

**FROM**  
**PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONING**  
**TO**  
**PERSONAL CONFESSION**

Henri J.M. Nouwen's contribution  
to the contemporary spirituality of pastoral care

Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde  
der Theologischen Fakultät  
der Bayerischen Julius-Maximilian-Universität Würzburg

vorgelegt von

P. Jose Thomas Karickal msfs  
Aus Paravanthuruth, Kerala, Indien

am 20.10.06

Referent: Professor Dr. Rolf Zerfaß

Co-referent: Professor Dr. Erich Garhammer

Wintersemester 2006/2007

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A quick flash back into my past opens me to the realization that life is a journey in the true sense of the word. A phase in this journey took me to Germany with the view of a doctoral study in Theology. I had to finalise the area of the specialization after coming here and after analysing the situation and the possibilities. The plan of God and the providence of God in my life is somehow hidden or veiled but a true blessing in retrospect. I am grateful to my parents, brothers and sisters for the first phase of my enriching and unforgettable life and their continued love and support. My gratitude goes to my Congregation and all the members with whom I had to do, especially Fr. Mani Panthalany, the then provincial of the Visakhapatnam province to which I belong for the possibility of these studies and the encouragement given to me. My special esteem and gratitude goes to Professor Rolf Zerfass as well who without hesitation took me as his 'Doctorand' and guided and helped me from the selection of the topic to the completion of this project. His popularity and busy schedule did not mar a friendly relationship and a fatherly care. With his help the research was a real dive into the academic depths and a hard search for the scientific quality of the work. His patience and great interest in the work gave me the necessary strength in spite of the hindrances and jerks I experienced on the way.

The most part of my studies I was staying in the Kollege St. Benedikt. I thank the Benedictines for the hospitality and community. My study was possible only with the scholarship of Church in Need in Germany, a partial financial help from the Henri Nouwen Society in Holland and for the last phase of my studies a scholarship of the diocese, Würzburg, Germany. I oblige a word of thanks to my parishioners in Saal, Wülfershausen and Eichenhausen for their understanding and support, especially to Mrs. Marion Metzler for the correction of the language. Many are close to my heart. Their spirit has also flown into this work, but one person I would like to thank very specially, Mrs. Cornelia Wilhelm, who stood by my side through ups and downs and inspired me with her critical and constructive questions and ideas. Above all I thank God who protected and led me through my life and made me to grow and mature in my spiritual life to which this work and the heavenly spirit of Nouwen has contributed a lot.

*Würzburg, Oktober 2006*

*P. Jose T. Karickal, msfs*

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgement

Table of Contents

General introduction .....	1
<i>The Motivation for this research</i> .....	1
<i>The aim of this research-work</i> .....	2
<i>The method of the analysis</i> .....	4
<i>Material</i> .....	6
<i>The building up of the structure of the Dissertation</i> .....	6

## Chapter 1 : Biography and Bibliography

### Introduction

1.1. <b>Biography</b> .....	7
1.1.1. Childhood to Ordination .....	8
1.1.2. Further Studies .....	11
1.1.3. Teaching Career .....	12
1.1.4. The Final Station- Daybreak .....	20
1.2. <b>Early influences which shaped Nouwen's thinking</b> .....	24
1.2.1. Anton Boisen (1876 – 1965) .....	24
1.2.2. Seward Hiltner .....	25
1.3. <b>A Sketch of Henri's Person</b> .....	26
1.3.1. Faithfulness to and continued search for his vocation .....	26
1.3.2. Nouwen, a restless Seeker .....	29
1.3.3. A wounded Prophet .....	30
1.3.4. Nouwen's struggles with his Sexuality .....	33
1.3.5. A generous and demanding Friend .....	34
1.3.6. Ups and downs .....	36
1.3.7. An ardent Writer .....	37
1.3.8. The Priest – Psychologist.....	39
1.3.9. A social Critic .....	41

1.3.10. An intensive and sensible Preacher .....	42
1.3.11. Growing in Maturity .....	43
<b>1.4. A summary of the Bibliography .....</b>	<b>46</b>
1.4.1. Lectures and conferences .....	47
1.4.2. Journals and Diaries .....	47
1.4.3. Meditations and prayers .....	47
1.4.4. Dedications .....	47
<b>1.5. Spreading the legacy of Nouwen .....</b>	<b>47</b>

## **Chapter 2 : The Academic Phase (1969 – 1981)**

### **Introduction**

<b>2.1. Intimacy: Essays in Pastoraltheology .....</b>	<b>49</b>
2.1.1. The Problem .....	50
2.1.2. From magic to faith .....	50
2.1.3. Intimacy and sexuality .....	50
2.1.3.1. The taking form of love .....	51
2.1.3.2. The forgiving form of love .....	51
2.1.3.3. The possibility of love .....	51
2.1.4. Intimacy and prayer .....	52
2.1.5. Intimacy and community .....	52
2.1.6. Intimacy and ministry .....	53
2.1.6.1 Time .....	53
2.1.6.2. Place .....	53
2.1.6.3. Person .....	54
2.1.6.4. Professional identity .....	54
2.1.7. Training for the ministry .....	54
2.1.7.1. Efficiency and skill .....	54
2.1.7.1.1. Climate .....	54
2.1.7.1.2. Word .....	55
2.1.7.1.3. Home .....	55

2.1.7.2. Training	55
2.1.8. The spirituality of the minister	55
2.1.8.1. Silence	56
2.1.8.2. Friendship	56
2.1.8.3. Insight	56
<b>Observations</b>	56
2.2. <b>With open Hands (1971 – in Dutch)</b>	58
2.2.1. Our clenched fists	58
2.2.2. Prayer and silence	58
2.2.3. Prayer and acceptance	59
2.2.4. Prayer and hope	59
2.2.5. Prayer an compassion	59
2.2.6. Prayer an prophetic criticism	60
<b>Observations</b>	60
2.3. <b>The Pastoral Spectrum in <i>Creative Ministry</i> (1971)</b>	63
2.3.1. Teaching: Beyond the transference of knowledge	64
2.3.1.1. Teaching as a violent process	65
2.3.1.1.1. Competitive	65
2.3.1.1.2. Unilateral	65
2.3.1.1.3. Alienating	65
2.3.1.2. Teaching as a redemptive process	65
2.3.1.2.1. Evocative	65
2.3.1.2.2. Bilateral	66
2.3.1.2.3. Actualizing	66
2.3.1.3. The resistance to learning	66
2.3.1.3.1. A wrong supposition	66
2.3.1.3.2. False pressure	66
2.3.1.3.3. Horror of self-encounter	66
2.3.2. Preaching: Beyond the retelling of the story	67

2.3.2.1.	The problem of the message .....	67
2.3.2.1.1.	Redundancy of the message .....	67
2.3.2.1.2.	Fear of the truth .....	67
2.3.2.2.	The problem of the messenger .....	67
2.3.2.2.1.	Assumption of non-existent feelings .....	68
2.3.2.2.2.	Preoccupation with a theological point if view .....	68
2.3.2.3.	The preacher who can lead to insight .....	68
2.3.2.3.1.	The capacity for dialogue .....	68
2.3.2.3.2.	Availability .....	68
2.3.3.	Individual pastoral care: Beyond the skilful response.....	69
2.3.3.1.	Spirituality and pastoral identity .....	69
2.3.3.1.1.	Self-affirmation .....	69
2.3.3.1.2.	Self-denial .....	69
2.3.3.2.	Spirituality and pastoral relationship .....	69
2.3.3.2.1.	Contract .....	70
2.3.3.2.2.	Covenant .....	70
2.3.3.3.	Spirituality and pastoral approach .....	70
2.3.3.3.1.	Role-definition .....	70
2.3.3.3.2.	Contemplation .....	70
2.3.4.	Organising: Beyond the manipulation of structures .....	71
2.3.4.1.	The pitfalls of the organiser .....	71
2.3.4.1.1.	The danger of concretism .....	71
2.3.4.1.2.	The danger of power .....	71
2.3.4.1.3.	The danger of pride .....	72
2.3.4.2.	Christian agent of social change .....	72
2.3.4.2.1.	The perspective of hope .....	72
2.3.4.2.2.	Creative receptivity .....	72
2.3.4.2.3.	Shared responsibility .....	73
2.3.5.	Celebrating: Beyond the protective ritual. ....	73
2.3.5.1.	How do we celebrate life .....	74
2.3.5.1.1.	Affirming .....	74
2.3.5.1.2.	Remembering .....	74
2.3.5.1.3.	Expecting .....	75
2.3.5.2.	What kind of a person make celebration possible .....	75

2.3.5.2.1. Obedience to the voice of nature .....	75
2.3.5.2.2. Obedience to the voice of other people .....	75
2.3.5.2.3. Obedience to the voice of God .....	76
2.3.6. An evaluation of the book Creative Ministry .....	76
<b>Observations</b> .....	77
<b>2.4. The Wounded healer</b> .....	80
2.4.1. Ministry in a dislocated world .....	80
2.4.2. Ministry to the rootless generation .....	81
2.4.3. The minister as tomorrow's leader .....	81
2.4.3.1. The leader as spiritual guide .....	81
2.4.3.2. The compassionate leader .....	81
2.4.3.3. The minister as contemplative critic .....	82
2.4.4. Ministry to a hopeless man .....	83
2.4.5. How to lead to tomorrow .....	83
2.4.5.1. Personal presence .....	83
2.4.5.2. Waiting in life .....	84
2.4.5.3. Waiting in death .....	84
2.4.6. Principles of Christian leadership .....	84
2.4.6.1. Personal concern .....	84
2.4.6.2. Faith in the value and meaning of life .....	84
2.4.6.3. Hope .....	85
2.4.7. Ministry by a lonely minister .....	85
2.4.7.1. The wounded minister .....	85
2.4.7.1.1. Personal loneliness .....	86
2.4.7.1.2. Professional loneliness .....	86
2.4.7.2. The healing minister .....	86
2.4.7.2.1. Concentration .....	87
2.4.7.2.2. Community .....	87
<b>Observations</b> .....	88
<b>2.5. Reaching out: The three movements of the spiritual life (1975)</b> .....	89

