

FAITH ^{AND} REASON

DVD STUDY GUIDE | THE HUMAN SPIRIT & THE TIMES WE LIVE IN

In this FAITHANDREASON® SEMINAR, “The Human Spirit and The Times We Live In,” Sr. Joan Chittister and Fr. Richard Rohr explore two fundamental realities of our common experience: The Identity and Role of Women in the History and Tradition of Christianity especially in the way we face and deal with the human experience in the world today (Chittister) and the Development and Evolution of Spiritual Awareness as it applies to contemporary human experience today (Rohr). As you and your group view these seminar DVDs, bear in mind how the two perspectives intersect.

In this DVD set, **Disc One** contains the two lectures by Sr. Joan: “God our Father, God our Mother, The Search for the Divine Feminine,” and (the title of lecture #2). The two lectures are divided into approximately 35 minute segments. Segment 1 is the first half of Joan’s “Divine Feminine” lecture, Segment 2 being the second half. Segment 3 is the first half of her lecture on “Women and War,” with Segment 4 being the second half.

Disc Two contains Fr. Richard’s two lectures on “The Human Spirit,” which have been divided into four segments, each approximately 25 minutes in length. In addition to Fr. Richard’s lectures, an extended Q & A session has been included with both Sr. Joan and Fr. Richard responding to questions from the audience.

For each segment of both Sr. Joan’s lectures and Fr. Richard’s lectures, you will find **DISCUSSION STARTERS**. They are meant to get you thinking about the issues that are involved in each segment. You can use the **DISCUSSION STARTERS** at the beginning of the session to set the stage for the DVD presentations.

The **DISCUSSION STARTERS** are followed by **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** that can be used to help the members of your group “process” what they have heard in the lecture segments.

DISC ONE: Sr. JOAN CHITTISTER**“God our Father, God our Mother, The Search for the Divine Feminine,” Segment 1**

In her first lecture, Sr. Joan claims that “women have been turning toward fullness of life since the emergence of humans.” Yet, she says, “our societies and our religions have acted as if they were unaware of the presence on the planet of half the human race.”

As a discussion group leader, you probably want to preview the two lectures and come up with your own discussion questions. The following questions are meant to supplement your own. Here are some “Discussion Starters,” to get you going.

DISCUSSION STARTERS for “God our Father, God our Mother, The Search for the Divine Feminine,” Segment 1

In this first segment Sr. Joan claims that:

- One third of the world population is living in abject poverty and two-thirds of those are women and children;
- Currently, the world in general and governments in particular, invest millions, if not billions of capital in education and social services aimed almost entirely at men;
- The UN tells us there are 600 million girls and women worldwide between the ages of 10 and 24 living in abject poverty. The UN also insists that addressing their needs and assuring their rights is critical to ending world poverty. Assuming these claims are accurate, what do you make of the four primary questions Sr. Joan outlines in the first lecture?

- 1** Why is the concept of the divine feminine important?
- 2** Where does talk about the divine feminine originate?
- 3** What signs and proofs do we have of an authentic role of the divine feminine in the spiritual life?
- 4** What does the divine feminine have to do with us as Christians, and why should we, as individuals, consider the topic at all?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

for "God our Father, God our Mother, The Search for the Divine Feminine," Segment 1

These discussion questions suggest an approach to your group discussion. Do not think you must get to all of them. Mix them up; improvise.

- A** What do you think about imaging God as female?
- B** Do you consider it heretical to refer to "The Divine Feminine" when thinking or talking about God?
- C** What life experiences have shaped your attitudes about God as male or God as female?
- D** What words have you used to identify God? Are these words still important to you? Have the terms you use to describe God changed or evolved?
- E** How nurturing have you found the male image of God to have been for you?

DISCUSSION STARTERS

for "God our Father, God our Mother, The Search for the Divine Feminine," Segment 2

- 1** Classical Christian theology insists that God is ineffable? Is this a helpful idea? Does God "feel," "emote," "have passion?"
- 2** What is the cost of casting God in only the masculine form?
- 3** Does God punish and reward?
- 4** What does "God our Mother" invite into your relationship with God?
- 5** What does "God our Father" invite into your relationship with God?
- 6** Does your church practice sexism? Do our churches teach sexism to our children?

In "Women and War," Sr. Joan makes the startling claim that over 90% of the victims in the wars already being fought in the 21st century are women and girls. These are, she says, not rough estimates; they are based on facts reported by the UN. One can ask, "How is this possible in this day and time? Aren't we more humane and sophisticated than any other people in history?" Apparently not. Sr. Joan pulls no punches in this powerful and provocative lecture. By the way, aren't refugee camps at least supposed to be places where war victims at least can be safe and out of harm's way?

Will it surprise you to learn that Joan and others refer to present-day refugee camps in Europe, the Middle East and Africa as "rape camps?"

