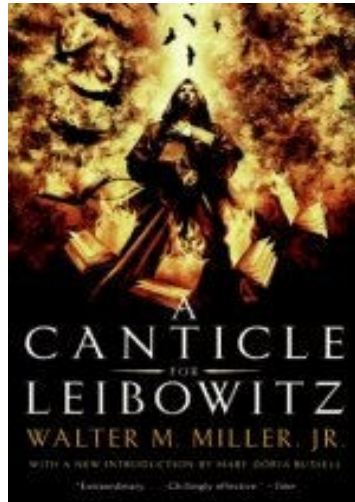


## Catholic Book Discussion *A Book Group Discussion Guide*



### *“A Canticle For Leibowitz” by Walter M. Miller, Jr.*

***Winner of the 1961 Hugo Award for Best Novel and widely considered one of the most accomplished, powerful, and enduring classics of modern speculative fiction, Walter M. Miller's “A Canticle For Leibowitz” is a true landmark of twentieth-century literature – a chilling and still provocative look at a post-apocalyptic future.***

- 1. What actual historical period was Miller inspired by? What similarities are there between his historical setting and the imaginary post-nuclear world Miller depicts? Do you find the parallels plausible?**
- 2. There have been many depictions of nuclear war and its aftermath, but Miller's was one of the few to meet with both critical and popular success. What are the problems involved with writing realistically but entertainingly on the topic and how does Miller overcome them?**

- 3. How would you characterize Miller's attitude toward religion in general, and the Catholic Church in particular? Is he celebrating it or mocking it?**
- 4. Through the book, different characters come and go. Who or what would you say the central character really is?**
- 5. There is a lot of irony in the book and a considerable amount of humor. Would you say that its ultimate message is one of despair? What message might Miller have wanted his readers to take away from it?**
- 6. It has been nearly 50 years since the publication of *A Canticle For Leibowitz*, yet it has never been out of print. How does the novel relate to the social and political climate of today?**
- 7. What does the Pilgrim / Benjamin represent? Does he have different meanings in the different ages of the book?**
- 8. What is the meaning of each section title?**
- 9. Brother Francis's questioning is portrayed in a very similar way to the questioning of a particular saint. Which saint was it and does he share any other similarities with her?**
- 10. Is the Church's position on the mutants and the secular world's response a surprise? Remember that this novel was written in the 1950's. What, if anything, was Miller symbolizing with these creatures?**
- 11. Does the evidence provided for St. Leibowitz's canonization seem to be persuasive?**
- 12. Music plays a prominent part throughout the story. What do the different pieces represent in the context of the story?**
- 13. There is an ongoing debate throughout the book about the good and evil of technology. When actual debates on the topic are held, who is more convincing? Why have the monks preserved technology even as they seem to fear its use?**

14. The leader of the group escaping in the rocket at the end of the book is Brother Joshua. Is there any significance to this?

15. What does Rachel / Ms. Grales represent?

*About the author:*

*Walter M. Miller ,Jr. grew up in the American South and enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He spent most of World War II as a radio operator and a tail gunner, participating in more than fifty-five combat missions, among them the controversial destruction of the great Benedictine abbey at Monte Casino in Italy, the oldest monastery in the Western world. Fifteen years later he wrote "A Canticle For Leibowitz."*

*Some questions taken from the Random House guide for the book.*