2.5.1. Reaching out to our innermost self	90
2.5.1.1. Suffocative loneliness	90
2.5.1.2. Receptive solitude	90
2.5.1.3. Creative response	90
2.5.2. Reaching out to our fellow human being	91
2.5.2.1. Creating space for strangers	91
2.5.2.2. Forms of hospitality	91
2.5.2.3. The host	91
2.5.3. Reaching out to our God	91
2.5.3.1. Prayer and mortality	92
2.5.3.2. Prayer of the heart	92
2.5.3.3. Community and prayer	92
<b>Observations</b>	93
2.6. <b>Genesee Diary (1976)</b>	93
2.6.1. Silence, solitude and prayer	94
2.6.2. Self and God	95
2.6.3. Mysticism, a common call	96
<b>Observations</b>	97
2.7. <b>Living Reminder (1977)</b>	98
2.7.1. Minister as a healing reminder	98
2.7.1.1. The wounds	98
2.7.1.2. The healing	99
2.7.1.3. The healer	99
2.7.2. The minister as a sustaining reminder	100
2.7.2.1. Sustenance	100
2.7.2.2. The sustaining	100
2.7.2.3. The Sustainer	101
2.7.3. The minister as a guiding reminder	102
2.7.3.1. The guidance	102
2.7.3.2. The guiding	102

2.7.3.3. The guide .....	102
<b>Observations</b> .....	103
<b>2.8. Clowning in Rome</b> .....	105
2.8.1. Solitude and community .....	105
2.8.1.1. Solitude an intimacy .....	105
2.8.1.2. Solitude and ministry .....	106
2.8.1.3. Solitude and prayer .....	107
2.8.2. Celibacy and the holy .....	107
2.8.2.1. The world .....	107
2.8.2.2. The witness .....	108
2.8.2.3. The life style .....	109
2.8.3. Prayer and thought .....	109
2.8.3.1. Unceasing thought .....	109
2.8.3.2. Unceasing prayer .....	109
2.8.3.3. Disciplines .....	110
2.8.4. Contemplation and ministry .....	110
2.8.4.1. The contemplative life .....	110
2.8.4.2. Contemplative prayer .....	111
<b>Observations</b> .....	112
<b>2.9. The Way of the Heart</b> .....	113
2.9.1. The World .....	114
2.9.2. The spirituality of the minister .....	114
2.9.2.1. Solitude .....	114
2.9.2.1.1. The compulsive minister .....	114
2.9.2.1.2. Solitude, the furnace of transformation .....	114
2.9.2.1.3. A compassionate ministry .....	115
2.9.2.2. Silence .....	116
2.9.2.2.1. The wordy world .....	116
2.9.2.2.2. Words out of Silence .....	116
2.9.2.2.2.1. Silence makes us pilgrims .....	116
2.9.2.2.2.2. Silence guards the fire within ...	116

2.9.2.2.3.	Silence teaches us to speak	.....	117
2.9.2.2.3	The ministry of silence	.....	117
2.9.2.2.3.1.	Silence and preaching	.....	117
2.9.2.2.3.2.	Silence and counselling	.....	117
2.9.2.2.3.3.	Silence and organising	.....	118
2.9.2.3.	Prayer	.....	118
2.9.2.3.1.	The prayer of the mind	.....	118
2.9.2.3.2.	The prayer of the heart	.....	118
2.9.2.3.3.	Prayer and ministry	.....	119
2.9.2.3.3.1.	Nurtured by short prayers	.....	119
2.9.2.3.3.2.	Unceasing	.....	119
2.9.2.3.3.3.	All-inclusive	.....	119
<b>Observations</b>		.....	120
<b>2.10. Making all things new: <i>An invitation to spiritual life (1981)</i></b>		.....	121
2.10.1.	Preoccupation with the ‘other things’	.....	121
2.10.2.	The Kingdom of God	.....	122
2.10.3.	Setting the heart	.....	122
<b>Observations</b>		.....	122
<b>2.11. Summarising remarks</b>		.....	123

## **Chapter 3 : Downward Mobility**

<b>The post Academic phase (1981 – 1996)</b>	.....	125
--	-------	-----

### **Introduction**

<b>3.1. Gracias (1983)</b>	.....	125	
3.1.1.	Poverty, prayer and ministry	.....	125
3.1.2.	Prayer, gratitude and ministry	.....	126
3.1.3.	Poverty, prayer and community	.....	127

<b>Observation</b>	.....	127
<b>3.2. Compassion (1982)</b>	.....	127
3.2.1. The compassionate God	.....	128
3.2.2. The compassionate life	.....	129
3.2.3. The compassionate way	.....	130
<b>Observation</b>	.....	131
<b>3.3. The Road to Daybreak (1985)</b>	.....	131
3.3.1. Being seen by God	.....	132
3.3.2. Being loved by God	.....	133
3.3.3. Experiencing the Daybreak	.....	133
<b>Observations</b>	.....	134
<b>3.4. Lifesigns (1986)</b>	.....	135
3.4.1. Intimacy	.....	135
3.4.2. Fecundity	.....	136
3.4.3. Ecstasy	.....	137
<b>Observations</b>	.....	137
<b>3.5. Letters to Marc about Jesus (1987)</b>	.....	138
3.5.1. Jesus, the heart of our existence	.....	138
3.5.2. Jesus, the God who sets us free	.....	138
3.5.3. Jesus, the compassionate God	.....	138
3.5.4. Jesus, the descending God	.....	139
3.5.5. Jesus, the loving God	.....	139
3.5.6. Jesus, the hidden God	.....	139
3.5.7. Listening to Jesus	.....	140
<b>Observations</b>	.....	140

3.6. <b>In the name of Jesus</b> .....	141
3.6.1. From relevance to prayer .....	141
3.6.1.1. The temptation to be relevant .....	141
3.6.1.2. The question: Do you love me? .....	142
3.6.1.3. The discipline: Contemplative prayer .....	142
3.6.2. From popularity to ministry .....	143
3.6.2.1. The temptation to be spectacular .....	143
3.6.2.2. The task: Feed my sheep .....	143
3.6.2.3. The discipline: Confession and forgiveness .....	143
3.6.3. From leading to being led .....	144
3.6.3.1. The temptation to be powerful .....	144
3.6.3.2. The challenge: Somebody else will take you .....	144
3.6.3.3. The discipline: Theological reflection .....	144
 <b>Observations</b> .....	 145
 3.7. <b>Belovedness</b> .....	 146
3.7.1. The inner voice of love .....	146
3.7.1.1. Split love and the need for unity .....	147
3.7.1.2. Spiritual imperatives .....	148
3.7.1.3. The journey towards the heart .....	149
3.7.1.4. Remain in the centre .....	149
3.7.2. Life of the beloved .....	150
3.7.2.1. Being the beloved .....	151
3.7.2.2. Becoming the beloved .....	151
3.7.2.2.1. Taking .....	151
3.7.2.2.2. Blessing .....	151
3.7.2.2.3. Breaking .....	152
3.7.2.2.4. Giving .....	152
3.7.2.3. Living as the beloved .....	152
3.7.3. The Return of the Prodigal Son .....	153
3.7.3.1. The younger son .....	153
3.7.3.2. The elder son .....	154

3.7.3.3. The loving father	154
3.7.3.4. The fatherhood of spiritual maturity	154
3.7.4. Adam, God's beloved	156
<b>Observations</b>	158
<b>3.8. Death</b>	158
3.8.1. Aging: The Fulfilment of Life	158
3.8.1.1. Aging as the way to light	159
3.8.1.2. Aging and caring	159
3.8.2. Death and the consoling spirit	160
3.8.3. Death and grief	160
3.8.4. Befriending death	160
3.8.5. Death and care	161
3.8.6. Death and freedom	161
3.8.7. Death, our greatest gift	162
3.8.7.1. Death and being caught	162
3.8.7.2. Death and fruitfulness	163
3.8.7.3. Death and resurrection	163
<b>Observations</b>	164
<b>3.9. Eucharist</b>	164
3.9.1. With burning hearts	165
3.9.1.1. Mourning our Losses	165
3.9.1.2. Discerning the Presence	166
3.9.1.3. Inviting the stranger	166
3.9.1.4. Entering into communion	166
3.9.1.5. Mission	167
3.9.2. Can you drink the cup	168
3.9.2.1. Holding	168
3.9.2.2. Lifting	169
3.9.2.3. Drinking	169