DISCUSSION STARTERS

for "Women, Power & Peace: A New Way to Tell the Story," Segment 1

- 1 Sr. Joan suggests that we take a few minutes and review our own knowledge about the role of women in the wars we are acquainted with.
- 2 What assumptions do you have about how wars have affected women and girls in the 20th and 21st centuries?
- 3 Are you aware of St. Augustine's "just war" theory and are you aware that this has been the official doctrine of war for the Christian Church?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

for "Women, Power & Peace: A New Way to Tell the Story," Segment 1

- A What role did religion play in the attitudes of your family as you grew up in regard to war and peace?
- B Have your attitudes toward war changed as you have gotten older? How has your faith contributed to these changes?
- C What has Christianity taught you about war?
- D Do you think attitudes in Christianity toward women have contributed to popular attitudes about war?
- E How have women you know been affected by wars that have taken place in your lifetime?

DISCUSSION STARTERS

for "Women, Power & Peace: A New Way to Tell the Story," Segment 2

Sr. Joan spends considerable time toward the end of lecture 2 talking about UNITED NATIONS Resolution 1325, passed by The Security Council in October, 2000 directed toward raising national and international awareness about the plight of women and girls in war today and taking steps to end their suffering. Take a few minutes to review these elements included in Resolution 1325 with your group.

- 1 An International Truth and Reconciliation commission on violence towards women;
- 2 Sanctions against the trafficking of women and girls;
- 3 Protection officers deployed at the highest level by the commissioners of refugee of human rights;
- 4 HIV AIDS programs in conflict situations where disease is being carried by women whose bodies have been made into weapons of war;
- 5 Gender training programs to guide government officials in dealing with women victims;

- 6 Gender based conflict resolution processes that seek peace through understanding rather than force;
- 7 Gender equality in all peace possesses, agreements, and transitional governance's structures;
- 8 UN Resolution 1325 makes women and gender perspective an essential dimension or component in all peace agreements, all refugee camp plans, all peace keeping operations, and all reconstruction plans in war-torn societies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for "Women, Power & Peace: A New Way to Tell the Story," Segment 2

- A What does the world look like for women when a sense of the divine feminine is absent both in women and in men in the society?
- B What is your understanding about how women and girls are affected by war in the 21st Century?
- C What makes today's engagement in war different from other wars throughout our history?
- D Can we rely on the Church to take the lead in advocating for women and girls who are victims of war?
- E Do you see a difference between being a religious people and being a spiritual people?
- F Has Sr. Joan's lecture on "Women and War" surprised you? In what ways?
- G How has Sr. Joan's lecture affected you? Are you willing to be an outspoken voice about the atrocities inflicted on women and girls in war today? If not, what would it take?

DISC TWO: Fr. RICHARD ROHR **"The Human Spirit and The Times We Live In"**

In his first lecture, Fr. Richard asks the question, why is it so hard for many well-intentioned people to hear and understand the kind of issues that Joan Chittister raises such as those in her preceding two lectures?

Fr. Richard uses the question to introduce a concept of the human spirit. He says that the human spirit always "wants more," "wants to seek more." He says that the *élan vital* of the human spirit is to seek and to keep on seeking. Then he claims that the human spirit naturally wants to move on, grow bigger and evolve until it "knows" God.

In Segment 1 (of 2 segments) of his first lecture, "The Human Spirit And The Times We Live In," Fr. Richard introduces what he calls, Nine Levels of Human Spirit Awareness. In this segment, he covers Level 1 (or Stage 1) through Level 3 (Stage 3) and then briefly introduces Level 4.

DISCUSSION STARTERS for "The Human Spirit," Part 1, Segment 1

- 1** Fr. Richard begins by describing Level 1 in his understanding and experience of the "stages" or "levels" (he uses these terms interchangeably) of human spiritual awareness. He says that the person in Stage 1, knows herself or himself as only, "My body, my needs, my hunger, my comfort, etc." What kinds of images do you have of such a person?
- 2** Fr. Rohr says that the experience that drives or pushes people to the next level is a failure of or a dissatisfaction with the level or stage of awareness in which they are living.
- 3** Later on in Segment 1, he says that organized religion, in this case, Christianity, typically does not encourage people to evolve beyond Level 2 or 3. Why do you think he says this?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for "The Human Spirit," Part 1, Segment 1

The following discussion questions are meant to help you encourage the members of your group explore their own experience of spiritual awareness.

- A** What level of spiritual awareness were you most exposed to growing up? Has your awareness changed as you've gotten older?
- B** Can you think of anyone in your life who has been especially important in the evolution of your own spiritual awareness?
- C** Why does Fr. Rohr say that only "failure" or "suffering" will move a person to the next level of spiritual awareness?
- D** Is his idea new or strange to you?
- E** What elements of Stages 1 through 4 do you see in yourself?

