

ROSE PACATTE

CORITA KENT

*Gentle
Revolutionary
of the
Heart*

DISCUSSION GUIDE

About the Book

Corita Kent, an American nun and pop artist, led a life of creativity and love that took her in unexpected directions. In this engaging portrait, Sr. Rose Pacatte, FSP, offers an in-depth look at this gentle revolutionary of the heart, letting the beauty and truth of her life and art speak for itself.

Frances Elizabeth Kent's rise to fame coincided with some of the most socially volatile years of the twentieth century. As Sr. Mary Corita of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters, she became a nationally respected artist—though the Archbishop of her home city of Los Angeles regarded her work as blasphemous. Seeing no contradiction between the sacred and the secular, Corita designed the US Postal Service's iconic "Love" stamp and created the largest copyrighted work of art in the world, on a gas tank for the Boston Gas Company. These examples and more exemplify the theology and point of view of one of the twentieth century's most famous and fascinating artists.

About the Author

Sister Rose Pacatte, FSP, is a Daughter of St. Paul and the founding director of the Pauline Center for Media Studies in Los Angeles. Rose has an MA in Education in Media Studies from the University of London and is a candidate for a Doctorate in Ministry in Pastoral Communications. In addition to being a course designer and facilitator for the University of Dayton's online faith formation program, she is the film columnist for *St. Anthony Messenger* and a regular contributor to the *National Catholic Reporter* on film and popular culture. Her previous book for the People of God series is *Martin Sheen: Pilgrim on the Way* published by Liturgical Press.



Discussion Guide

Note to the reader: Unfortunately, it was not feasible for Rose Pacatte's *Corita Kent: Gentle Revolutionary* to include illustrations of Corita's work. One easily accessed source where readers can explore her work is the website of the Corita Art Center, at <http://corita.org/collection>. There are other good online sources where her work can be viewed as well. In many of the questions below, URLs for specific works discussed in this biography are provided.

Chapter One

1. We read that Corita (named Frances at birth) followed her older sister Ruth into religious life and that their brother Mark became a Maryknoll priest. Later, Mark left priesthood to marry, and Corita left both religious life and her practice of her faith. How does this reflect the experience of many Catholic families of the past couple of generations? Is it similar in any ways to your own family's experiences?
2. We read briefly here about the alcoholism that afflicted Corita's father and may have led to an early death. No doubt he struggled with it for years, and no doubt it impacted his family. What insights do you have about alcoholism and living with an alcoholic whom one loves that might help you understand Corita even better?

Chapter Two

1. Pacatte tells us that Corita began teaching right after she entered the convent (which she did immediately following high school graduation) and taught during her novitiate as well. This was a common way during this era for many sisters to begin a teaching career. What must it have been like for a person to begin teaching right after high school graduation? What must it have been like for the students?
2. How might Corita's assignments of work in multiples of hundreds (for example, 200 line drawings of one thing) have been intended to open her students' minds to new experiences of creativity?
3. When someone asked Corita to pray for some need, Pacatte tells us, she would immediately "stop where she was, bow her head, and say, 'Jesus.'" What example might this offer Christians today? What might it say about Corita's role as an intercessor even today?

Chapter Three

1. You can find a good image of Corita's early, award-winning print *the lord is with thee* at <https://collections.lacma.org/node/233635>. What are your thoughts on it?
2. You can find a good image of Corita's *wonderbread* at <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/the-pop-art-of-corita-kent/9/>. How is this work a good example of her interest in bringing "the sacred and the secular together"? Does she do it well?
3. You can find a good image of the banner that Corita prepared for the Vatican pavilion at the World's Fair at <https://corita.myshopify.com/products/beatitudes-banner/>. What are your impressions?
4. You can find a couple of photographs of Corita's *Peace on Earth* office window exhibit at the IBM office at <https://kerimarken.omeka.net/items/show/10>. What do you imagine those observers are thinking as they look at it? What impressions do you suppose it leaves?
5. You can find a photograph of Corita's *Survival with Style* exhibit at <https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/schlesinger-library/item/world-council-churches-exhibition>. What do you imagine the experience of walking among the pieces of this large work of art to have been?
6. Pacatte writes that Corita believed "that any art that was good had a religious quality to it." Do you agree? Why or why not?