<b>Observations</b>	.....	170
<b>3.10. The summing up</b>	.....	171
3.10.1. Prayer	.....	171
3.10.2. Friendship	.....	171
3.10.3. Woundedness, healing and spiritual maturing	.....	172
<b>An Interim Balance</b>	.....	174
<b>Chapter 4 : A Final Analysis</b>	.....	177
<b>Introduction</b>		
<b>4.1. Nouwen's context</b>	.....	177
4.1.1. Ministry and it's World-context	.....	177
4.1.2. Ministry an it's Church-context	.....	178
4.1.2.1. Church as a community	.....	180
4.1.2.2. Community as a safe centre	.....	181
4.1.3. Nouwen's picture of God	.....	181
<b>4.2. Consequences for the ministry and the minister</b>	.....	182
4.2.1. Ministry and divine sensitivity	.....	182
4.2.2. Ministry, prayer and mysticism	.....	183
4.2.3. The minister	.....	183
4.2.3.1. The minister must mature in intimacy	.....	184
4.2.3.2. A man of solitude, silence and prayer	.....	184
4.2.3.3. The minister is a wounded healer	.....	185
4.2.3.4. Weak among the weak	.....	185
4.2.3.5. Minister speaks and acts in the name of Jesus	.....	186
<b>4.3. Some observations about the theme-frequencies or variations</b>	.....	186
4.3.1. What is left behind	.....	186
4.3.1.1. Pastoral categories	.....	186
4.3.1.2. Writing for the Clerics	.....	187
4.3.2. What is new	.....	187
4.3.2.1. Ministry is giving and receiving	.....	187

4.3.2.2.	Spiritual life	187
4.3.2.3.	Belovedness	188
4.3.2.4.	Body and the spirituality of incarnation	188
4.3.2.5.	Theology of weakness	188
4.3.2.6.	Downward mobility	190
4.3.3.	What is repeated	190
4.3.3.1.	Availability	190
4.3.3.2.	Solitude and silence	190
4.3.3.3.	Prayer	191
4.3.3.4.	Social engagement	191
4.3.3.5.	Community	191
4.3.3.6.	Eucharist	192
4.3.3.7.	Death	193
<b>4.4.</b>	<b>Influence of biography on writing and vice versa</b>	<b>193</b>
4.4.1.	Nouwen's vocation and life as a priest	194
4.4.2.	Leaving the family	195
4.4.3.	Downward mobility	196
4.4.3.1.	Jesus' way	196
4.4.3.2.	Upward mobility	197
4.4.3.3.	Ministry and downward mobility	198
4.4.3.4.	The struggle of descending	199
4.4.3.5.	Ministry of leading and being led	199
4.4.4.	Nouwen's own woundedness and the wounded healing	200
4.4.5.	A life-long reaching out to himself, to others and to God	201
4.4.6.	From clericalism to Christian spirituality	201
<b>4.5.</b>	<b>The new profile of ministry as functioning and confessing</b>	<b>202</b>
4.5.1.	Ministry as functioning from the heart	203
4.5.1.1.	Hospitality	203
4.5.1.2.	Simple and personal presence	204
4.5.1.3.	Creative absence	204
4.5.1.4.	Solidarity	205
4.5.2.	Ministry as confessing from the heart	205
4.5.2.1.	Confession of faith	206
4.5.2.2.	Confession of one's own wounds	206

4.5.2.3. Confession of one's weakness .....	206
4.5.2.4. Confession of Jesus .....	207
<b>To sum up</b> .....	207
<b>4.6. A tribute to Nouwen</b> .....	209
<b>General Conclusion</b> .....	214
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	219

## General Introduction

### *The Motivation for this Research*

A search into the writings of Henri J. M. Nouwen, a famous spiritual writer of our times, as a Research-programme with a pastoral aim is the result of my coming in contact with Nouwen's book: *Creative Ministry*. During several years of my active pastoral ministry I had the great satisfaction of being a minister and of exercising the priestly ministry. But a careful analysis shows that I have also had difficulties in identifying the priorities in my vocation and also in effectively handling certain pastoral issues connected with my vocation and mission. In the beginning as the horizon of my pastoral vision was not very wide and as I lacked enough experience of concrete life situations there was a deficit both in theoretical and practical knowledge. The high esteem and the privileges of a minister was naturally pleasant but I could take only with a pinch of salt the 'kenosis' (Phi.2/6-8)<sup>1</sup> required of a minister - losing the life in order to gain it. The teaching of Jesus; „Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it cannot produce fruits“ (Jn.12/24) remained for my pastoral activities a yet to be understood and to be realised challenge.

The longer I exercised the ministry the stronger was the question: what is the real basis of ministry and what gives real strength and satisfaction in ministry? or to put the question more bluntly: what is true pastoral ministry? My own spiritual and emotional struggles, the experience of the burn-out symptoms, disappointments due to lack of encouragement and cooperation, the set backs due to wrong priorities and the under-effective approach- all of which I also noticed in the lives of many other priests, sisters and catechists whom I know- I got interested in reading the books of Nouwen. I experienced that the books speak in a very personal way to me and I identified his struggles with those of mine. Many of Nouwen's pastoral insights seemed relevant and helpful to me.

I realized more and more that the feeling of being wanted and the realisation of one's own deficit leading to activism or overdoing without examining the relevance or effectiveness of what one is doing can be fatal. Only a clear goal- setting according to one's own interest and ability, a very realistic expectation of the realisation of the goals and one's own authenticity can offer the joy and satisfaction of true ministry. Ministry brings satisfaction as well as frustration. It is an envied status as well as a tight rope walking. It is being and at the same time becoming.

People's high expectation from a priest and his own big goal make the minister's life difficult. He constantly has to live with the conflict between powerfulness and powerlessness. That the priest is expected to be a man of God and a brother to All, a friend of everybody - very often without true intimacy to someone - leads to the need of high emotional maturing. The personal growth of the pastors in faith and in the pastoral experiences was always a matter of concern but not adequate in the context of the fast changing social situations. The result is a world-wide crisis of pastoral vocation. The demands of the ministry today cannot be met without a sound and maturing spirituality. I could see in me the lack of a healthy relationship or harmony between the person and the profession. The traditional walls of safety around a priest who will be loved, accepted and respected and the illusion of living as a holy and perfect priest collapses sooner or later. The traditional roles as the chosen ones, mediator, leader, healer and helper fail to acknowledge the human limitations of the priest. Luckily

---

<sup>1</sup> All the Bible quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Thomas Nelson, Tennessee 1993.

there is a growing acceptance of the fact that the priest is also, like everyone else, a pilgrim and a seeker, one among those who travel on to become an ‘enlightened Buddha’<sup>2</sup> or an ‘emancipated Yogi’<sup>3</sup>. Thus my own search for the essence of ministry and the ever growing consciousness of my own identity raised in me the question of the balance between profession and identity. This is a point running through Nouwen’s life and writings too.

The ministers today can live either a ‘comfortable’ life or a challenging prophetic life. A question that he has to ask himself constantly is: what am I striving for? The temptation to give in to the desires for success, comfort, power and prestige is very much there. Against this current there is the other possibility of discovering oneself, working towards the harmony of one’s own person and becoming a lamp of love shining for others with the rays of authenticity, integrity, openness and the courage to accept what I am and what others are. Only such a person can become salt of the earth and yeast in the flour. Understanding the true message of the Gospel, following Jesus with the best of conviction and ministering to others selflessly and effectively is not attained through any magical formula. It needs a tearing away of masks and a restless and painful search like that of Nouwen, a movement from ‘magic to faith’<sup>4</sup>. That motivated me to search into myself together with him in the search for the true spirituality of ministry.

### *The aim of this research-work*

There is a knowledge-explosion in every branch of science and pastoral theology is not untouched. The need of the constant revival of the church and the recurring correction of the course of pastoral theological theory and practice gives room for new insights and perspectives. Therefore I thought of focussing on the inner dynamic of the books and biography of Henri Nouwen which according to me, is of great significance to pastoral theology and to pastoral care. In the context of the worldwide crisis of priestly vocations the question of the priest’s role and his personal development emerges as very actual and urgent. As I feel that the pastoral concept of Nouwen can fill a vacuum in the understanding of ministry as a **call** and **vocation** based on a **sound spirituality** I decided to make a scientific analysis of the pastoral books of Nouwen to identify his pastoral concept and to point out the spirituality underlying his pastoral approach. In the beginning Nouwen wrote primarily for the clerics and ministers, but interestingly his later works were more general and aimed at every Christian. Although Nouwen writes about the functions of the priest, he tends to focus more on his personal development which is closely connected to the spiritual growth. This is parallel to his own biography where we notice a ‘downward mobility’ from clericalism to being a true Christian. There is a whole lot of interconnected thoughts and ideas running through his books numbering above 40.

Nouwen’s thoughts reflect very much the spirit and the vision of the Second Vatican Council, where he was privileged to be present during the opening ceremony.<sup>5</sup> The council taught unequivocally that every Christian has a share in the mission of the church and the anointing of the spirit<sup>6</sup>. Nouwen stresses the ‘commonness’ rather than the ‘otherness’ of the priests with the people. In two documents the Second Vatican Council has envisaged it’s vision of the role of the church in the modern world and the ministry and life of the priests.

---

<sup>2</sup> Meaning one who has attained the ‘knowledge’ of himself and God through the spiritual path.