DISCUSSION STARTERS for "The Human Spirit," Part 1, Segment 2

- 1** Fr. Richard gives the second segment of his first lecture to a more comprehensive explanation of Level 4. He says that in Level 4, a person discovers the interior life.
- 2** Fr. Richard says that as rewarding as the experience of Level 4 consciousness is, it is also the level where people often get stuck.
- 3** Fr. Richard says that to move from Level 4 consciousness is to begin to experience the "Other."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

for "The Human Spirit," Part 1, Segment 2

The following discussion questions are meant to help us explore Level 4 consciousness. Ask your group to notice their own desire to consider themselves as Level 4 people. Ask them to speak up when they experience this.

- A** What element of Level 4 consciousness do you find the most attractive?
- B** Do you find any of these elements to be intimidating? Do any fears come up for you?
- C** Right at this minute, what level seems most to fit your present experience of spiritual consciousness?
- D** Remembering that the point is not to "evaluate" how you are doing in your spiritual consciousness, but rather what your soul longs for, how do you feel about the level where you think you are?
- E** Assuming you would like to move to a higher level of consciousness, what would you like for that experience to look like? How would you recognize yourself having "transformed" into a higher level?

DISCUSSION STARTERS

for "The Human Spirit," Part 2, Segment 1

- 1** As Fr. Richard begins his second lecture, he speaks of experiencing spiritual consciousness in our bodies. He says it's ironic, isn't it, that in the only religion that speaks of the embodiment of the divine in the human, we have hated our bodies and tried to fly into the world of "spirit" and called that religion.
- 2** He says, "The reason [we] teach the contemplative mind is because it is the only one that can invade the human conscious to this fourth level where you become aware that, as our Roman Catholic mystics say, 'My deepest me is God.'"
- 3** Fr. Richard says, "God is not out there (pointing out and away) in the higher levels of spiritual consciousness."
- 4** Watch for, "Mind space open;" "Heart space open."
- 5** Why does Fr. Richard say, "I can be a racist, I can be sexist, as long as I believe the doctrines of the church."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

for "The Human Spirit," Part 2, Segment 1

The following discussion questions are meant to give us a sense of levels 5 and 6 of consciousness. Encourage the people in your group to notice any resistance they experience about the way Fr. Richard describes subsequent levels of consciousness.

- A** Fr. Richard says there is a disappointment in stage 4 that will lead us into a full, head-on confrontation with our shadow self. How do you understand this confrontation?
- B** Why do you think Fr. Richard says that he became a priest for the wrong reason? What is "the dark night of the senses?"

- C** Fr. Richard says that our shadow self is hidden from us. Why?
- D** Stage 5 people are willing to look at their wounds. What do you think Fr. Richard means by this?
- E** In stage 5, we experience the “weeping time.” What does Fr. Richard mean by this?
- F** “In stage 5, I don’t need to eliminate the negative anymore,” says Fr. Richard. What do you think of this statement?
- G** Fr. Richard describes stage 6 as the experience of saying, “I am empty and powerless.” What does this statement create in you? Do you experience resistance when you hear Fr. Richard say this?

DISCUSSION STARTERS for “The Human Spirit,” Part 2, Segment 2

- 1** Fr. Richard begins the second segment of his last lecture by saying, “At stage 7, we start with, ‘I am much more than I thought I was.’” Is this boasting? Is this arrogance?
- 2** “Level 7 is where one moves into abundant living, not abundant religion, but abundant living.”
- 3** The recognition that religion is the finger pointing to the moon, not the moon itself.
- 4** Fr. Richard says that many of us mistake the container for the content, the wineskin for the wine.
- 5** Culture is just as invested in keeping you at stage 2 as religion is.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for “The Human Spirit,” Part 2, Segment 2

- A** Fr. Richard says that stage 7 is where one begins to experience the true self; I am who I am in God, the deepest me is God. It’s the death of the false self. How is the death of the false self related to abundant living?
- B** Fr. Richard says, “It’s very clear why the scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus? How does his explanation of their hate strike you?”
- C** Have you found yourself resenting other people for the same reasons? How does that feel? Not, what do you think about it; rather, how does it feel?
- D** Notice that Fr. Richard makes the claim that if you never fall in love you’ll never escape stage 1 or 2 consciousness. What do you make of this?
- E** Why does Fr. Richard say that the Sermon on the Mount is not understandable until you are at level 5 or above?
- F** How do you respond to Fr. Richard’s description of stage 8 as, “I and the Father are One or I and the Mother are One?” Take these two phrases one word at a time. What do you come up with?
- G** Fr. Richard says that in Stage 9, one can say, “Hey, it’s just me.” What does this touch in you?