

# WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN:

## *A Lover's Quarrel With America*

### Discussion Guide

1. What was your overall response to this video? What struck you most?
2. Does the video leave you feeling hopeful or more hopeless about the world? Why?
3. Rev. Coffin says that after 9/11 Americans felt unfairly hurt. *“Instead of understanding that a lot of people in the world are being unfairly hurt, Americans turned in upon ourselves and became the victim of victim-hood.”*
  - What do you think he means by this?
  - Do you agree?
  - What could the government have done after 9/11 to make the world a safer place?
4. Rev. Coffin believes that 9/11 has been exploited mercilessly by the Bush Administration. Do you agree?
5. Rev. Coffin says that the only war to wage would be a war on global poverty.
  - What is your response to this statement?
  - Do you think such a war could be won?
6. Rev. Coffin points to **The Project for the New American Century** as the Bush Administration's goal: *“They want to become the dominant military and economic power in the world.”*
  - Are these acceptable goals for a superpower?
  - Why? Why not?
  - What do you think should be our goals as the world's only superpower?
  - To read more about the goals of the US government see their website: [www.newamericancentury.org](http://www.newamericancentury.org)
7. Rev. Coffin calls for universal permission or universal prohibition vis-à-vis nuclear weapons; i.e., America can't justify forbidding other countries to develop them as long as we retain the right to have them ourselves.
  - What do you think about this? Why?
8. The Bush Administration is asking Congress for funds to develop new “low-yield usable nuclear weapons.” What is your response to this? *(For more information about the weapons in question, see the website of the Federation of American Scientists: <http://www.fas.org>, or do a Google search for “low-yield nuclear weapons”).*
9. At the NYC protest rally (2/15/03) Archbishop Desmond Tutu says; “Any war, before you have exhausted all possible peaceful means, is *immoral*.”
  - Do you agree with this statement?
  - Was “Operation Iraqi Freedom” an immoral war?

10. Rev. Coffin says that on February 15, 2003, ten million people, on six continents, marched against the pending war on Iraq. He says *"that's virtually world opinion."*
- Do you agree with that statement?
  - Do you think the Bush administration should be bound by world opinion?
  - Should anyone be bound by world opinion?
11. Rev. Coffin says, *"It takes courage to buck the tide . . . courage is the one virtue that makes all other virtues possible."*
- Do you agree with that statement?
  - How does courage, or lack of courage, operate in your life?
  - If citizens were more courageous, could they really change things?
  - Do you agree with Coffin that most people don't want to know the truth about what's going on? Why might that be true?
12. When Rev. Coffin's asked his 85-year-old friend, *"Richard, what makes you cry these days?"* Richard said, *"I cry whenever I see or hear the truth."*
- What was your response to Richard's statement?
  - What makes you cry these days?
13. Rev. Coffin says that *"joy comes from being in the middle of the right fight."*
- Do you think this is true only for him and other activists?
  - Is it true for you?
  - What brings joy to you?
14. Rev. Coffin says, *"Faith is a matter of faithfulness."*
- What do you think he means by this?
  - How would you define faith?

## Biographical Notes on William Sloane Coffin:

As chaplain at Yale University, the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr., first rose to prominence during the 1960s as a leader in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. Calling himself a "Christian revolutionary," he gained national attention as one of seven Freedom Riders arrested and convicted in 1961 in Montgomery, Alabama, while protesting local segregation laws.

At the height of the anti-war movement, Coffin co-founded the organization Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam and began offering the sanctuary of his Yale chapel to men who refused to serve in Vietnam. He also helped organize a rally in Boston in which 944 young men turned in their draft cards, for which he was arrested for, and convicted of, conspiracy. The conviction was later overturned on appeal.

After leaving Yale, Coffin was appointed senior minister of New York's Riverside Church, where he founded the church's acclaimed Disarmament Program, for which he traveled around the world promoting international peace and human rights. In 1979, he was one of four clergymen invited by Iran's ruling Revolutionary Council to celebrate Christmas services with the American hostages held at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. From 1987-90, he served as president of SANE/FREEZE: Campaign for Global Security, the largest peace and justice organization in the United States.