<sup>3</sup> Meaning one who seeks liberation of the ‘self’ through spiritual discipline.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, Intimacy 5.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Beumer, Henri Nouwen 38

<sup>6</sup> Vat II, Presbyterorum Ordinis Nr. 2

The church's teaching clearly says that the priests are in a special way sharers in the Priesthood of Christ<sup>7</sup> and act in the person of Christ with the purpose of 'God's glory' and men's growth in the divine life.<sup>8</sup> However this 'special priesthood' should not become a barrier, but serves as a bridge. The minister is set apart but not separated from the people<sup>9</sup> and ministry involves among other things living with the rest as a brother and becoming all things to all.<sup>10</sup> Being in the world he is not of the world. Ministers are disciples of the Lord along with all the faithful and brothers among brothers.<sup>11</sup> They are called to seek perfection even in the midst of human weakness<sup>12</sup> and exercise their function in the spirit of Christ and in intimate union with Christ.<sup>13</sup> Ministry which involves seeking and fulfilling the will of him who has sent, demands humility and obedience. This means being conscious of one's weakness and being obedient to the spirit.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the teachings of the Council on ministry come out strongly in the writings of Nouwen and that gives me the reason to endeavour to bring out the pastoral concept of Nouwen to show that Nouwen attempts very much to remind us of the teachings of the Council and how he pleads to put it into practice. My thesis attempts to present the unique contribution of Nouwen to the pastoral concept for today which has to do very much with the existential struggles of the priest himself as a human being and the concrete living condition of the common Christian. Nouwen criticises and corrects the drawbacks and deficits in the function and the identity of the minister and throws new light into the teachings of the Council and its practical application.

Nouwen's books can be divided into pastoral, spiritual and journals. In some of his books he has treated the functions of the priest in the various pastoral fields and in some others the true identity of an authentic minister. His spiritual books contain deep insights about the spiritual life and his journals are sincere confessions which offer every reader a challenge to become a faithful Christian which, also the ultimate vocation of every minister. I have come to know that the books of Nouwen have inspired and helped several people in Ministry including priests and sisters. He is widely read by people who long for spiritual comfort. Nouwen's reflections which are purely the fruits of his restless seeking to find out the 'centre' from which all good and evil springs, point out towards *solitude, prayer, friendship, compassion, community and communion with God* as some of the essentials of life which are in danger of being pushed aside by the urgencies of a busy life .

Nouwen rediscovers the need for a sound spirituality and identifies the strong bond and a careful balance between action and prayer as the identifying mark of an effective minister whose creative ministry is the need of the hour in a world in which fear, competition, hatred and injustice spread darkness, hopelessness and resignation threatening to devour the gentle, loving presence of God and the joyful, just and peaceful realisation of his Kingdom.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Nr.5

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Nr.2

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Nr.3

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Nr.3

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Nr.9 (This is an important message in Nouwen's writings)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Nr.12

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Nr.13

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Nr.15

The new approach of Nouwen<sup>15</sup> confronts every Minister with the question whether his or her Ministry is founded on proper motives, methods and disposition.

Since Nouwen's books have already spoken to me in a personal way, I know that this study is having an impact on myself and expect it to become an appeal to those who seek clarity in their pastoral vision. It has already started to convince me about the fragility of a pastor and the necessity to throw off masks in order to enter into communion with people and their life situations as Jesus did. In helping others to put together the fragments of their lives and to experience the healing love of God, the minister learns to help himself to put together the fragments of his life and to show **that** love and concern of Jesus who said: there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his friends. Jn. 15/13

For Nouwen ministry is not giving food to the hungry but coming together as hungry and going back satisfied by sharing with each other what each individual possesses.<sup>16</sup> Nouwen has not written volumes about the contents, method and techniques of pastoral ministry. But in few words and sometimes very implicit he has brought out the essence of the 'what' and 'how' of ministry. The credit of a tasty meal depends on the ingredients and the art of preparing. Similarly the success of the ministry depends on the contents and the method of going about it. Of course without the energy coming from solitude and prayer what we want to serve is too raw.

I am sure that this Dissertation which tries to highlight the basic principles and challenges of spiritual growth – both of the clerics as well as of the laity - , how the laity and priests compliment each other, how to integrate these aspects into practical theology and the formation of the pastors will give new enlightenments to the readers and encourage the ministers of the Gospel. This ship of mine will sail through the books of Nouwen to discover the land of Nouwen's pastoral concept, who lays bare the concrete problems in ministry and suggests therapeutical answers making use of his rich knowledge of psychology and the Christian spiritual and mystical traditions. Only he who learns to deal effectively with his own problems can offer help to others. The outcoming thesis and the suggestions for future actions may help those who are in ministry to evaluate their activities, the circumstances of their own and other's life, and the inner movements of their hearts and to serve as inspiration for the creative ministry which should come from the heart. The conclusions arrived at and the appeal for change in attitudes and methods must be of relevance also in the field of formation of the future ministers.

### *The Method of the Analysis*

After considering the possible options I decided to make a qualitative analysis of the content of the books written by Nouwen. I am hoping to filter the books of Nouwen and through a hermeneutical approach arrive at the person and the teaching of Nouwen, an admirable person for whom writing had become his 'second nature'<sup>17</sup>. Nouwen himself confesses that writing

---

<sup>15</sup> ( that ministry is a profession rather than professionalism, that leading consists also of being led, that the ministers are not only givers but also receivers, that the Minister heals but is himself in need of healing, that in teaching the learning process is also involved, that preaching means proclaiming the word of God and not our opinions, that organisation is liberating others rather than making them dependent on us and that in the celebration we celebrate our lives with its ups and downs and not mere rituals.)

<sup>16</sup> Nouwen did not dwell explicitly on the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. But I see a close connection between his pastoral concept and the ministry of Jesus' breaking the word and blessing the five loaves and the two fishes narrated as the wonderful multiplication of the Bread in Mk 6, 30-44 and parallels.

<sup>17</sup> Beumer, Henri Nouwen : A restless seeking for God 44

became for him a source of consolation and a powerful way of concentrating and obtaining clarity of thought and feelings.<sup>18</sup> He wrote not only to share his insights with others but also to gain insight into himself. I will be examining the books of Nouwen in the historical order and trying to show the interconnections and the inner development of the themes in the light of his biography.

This is not an easy task because Nouwen writes from his heart. We have access only to his books and articles or writings on Nouwen. Many of his personal writings have not yet been sorted out. A second problem is that although he is a sharp observer in his pastoral-psychological insights, he allows himself to be guided more by his spiritual mentors and the Holy Bible. Very rarely he quotes contemporary authors. Maybe he does not want to blend the spiritual truths with scientific jargon or he has an allergy to such presentations after the bad experiences with his doctorate.

Without allowing the admiration to stand in the way of objectivity and scientific precision my endeavour is to highlight the pastoral character of Nouwen's books although he is mostly projected as a spiritual writer. It has been clear to me from the very beginning that I am not making an exploration of all his literature from the historical perspective on a quantitative basis. He has written numerous articles which are also outside the sphere of my research because the contents of most of them have appeared later in one or other of his books. My endeavour is to reconstruct the inner coherence and co-relation between the pastoral aspects contained in his books, primarily the pastoral works and secondarily the other books. In this process I will be trying to identify the different pastoral perspectives leading to a single underlying perspective. Subsequently Nouwen's unique contributions in the pastoral works and the dominant themes in the spiritual books and journals will be scrutinised to establish the bio-bibliographical development which should throw light on Nouwen's own inner growth and the inner dynamic within the main works. The question of the deepening of the pastoral and spiritual concerns as developed in the books, the interconnection between the pastoral and spiritual competence, the developing terminologies, the change of accents and addressee, and the contribution to practical theology will follow us during this journey.

My justification for venturing into a scientific analysis of the apparently not very intellectual works of Nouwen is that there is a great scientific quality in Nouwen's diagnosis and therapeutical suggestions. I will try to maintain the two poles appearing in his books, namely, the minister's deficit and appeal for a better approach to ministry. A dominant theme that slowly evolves is the **person** of the minister himself with his limitations and brokenness and how they can be complimented by the great God who has chosen him and whose love transforms weakness into strength. Nouwen's principles of pastoral action and his spiritual perspectives have an inner quality. By establishing the relationship and interaction between the different perspectives which will be achieved by analysing the outstanding themes contained in the various books, and with reference to his biography I will try to establish the underlying-perspective or the guiding principle of a pastoral action. After identifying the problem-dimension - in my case concerning and restricted to the five main pastoral fields called teaching, preaching, counselling, organisation and liturgy - possible solutions will be pointed out on the basis of his perspective to each problem leading to forming a theory of action with suggestions for improvement in approach and attitude. Corresponding to my aim of presenting Nouwen's perspective, without getting into the theological developments in Germany or elsewhere or even making a comparative study, I make a qualitative analysis of

---

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *The Genese Diary* 103

his main works and pin down the theological and spiritual aspiration of Nouwen, laid open through his life and works.

### ***Material***

From the scheme it is clear that I engage myself directly and primarily with the pastoral books of Nouwen and indirectly with the spiritual foundations mentioned in the spiritual reflections and journals. A close following up of the biography and a chronological and content based sorting out of the books will hopefully give insights into the influence of his biography on his writings and the writings on his biography. The underlying pastoral principle will be worked out purely based on the books written by Nouwen<sup>19</sup>. The articles written by Nouwen, my dialogues with people who knew Nouwen and books or articles written on Nouwen, the Websites and video and audio cassettes by or on Nouwen will serve only as background to see clearer into Nouwen's writings.

### ***The building up of the structure of the Dissertation***

In the first chapter a short biographical sketch and a brief reference to some persons who influenced his thinking will lead to a better understanding of the person and his works.

In the second chapter I deal with the important writings during his teaching years, the phase of moving upwards.

The third chapter deals with the phase of 'downward mobility' and the books written during this time.

The final chapter is the critical analysis and reconstruction of the main ideas.