Chapter Four

1. Do you suppose you'd have enjoyed being a student in one of Sr. Corita's courses? Why or why not?
2. Reflect on Corita's "Ten Rules for Students and Teachers." Which do you find most valuable or insightful? Do any seem not to be worth being there?
3. What do you suppose Corita meant by Rule Four: "Consider everything an experiment."
4. What do you find most impressive about Corita's approach to teaching? Is there anything that you find frustrating?

Chapter Five

1. What are your impressions of Cardinal McIntyre?
2. How does the relationship between Cardinal McIntyre and the IHM community in some ways encapsulate and foreshadow dynamics within the Church over the decades to come?
3. You can find an image of Corita's *the juiciest tomato of all* at <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/the-pop-art-of-corita-kent/8/>. What are your impressions? Do you understand the Cardinal's ire about it?
4. Consider the process of renewal that religious communities undertook in the late 1960s, the reason they undertook them, and the results. It's a major aspect of Catholic life and culture of that decade and those that followed. What light does this chapter (and this book) shed on the experience?
5. What do you make of the questions asked of the IHM sisters in the 1965 investigation by Cardinal McIntyre's office?
6. What are the bitterest ironies of the story of the IHM sisters and Cardinal McIntyre?

Chapter Six

1. Does the friendship between Dan Berrigan and Corita surprise you? How were they very much alike? How were very different?
2. We read that Corita became focused on “the relationship between the biblical call, social consciousness, and the need to make art.” If you were chatting with Corita about this topic, what thoughts would you offer? What questions might you ask her?
3. What impressions about Corita’s personality have you developed by this point in your reading?
4. What do you make of the Mary’s Day celebrations that Corita helped develop? How are these celebrations and the conflict they generated emblematic of the times in which they happened?
5. Cardinal McIntyre considered some of Corita’s images of Jesus or Mary or the saints “burdened with a large element of uncertainty as well as of the grotesque.” What elements of Corita’s work might have led him to this impression? If we would have wanted to explain to the Cardinal another way of looking at the art, how might we have put it?
6. What factors, had things happened differently, might have resulted in Corita remaining in religious life?

Chapter Seven

1. Corita's friend commented that one thing that was very important to Corita was "to find spiritual meaning in the contemporary world." Are you skeptical of such an effort, or optimistic? How does Corita's art reflect this? How well does it do so?
2. You can find an image of Corita's *Saturday Evening Post* cover at <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/374150681533209761/>. Imagine being a subscriber to the magazine in late 1968 and pulling this issue out of your mailbox. Your reactions, impressions, or thoughts?
3. What are your impressions about Corita's departure from religious life and from the Church? Did she continue to have faith, and if so, what was the nature of it?
4. You can find a couple of photographs of Corita's Boston Gas Tank design (popularly known in Boston even today as the "rainbow swash") at <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/rainbow-swash>. Were you familiar with it before reading this book? What impressions might it offer to motorists who drive by it daily?
5. You can find photos of one of Corita's "We can create life without war" billboards at <https://crystalmoody.com/blog/corita-kent-5>. What do you suppose Corita was trying to do through this design? Was it effective?
6. Along with the Boston gas tank design, the "Love" stamp may be Corita's most famous work. You can find an image of it at <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/the-pop-art-of-corita-kent/17/>. Were you familiar with it before reading this book? Do you like it? Why or why not?

Chapter Eight

1. You can find several examples of Corita's *moments* series from 1977 at <https://hammer.ucla.edu/collections/grunwald-center-collection/corita-kent/art/moments-4761/> (click around a bit to view others from the series). What feeling do these works prompt in you?
2. You can find one of her several *Flowers Grow Out of Dark Moments* works at <http://corita.org/piece/77-02>. What was Corita trying to convey by the text and design?
3. What does Corita's statement to her friends before her death say about her? About her faith? About how she viewed her life?