelide@catholicpeacefellowship.org) or 574.232.2811.*