The underlying idea will be arrived at through meta and micro analysis. The books serve at the meta level and the themes at the micro level. The five pastoral fields in the book *Creative ministry* depicting the function of the minister will be seen as the different branches of the same tree in its relation to the trunk. The hidden roots of this tree are in the sacred scripture and Christian tradition. The fruit is the dynamic and creative pastoral approach conceived by Nouwen. I see the pastoral contents of Nouwen as a tree and my job is to give a name to this tree.

The qualitative analysis of the content of the important books with the biography as background is aimed at presenting the two sides of a single coin - Function and Identity- which are not separable. With the hypothesis that the identity of the minister is a second pillar constituting Nouwen's pastoral concept I try to concretise it with the chronological analysis of the books and biography. A critical look gives the uniqueness of Nouwen justifying this work.

A word of clarification about the use of the term 'minister' may help to avoid some possible confusion. Every Christian is called to be a minister and Nouwen would be only happy to avoid a differentiation between the Christians and ordained ministers or between Catholic ministers and non-Catholic ministers. However this study seems to take a Catholic perspective as Nouwen was a Catholic as person and as author. Other words like pastor, priest, Christian

---

<sup>19</sup> There are several articles written by Nouwen. Their contents have appeared in one or other of his books. For those who are interested I have given a detailed list of the articles in the bibliography.

leader are also used in different contexts referring to ministers. The essence of Nouwen's teaching is applicable for all Christians.

# Chapter 1 : Biography and Bibliography

## Introduction

Nouwen's life was a life of continuous search, a life of reflection and a life of contemplation. The piety inspired by his mother and the spirit of hard work instilled upon by his father took him to many spiritual and academic heights. We cannot understand Nouwen without his family background and without the socio-political milieu in which he lived. Therefore a concise biographical sketch of Henri J.M. Nouwen right at the beginning of this research is according to me a must to understand the writings and the person of Nouwen better. The life circumstances, the person and the writings of an author are closely connected to each other and therefore I am taking the liberty of presenting them side by side in a quasi literature-biography form. The first chapter contains biographical data; references to books mostly in general and at times with specific accents and finally some observations about the person of Nouwen.

### 1.1. Biography

A rather detailed biography of Henri Nouwen is presented by Jurjen Beumer<sup>1</sup>, a theologian and diaconal preacher in Haarlem, Netherlands. His presentation is factual because as a friend for over fifteen years Beumer knew Nouwen well. He had finished the book before Nouwen died. Beumer tries to evaluate the person from a distance in order to be objective but he could not but swim with the 'passion of Nouwen's heart'<sup>2</sup> and presented Nouwen as a restless seeker.

Beumer did not want to violate the secret of the person he was writing about by going too close to him and he preferred to go about thematically rather than chronologically. The work above is complemented by *The Wounded Prophet: a portrait of Henri J.M. Nouwen* written by Michael Ford<sup>3</sup>. Ford portrays Nouwen as an excellent spiritual writer but tries to bore into the roots of his struggles, to present a true Nouwen. Ford sees in Nouwen a much sought after teacher and preacher but with his own woundedness. Often looking for prestige and company, he was also a most desperate person suffering from a deep loneliness.<sup>4</sup>

Deirdre La Noue's Study on Nouwen's spirituality<sup>5</sup> also contains a section on biography which adds more details to the other works. The works of Robert A. Jonas<sup>6</sup>, Christopher de

---

<sup>1</sup> Beumer, Henri Nouwen pp. 13-66. trans. David E Schlaver and Nancy Forest-Flier (Crossroad, N.Y. 1997) This book is the first of its kind on Nouwen. As a friend Beumer had surely the privilege of knowing him close and make an authentic analysis of the person. It is all the more easier and at the same time delicate when the book is written while the person is still alive. The biographical sketch in the first part, although not very extensive and thorough, has helped this study very much. The book was published soon after the death of Nouwen.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ford, Wounded Prophet pp. 70-146 Michael Ford is a journalist and broadcaster at BBC. He has met Nouwen personally and has interviewed him for a programme.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Ibid. Xiv.

<sup>5</sup> La Noue holds a Master of Divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in religious studies from Baylor University. She teaches at Dallas Baptist University. Her book on Nouwen is titled *The Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen*.

<sup>6</sup> Jonas, Henri Nouwen pp. Xxii-Ixx. Robert A Jonas is the director of the Empty Bell contemplative centre in Watertown, Massachusetts. He is a psychotherapist, spiritual director and retreat leader. He was a good friend of Nouwen and is often mentioned in his writings.

Vinck<sup>7</sup>, Chris A. Glaser<sup>8</sup> and Beth Porter<sup>9</sup> (Editor) are further sources of information.

### 1.1.1. Childhood to Ordination

Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen was born on the 24<sup>th</sup> January<sup>10</sup> 1932 in the small city Nijkerk, about 28 miles southeast of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. He was the first of four children of Laurent Jean Marie who came from a pious family<sup>11</sup> of eleven children and Maria Huberta Helena, one of the seven siblings from a prosperous business family. The Nouwens had been blacksmiths in the past century who, as well as shoeing horses, had specialised in artistic forge work, such as locks and ornaments. They came from the province of Limburg in the south of the Netherlands. His grandfather was the town clerk of Venlo at the beginning of the century. Maria's father died young and the mother took over the reign of bringing up the eight children of which the eldest son Toon became a Priest for the Archdiocese of Utrecht. This uncle of Nouwen played a great role in Nouwen's life. Laurent Nouwen married Maria Ramselaar in 1931 and they had their first son, little Henri, after nine months. The three days prolonged painful, anxiety filled and fear evoking delivery process resulted in a strong bond of love between mother and son.

Henri's father „a man with a strong personality, a powerful will and a convincing sense of self“<sup>12</sup> carried the title of 'Notarial Candidate' and worked as inspector of registration and public property. During the second world war he gave up this position and eventually practised as a private lawyer in The Hague and finally Professor of Notarial and Fiscal Law at the Roman Catholic University of Nijmegen. The family lived in Nijkerk, Venlo, Bussum, The Hague and Nijmegen. Laurent retired in Geysteren, outlived Henri by one and a half year and died in 1997 at the age of 94.

Henri Nouwen's mother, a woman with great interest in literature and mysticism, could not pursue her studies in Latin and Greek due to the marriage. For many years she was the supervisor of the bookkeeping department in the family business, run first by her mother and later by her brother. She was warm, welcoming, deeply religious, a dedicated wife and mother and in the words of Henri always with „a smile and tear, joy and sadness“<sup>13</sup>. Both parents were very concerned about their four children. They emphasised on independence and critical thinking. They provided their children ample opportunity to develop themselves materially, socially and spiritually. When Henri was two years, his brother Paul was born. Paul studied law and worked in the insurance business. Later he became prominent as the president of ANWB, a three million member association for tourism, touring, water sport and recreation. He married Marina san Giorgi, a teacher who died of cancer. They had no children.

---

<sup>7</sup> Vinck, Nouwen Then. This book contains more his reflections on Nouwen than biographical data. Vinck holds a doctorate in education from Columbia University, and is presently the Supervisor of Humanities at Clifton High School. He lives with his family in New Jersey and is the author of several books. He met Nouwen for the first time during an award giving ceremony and since then they are friends. Both are recipients of the Christopher Award. Christopher award is an annual award given out to authors, organisers and television producers who make a significant difference in the world based on the motto 'It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness'.

<sup>8</sup> A graduate of Yale, long time friend of Nouwen, a writer, speaker and leader of workshops and retreats.

<sup>9</sup> Writer and a friend of Nouwen, was colleague in the L'Arche community for many years.

<sup>10</sup> on the feast day of St. Francis De Sales, patron of the writers.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed Genealogy, compare Beumer, Henri Nouwen 13f.

<sup>12</sup> Nouwen, A letter of consolation 45.

<sup>13</sup> Nouwen, In Memoriam 16.

Laurent (Willem) the third son was born after ten years. He is a lawyer, partner of a firm and president of the 'Henri Nouwen Stichtung' in Europe. . He married Heiltjen Kronenberg, a private practitioner who later became a judge. They have three children, Sarah, Laura and Raphael.

Two years later a daughter was born, Laurien. She also studied law but graduated in Italy. She married a lawyer, Marc Van Campen and had three children but got divorced later and works as Managing Director of a Law firm in Arnhem.

According to the biographers one of the things that characterised Nouwen throughout his life was that from the time he was a baby he longed for affection, constantly reaching out to be held and to be beloved. The relationship with his father was less harmonious and, although Laurent was proud of his son's ambitions and desire for leadership, Henri was sceptical about his father's unconditional love and it must be one of the things that affected his thinking, inner struggles and writings. As a child he was active but suffered a chronic hunger.<sup>14</sup> His mother apologised for having brought him up in accordance with the doctrine of a doctor who had advocated that the grasping nature of young children should be tamed by restrictions of food and physical touch.<sup>15</sup>

His mother and grandmother encouraged his desire to become a priest and helped him to grow in piety. The grandmother had her store's carpenter made a child-size altar and she had her seamstress make all the vestments needed that Henri could play priest. Henri was ambitious and received great support from the family. But at the school it was not easy for him as he was considered cross-eyed, clumsy and the last choice for the sports.<sup>16</sup> The influence of uncle Toon was tremendous as he stood for everything for which Henri aspired especially to celebrate Mass as his uncle did.

Despite the post war tensions and confessional fights, Henri grew up under the protection of an intact and traditional catholic family although it may be said that the war situation had brought more intensive talk about God and trust in God. Although the war destroyed everything, his mother requested a group of priests to start a school for boys in the neighbouring village so that the elementary education of the children was not interrupted. His father also tried to provide cultural experiences by gathering family and neighbours for poetry reading and discussion about art. Henri was energetic and enterprising and his great interest in 'playing priest' with the other family members as parishioners shows his enthusiasm for the church and interest in priestly life from a very early age. The inclination to piety and leadership was strengthened with a healthy ambition paving the way for developing the potentials and leading to a certain maturity. Laurent Nouwen's account of the shadow side of his son is remarkable and gives a glimpse of the weakness of Henri. His strong leadership quality was also his weakness. He reacted with angry flare ups to offences and sudden outbursts when someone challenged his leadership.<sup>17</sup> The father-son relationship was strained due to competitive spirit but the differences were later ironed out as mentioned in Henri's books *A letter of consolation* and *The return of the prodigal son*. According to Ford Henri's relation to his own father was distanced and cool because his father seldom used words that affirmed the affection of a father.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Jonas, Henri Nouwen xxii.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Ford, Wounded Prophet 73.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. Beumer 20.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. Ford, Wounded Prophet 65.

The words of his father and the words of his mother had different tones. The father said: show me that you can make it in this world, be an independent person and compete with others. Show me that you can accomplish something. In contrast to that his mother's admonition was: whatever you do in this life, don't lose contact with Jesus. Being known and having a big job is unimportant. It is important that you continue to carry Jesus in your heart and that you don't lose his light.<sup>19</sup> The father-son relationship with its unexpressed competition and silent battle for precedence, with its hidden dance for the mother's attention and unconscious attempts to gain her favour<sup>20</sup> was noticeable in the Nouwen family also. Henri's relationship to the mother was clear in itself but in his relationship to his father he had to make a process of identifying and differentiating between the actual father and his image of a father.<sup>21</sup> In *The return of the prodigal son* Henri Nouwen narrates about this phenomenon.

Henri's strong bond with Maria Nouwen and her influence in his decision to become a Priest is summed up in his own words: „it was mother's deep and lasting devotion to the Eucharist that was one of the factors, if not the main factor, in my decision to become a priest“<sup>22</sup> and that „years after my mother's death, she continues to bear fruit in my life. I am deeply aware that many of my major decisions since her death have been guided by the spirit of Jesus, which she continues to send me.“<sup>23</sup> They wrote to each other, telephoned and shared much. Her sudden death in 1978 at the age of 72 left a vacuum in his life<sup>24</sup>. The process of catharsis after her death is described in the book *In Memoriam*.

Nouwen wanted to enter seminary at the age of twelve but was stopped by his parents as he was too young to leave the house. So he attended the school near Amsterdam. As the Nouwens moved to The Hague he finished the education by the Jesuits in Aloysius College. At the age of 18 he joined the Seminary in Apeldoorn where his uncle Toon, later Monsignor and well known for his commitment to Jewish-Christian dialogue, was the president. It was followed by the customary 2 years of philosophy and 4 years of Theology in the Major seminary at Rijsenburg near Driebergen, the programme for the students of the Archdiocese of Utrecht.

Because of his family background he was admired and could hold important functions like head boy and representative. He was kind, an effective speaker and talked with people freely. According to a supervisor he was hardworking and hard praying, with an intellect

---

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. Deirdre La Noue, *The spiritual legacy of Henri Nouwen* 14. She feels that Nouwen followed the voice of his father during the adult life, but later he responded more to the voice of his mother.

<sup>20</sup> Taken from Beumer, p.20 who traces the detail to the Dutch booklet von Laurent Nouwen.

<sup>21</sup> Nouwen's life was a life long struggle of becoming the 'perfect' father (Mt. 5/48) This is also related to his experience of his father and mother. Chris, a student and then a friend of Henri for about 25 years, suggests that "One could psychologize Henri's relationship with his parents, pointing out that sensitive boys often have a special bond with their mothers, and fathers frequently put distance from sons that they perceive as unmasculine. But it would be more helpful, I believe, to 'theologize' Henri's relationship with his parents: the father represented the patriarchal view of a demanding God the father in control, and the mother represented a more feminist view of a vulnerable God, the mother with compassion....., I think Henri's appeal is that, without consciously trying, he was balancing out the patriarchal church he represented with a mother God". (See Chris Glaser, *Henri's Mantel* 65-66.)

<sup>22</sup> Nouwen, *A letter of consolation* 64.

<sup>23</sup> Nouwen, *Our greatest gift: A meditation on dying and caring* 39.

<sup>24</sup> His later affection towards and attachment to Madame Pauline Vanier, the mother of Jean Vanier, was possibly a filling of this vacuum. Pauline was a deeply religious person who provided Nouwen great hospitality but also challenged his spirituality.

that was not very original but very sharp.<sup>25</sup>

The ecumenical initiative he made as a student was courageous enough for the day. He was a good preacher, confident, intelligent and charismatic in communication. Traces of the influence of the content of the seminary-formation which insisted on intellectual and spiritual purity, a disciplined life of supplication and sublimation are present very much in the earlier Nouwen.<sup>26</sup> He was ordained Priest at the age of 25 on July 21<sup>st</sup> in the year 1957 by Bernard Alfrink, the then Archbishop of Utrecht.

### 1.1.2. Further Studies

Nouwen's bishop wanted him to continue theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome but Nouwen requested for permission to study psychology in Nijmegen, Holland, because he sensed that psychology can offer tremendous help to theology especially to pastoral theology. His request was granted and he pursued the studies in psychology from a pastoral point of view with special emphasis on human development. In September 1957 Henri enrolled at Nijmegen University for his doctoral research which would amount to 7 years. Clinical psychology was getting attention in pastoral care and Nouwen wished to explore the common grounds and aims of psychology and spirituality. His father being professor of law at the same University and his uncle very famous for his ecumenical efforts Nouwen was a marked man.<sup>27</sup> In Nijmegen Nouwen stood out for intensity and enthusiasm. His early tending to upward mobility is clear from his narration of the great feelings as army chaplain. But later he realised that the belt covering the chest hindered the heart and slowly he longed for the downward mobility.<sup>28</sup>

His contacts with Professor Han Fortman<sup>29</sup> a famous Psychologist of Religion, reading the works of Gordon Allport and his research on Anton Boisen influenced him very much.

Besides new insights and inspirations, Nouwen wanted to experience also what faith meant in the harsh reality of everyday life. He joined the workers in the mines of South Limburg, worked for Unilever in Rotterdam, served as Chaplainship in the Army and also took up vacation jobs on ships as Chaplain for the Holland-America line. His fellow psychology students who misunderstood him in the beginning for someone wanting to cultivate contact with important people later realized that he was interested in people of all walks of life.

As the Nijmegen University demanded more statistical evidences and scientific evaluation in his thesis, Nouwen refused to be 'forced into a strait jacket' and for his research work received the 'Doctorandus', meaning someone who still has to become a doctor.<sup>30</sup> Nouwen was more a preacher than researcher in the sense that his spiritual hunger was so overwhelming that he had no patience to invest his time and energy doing scientific work.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. Ford, *The Wounded Prophet* 80.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 81.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Beyond the Mirror*(1992) 41.

<sup>29</sup> Fortmann (1912-1970) was one of the first academic psychologists brave enough to publish papers which were interdisciplinary in that they tried to show links between psychology and religion. Nouwen discovered the close connection between Action and Contemplation.

<sup>30</sup> Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 89.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

His interest to go to America was instilled by his desire to meet the famous psychologist Gordon Allport personally and to study at Harvard under him. The meeting was possible through an introduction by Cardinal Cushing of Boston and Gordon advised Nouwen to finish his studies in Nijmegen and thereafter enrol in the Programme of Studies in ‘ Religion and Psychiatry’ at the Menninger Institute in Topeka, Kansas, U.S.A.

Nouwen followed the advice of Allport and in 1964 joined the Menninger Institute, the birth place of the contemporary discipline of pastoral psychology and clinical pastoral education. He stayed there for two years and became friends with Seward Hiltner<sup>32</sup>. Nouwen was enthusiastic to meet Anton Boisen who taught his students to view the psychiatric patients as ‘living human documents’ and whose writings he had read in Nijmegen. Boisen kept Nouwen close to himself by challenging Nouwen with some fundamental questions. Nouwen’s admiration for this man grew, whose concept of God is summarised as “the internalisation of the highest values of our social relationship” and who had made his sufferings a source of creativity.<sup>33</sup>

The political awakening in him prompted to join Martin Luther King’s great march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965 for the Blacks’ civil rights. Nouwen’s eyes were opened for the realities outside too. In Kansas he became spiritually more matured, emotionally adolescent and academically successful. Struggle, growth and success all were present side by side during this time.

### 1.1.3. Teaching Career

The studies in Menninger helped Nouwen to form a strong and suitable foundation for his later life. His original intention was to go back to the Netherlands and introduce psychology into the religious education in his native land, which was very slow and sceptical in recognising the positive role of psychology. Sadly Nouwen was less known and accepted in Europe. But his reputation as clinical psychologist and a dynamic speaker was noticed by the University of Notre Dame and through his friendship with John Santas, a catholic psychologist, Nouwen was invited to take up teaching at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, U.S.A. He taught at Notre Dame from 1966- 1968. Nouwen was the first to teach abnormal psychology at Notre Dame and he even invited protestant psychology professors for lectures. He was immersed not only in teaching but also in the spiritual life of the community. He taught a non-credit course for the priests who were ministering to the students, celebrated the Eucharist with students and professors, and gave counselling. The combined aspects of his work at Notre Dame, helping students connect insights from psychology with faith and its practice, provided him with the initial professional experiences that would eventually enable him to make significant contributions to the field of pastoral care.<sup>34</sup> During this period he was influenced by Anton T. Boison, S. Hiltner and Thomas Merton. Nouwen earned a lot of fame but was also struggling with his commitment to be celibate, his loneliness and need for affection and community. Knowing that others had similar problems he began to lecture on themes like depression, confusion, intimacy and love<sup>35</sup>.

---

<sup>32</sup> Hiltner laid the foundation for a new type of pastorate in which psychology was made complimentary to Theology.

<sup>33</sup> Ford, Wounded Prophet 91.

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. Jonas, Henri Nouwen xxv f and also La Noue, The spiritual legacy of Henri Nouwen 16.

<sup>35</sup> The fruits of his stay there is brought out in the famous books *Intimacy: Essays in pastoral theology and Creative Ministry*.

Despite his successes Nouwen wanted to talk to someone about his confusions clouding his sense of vocation and the meeting with John Eudes Bamberger at the Cistercian Monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky, who later became the Abbot of Genesee, brought him another good friend and guide.<sup>36</sup> Nouwen left Notre Dame as the authorities insisted on a Doctoral Thesis for a permanent professorship. His taking part in the funeral procession of Martin Luther King on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1968 gives a glimpse of the man with equally intensive spiritual and social concerns.

From 1968-70 Nouwen taught in the Netherlands at the Joint Pastoral Institute in Amsterdam, Netherlands as the head of the department of behavioural sciences at the Catholic Theological Institute of Utrecht. Two books came out during this time, *With Open Hands* and *Thomas Merton: Contemplative Critic* originally written in Dutch. Nouwen was not at ease teaching psychology without pastoral application and so registered for his doctorate in theology at the Nijmegen University and was now in a position to justify his psychological insights theologically. These studies show Henri's passion for education in the area of pastoral ministry and also point to the fact that his stress was more on spirituality and ministry rather than on psychology.

Nouwen's doctoral work which was a case study, in the spirit of Hiltner and more practical, was found by his professor not theological enough and as Nouwen did not want to re-do it he was awarded a second Doctorandus qualification, although later honorary degrees including doctorate was bestowed on him from American Universities.<sup>37</sup> The writings of Thomas Merton, Mother Teresa, Jean Vanier, Gustavo Gutierrez and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the paintings of famous Dutch painters had tremendous impact on Nouwen's life.

Nouwen might have expected a professorship in Nijmegen but as he was disappointed, as assessed by Ford,<sup>38</sup> resigned from the job and lived a year as a student in a rented room. But here he realised his vulnerability. Nouwen wrote: "People I had hoped would come and visit me didn't come; friends I expected to invite remained silent; fellow priests whom I thought would ask me to assist them in their Sunday liturgy didn't need me and my surroundings had pretty well responded as if I were no longer around. The irony was that I always wanted to be alone to work, but when I was finally left alone, I couldn't work and started to become morose, angry, sour, hateful, bitter and complaining. During that year I realized more than ever my vulnerability".<sup>39</sup>

Nouwen watched the developments in pastoral psychology. To pursue his interest he found the developments in America more conducive. Now he had to choose between remaining in his country or going to U.S.A.

The discerning or decision making process was made easier when he received an invitation from Colin Williams, the dean of the Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, to teach there. At first he politely rejected the offer because of his commitment to the Church in Holland. But a renewed request six months later was responded to positively because Nouwen was impressed by the calibre and healthy mix of students from different denominations. He accepted the offer on his own conditions and started as a lecturer in

---

<sup>36</sup> Ford, *The wounded Prophet* 93.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 100.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

<sup>39</sup> Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary* (1995) 68.

pastoral theology. During his 10 years of teaching career there between 1971-81 he reviewed the whole broad terrain of mysticism, spirituality, psychology and pastoral psychology. He took courses on ministry and spirituality.<sup>40</sup> Nouwen was hard working but instead of adapting himself to the entrepreneurial spirit of the academic world and trying to make a good career he wrote a series of inspiring books.<sup>41</sup>

Slowly Nouwen felt the need for a retreat from the busy life. He wanted to get to know, confront, and confess in his deep within hidden feelings, longings, desires and problems. For that he decided to stay in a Trappist Monastery for seven months. For him the social, political and religious renewals of the 60s and 70s, the external renewal, without the individual's relationship with God, the internal renewal, was throwing the humanity out of the rails and he wanted to explore the unity between the internal and the external, between intimacy with God and one another and the socio-political engagements.

Nouwen's plea for the interiorization of the religion fell on deaf ears in his native place, where the whole discussion was on 'issues' but his book *With Open Hands* got great acceptance in the United States, where the de-christianisation and secularisation was more balanced.<sup>42</sup> For the modern men and women with 'almost limitless capabilities and knowledge' but with a 'vast emptiness'<sup>43</sup> the writings of Nouwen were breath giving and surely his reflections were based on his coming in contact with the lives and problems of many. Nouwen did not negate the theological problems but "he chose instead to skirt around them in a wide circle. He was always suggesting that his readers look at the other side of things, that for all the shadowy aspects of life there are many shining facets, and that God, at the intersection of light and darkness, has chosen the light. This light, he insisted, is also present at the bottom of every heart."<sup>44</sup> Nouwen realized that his life was also part of the history and contributed to its shaping. Therefore the good and the evil in the world had some bearing on one's own life and for their roots one has to search into the centre of one's own solitude.<sup>45</sup>

In 1974 Nouwen received tenure at Yale Divinity School as associate professor and in the same year in the midst of conflicting interests and aspirations he decided to stay for some months at the Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard, New York. He realized that he was compulsive and restless and needed to retreat from the academic life to address the difficult questions through prayer and solitude. In his own words: "May be I spoke more about God than with him. May be my writing about prayer kept me from a prayer life. May be I was more concerned about the praise of men and women than the love of God. Maybe I was slowly becoming a prisoner of people's expectations instead of a man liberated by divine promises. [...] It was not all that clear, but I realized that I would only know by stepping back and allowing the hard questions to touch me even if they hurt."<sup>46</sup> He wanted to

---

<sup>40</sup> Details in Beumer, Henri Nouwen 179.

<sup>41</sup> The secret of his success lays in the fact that he allowed all of his readings to pass through the filter of his own experience. He wrote several books during this period which will be introduced in the bibliography. *Reaching Out* is one of the most personal books with deep insights. Here he explains, from the experiences of his own spiritual journey how one has to learn to descend to one's own 'interior', how one has to discover one's own 'lonely way' in the journey of life, in the spiritual journey. The culmination of his thinking is expressed in the confession that the right to judge the inner way is reserved for God alone.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. Beumer, Henri Nouwen 36.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid 39.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 39.

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Reaching Out* 35.

<sup>46</sup> Nouwen, *Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* 13.

discover ‘a single source’<sup>47</sup> from which all the actions come, ‘a quiet stream underneath the fluctuating affirmations and rejections’<sup>48</sup> of his life, ‘a still point where life is anchored’<sup>49</sup> and from where he could reach out with hope, courage and confidence. During the stay in the Abbey from June to December 1974 Nouwen received valuable insights under the guidance of Abbot John Eudes. Here Nouwen began to confront his inner life in a very direct and intimate way. The purpose was as he himself says “to allow the hard questions of life to touch me even if they hurt”<sup>50</sup>. Nouwen’s journal *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* narrates interesting incidents during the stay and the tremendous transformation in his life which kept unfolding itself in all that he did or planned to do.

From 1977-81 Nouwen was full professor at Yale. For him ‘excursions’ were important. He travelled a lot and was happy doing a different thing. In 1976 he became a fellow at the Ecumenical Institute at Collegeville, Minnesota, U.S.A. during which he wrote the *Living Reminder*. The fame of Nouwen increased and his writings were acknowledged and in 1978 he was named the pastoral theologian of the year by the journal pastoral psychology.<sup>51</sup> Hiltner commenting on one of his ‘case history’ praises Nouwen for his healthy mix of theory and practice.

In 1978 he spent five months in Rome as a scholar in residence at the North American College and his reflections took the form of the book *Clowning in Rome*. One section of this book ‘Prayer and Thought’ received the 1979 journalism award from the Catholic Press Association in which Nouwen describes prayer as the God-centred dialogue instead of the self-centred monologue. The death of his mother in 1978 affected him deeply but he found out that writing about the things that affect the heart bring a lot of consolation. The books *In Memoriam* and *A letter of Consolation* bear witness to it. Nouwen kept himself busy but did not forget to ‘step back’ and in 1979 he spent another half year in the same Abbey. The prayers which he wrote during this period were later published as a book *A cry for mercy*. For Nouwen writing became very important as a source of inner clarity.

The emergence of the Liberation Theology attracted Nouwen’s attention to Central and South America. Henri wanted challenges and he wanted to give a new vision to his spirituality. The excitements in Latin America demanded a personal answer from him and he decided to make his official break with Yale to go to Latin America. In 1972 he had already spent a summer in Bolivia to learn Spanish.

The stay in Genesee convinced him that the life of a minister grounded on prayer. Now he felt that it was also important to live close to the poor. He found an extremely important connection between the life of prayer and ministry. In his own words “when we have met our Lord in the silent intimacy of our prayer then we will also meet him in the *campo*, in the market and in the town square.[.....] Seeing God in the world and making him visible to each other is the core of ministry as well as the core of the contemplative life”<sup>52</sup>.

For Nouwen looking at oneself was essentially connected with looking at others. “Wherever he might find this duality of action and reflection, struggle and worship there

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>50</sup> Durback, *Seeds of Hope* xiii.

<sup>51</sup> Ford, *The wounded Prophet* 93.

<sup>52</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* 21. (Nouwen explains it in the book *Clowning in Rome* P.87 while speaking about contemplation. It comes up in this work also.)

he would feel at home”<sup>53</sup> In 1980 he was awarded an honorary doctorate of divinity from the Virginia Theological Seminary. Nouwen resigned from Yale in the year 1981 because he suffered loneliness despite his fame and thought that he was lacking challenges. He also wanted to get more clarity about his vocation.

From October 1981 to March 1982 Nouwen stayed in Latin America thinking that his call was to be a missionary for the poor. At first he took a three-month Spanish course in Cochabamba, Bolivia at the Institute de Idiomas of the Maryknoll Congregation. Then he stayed for three months with a poor family in Lima, in Peru. Henri had a great admiration for Gustavo Gutierrez of Lima, the father of Liberation Theology, whose influence on Henri can be noticed in his writings. The growing critical features of Henri’s writings are certainly influenced to a great extent due to his directly experiencing the realities of the poor people about which he had only heard or read. But the fruitful integration of the Liberation Theology with the mystical heritage is manifested in his insight that Liberation Theology should go beyond mere social criticism and must be deeply rooted in a “spirituality of exile or captivity”<sup>54</sup>. In a foreword to Gutierrez’s book *We drink from our own wells: the spiritual journey of a people* Nouwen claims that the essential elements of a true struggle for freedom are personal friendship, affective relationships, useless prayer and intimate joy.<sup>55</sup>

Nouwen’s uncertainty about his vocation is noticeable in his sudden euphoria coming from a vision of a “small community gathered in the midst of the squalor creating a space for people to celebrate God’s presence”<sup>56</sup> which is later corrected when he realized that he was following more his own spiritual ambition than doing God’s will for him as confessed in the *Road to Daybreak*.<sup>57</sup>

One of the interesting contributions of Nouwen, which is the result of his Latin American interludes, is the concept of the ‘reverse mission’<sup>58</sup>, the movement from the south to the north<sup>59</sup>. Nouwen feels that the countless martyrs in Latin America who make the suffering Christ visible are the teachers of the people in north who are called “to know with heart and mind that all that is, is given to us as a gift of love, a gift that calls us to make our life into an unceasing act of gratitude”<sup>60</sup>. But Nouwen’s decision not to stay on in Peru also shows a certain ambivalence. It appears to be one of Nouwen’s weaknesses that he has great ideas, dreams and desires but can hardly stick to them due to a basic restlessness and an ongoing search for the real call.<sup>61</sup>

After experiencing Latin America Nouwen argues more for the power of the non-violent spiritual path.<sup>62</sup> There are advocates of action coming from prayer and others advocating action in prayer. For Nouwen it is basically a question of the precedence of prayer.

---

<sup>53</sup> Beumer, Henri Nouwen 49.

<sup>54</sup> Nouwen, Gracias 40.

<sup>55</sup> Cfr. Beumer, Henri Nouwen 50. See also Nouwen, Gracias 144.

<sup>56</sup> Nouwen, Gracias 145.

<sup>57</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak* 3.

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, Gracias 188.

<sup>59</sup> Meaning from Latin America to the United States of America.

<sup>60</sup> Nouwen, Gracias 188. (Nouwen has repeatedly stressed that the rich can not only give but also receive, that they can not only teach the poor but also learn from the poor, that ministry is beyond professionalism and involves a two way traffic, a healing interaction based on the principle of subject-subject relationship.)

<sup>61</sup> Details in Beumer, Henri Nouwen pp. 52,53,63.

<sup>62</sup> This point is dealt with in detail in Nouwen’s book on Thomas Merton.

In March 1982 Nouwen returned to the United States and in the meantime Harvard Divinity School had contacted him to teach there. May be because he himself realised the truth in what some of his friends told him that with his teaching and writing he could have done more for the south in the North than in the South. So he decided to accept the offer from this prestigious American University. Only six months he was tied to the university and the rest of the time was for his other undertakings for example to write, to travel extensively and to give talks.

In the second half of 1983 he spent one month in Mexico followed by a visit to Nicaragua and Honduras. In 1984 he gave a series of lectures drawing the North American attention to the situation in South America. Through the self-exposing journeys with lectures and conferences Nouwen drew attention to the oppressive system in Central America.

In the meantime a meeting with Jean Vanier<sup>63</sup> during a silent retreat in Chicago attracted Nouwen's attention to L'Arche.<sup>64</sup> In the fall of 1983 he made his first visit to Trosly, a village just north of Paris in France. He was influenced by Jean Vanier and Thomas Philippe<sup>65</sup>, the founders.<sup>66</sup> Jean Vanier sensed that Nouwen was a man without a 'home'. He did not want Nouwen to give a talk or write a book. He offered Nouwen a home and wanted him to waste some time with them.

At the end of August 1984 Nouwen spent over a week in Guatemala. His witness of the zealous, courageous ministry of the murdered Priest Stanley Rother and Nouwen's friend John Vesey, who took over the challenge from Stanley, appeared as a book called *Love in a fearful Land: A Guatemala story*. The story is more than a simple narration of the incidents in Guatemala. Nouwen gives here some of his reflections on ministry. An

---

<sup>63</sup> Jean Vanier, a French-Canadian born in Geneva in 1928 is the founder of L'Arche with the help of Father Thomas Philippe. He is also the co-founder, with Marie Helene Mathieu, of *Faith and Light* which brings together people with disabilities, their parents and friends for regular meetings. Jean Vanier is the son of a former Canadian Governor-General. In 1942 he left for England and was in the Royal Navy until 1950. He joined the Dominican faculty of philosophy and theology in Paris where Father Thomas Philippe taught at that time. He obtained a doctorate in philosophy and taught at the university of Toronto in Canada. Following his inner voice, a response to God's call discerned with the help of Father Thomas, he gave up his military, church and university career to live with the handicapped. In 1964 he started the first community with two handicapped persons. He is also the author of several inspiring books. He is also the recipient of Paul VI International prize given every five years. Pope John Paul II called his works 'concrete signs of hope'.

<sup>64</sup> L'Arche is a world-wide network of over 100 communities in over thirty countries taking care of the people with intellectual disabilities. It was founded in 1964 by Pere Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier in a village called Trosly sixty miles north of Paris, France. The spiritual power of L'Arche is the message of Jesus and the beatitudes. Their Charter is 'Whatever their gifts or limitations, all people are bound together in a common humanity. In a divided world L'Arche wants to be a sign of hope. Its communities seek to be signs of unity, faithfulness and reconciliation'. As an ecumenical and inter-religious organisation it is a dynamic example of unity in an increasingly fragmented world. According to Nouwen L'Arche reminds us that a worldwide movement of care for the poor and the oppressed can engender a new consciousness which transcends the boundaries of sex, religion, race, and nation. Such a consciousness can give birth to a world community, a community to celebrate our shared humanity, to sing a joyful song of praise to the God of love, and to proclaim the ultimate victory of life over death. At L'Arche the handicapped are named 'core members' because they do not merely receive help. They are contributors. Those who care for them are called 'assistants' who live with them after the model of Jesus, God with us. Henri conveyed in his lectures and writings that these core members have gifts to offer, gifts of love and gifts of wisdom. He took some of them along with him on his journeys across the country.

<sup>65</sup> Pere Thomas Philippe, O.P. (1905-1993) was a teacher of philosophy and theology besides carrying on the apostolate of preaching, giving recollections, retreats and spiritual direction. On health reasons he gave up teaching and devoted himself to the handicapped and maladjusted.

<sup>66</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak* 10.

important element in ministry is establishing trust by being present in the place where you have been sent. There are situations in ministry where we have to fight against all odds seeing very little fruits of the labour but it is also a ministry to give courage and hope to the weak and ‘hopeless’ by simply being present there with patience and abandonment.

In 1984 Nouwen won a Christopher award given annually to authors, organisations and television producers who make a significance difference in the world with the motto, ‘It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness’.<sup>67</sup>

In December 1984 Nouwen went once again to Trosly and made a 30 day retreat. He felt that his spiritual life was at stake in the midst of a busy academic life.

“After twenty-five years of priesthood, I found myself praying poorly, somewhat isolated from other people, and very much preoccupied with burning issues...I woke up one day with the realization that I was living in a very dark place and that the term ‘burnout’ was a convenient psychological translation for a spiritual death.”<sup>68</sup>

After the stay in Trosly he felt attracted to this community and naturally the struggle now was Harvard or L’Arche. Nouwen saw two possibilities ‘upward mobility’ or ‘downward mobility’. He loved teaching and pulled large ‘crowds’, but he perceived Harvard as an ambitious place. He did not want to remain at the intellectual discussions, rather he wanted to aim teaching at spiritual formation. This opinion was not shared by all the colleagues which made Nouwen feel uncomfortable to continue remaining in the academic arena. His own inner struggles might have intensified the decision to resign from Harvard after the spring semester of 1985.

A glimpse of what Nouwen suffered is made known from an unpublished journal of Nouwen by Robert Durback.

“After only a few weeks away from the competitive, career oriented life at Harvard Divinity School...I want to cry out loudly to my colleagues and students: ‘Do not serve Harvard, but God and his beloved Jesus Christ, and speak words of hope to those who suffer from loneliness, depression and spiritual poverty’. Yet I myself have come to the painful discovery that when I am chained by ambition it is hard for me to see those who are chained by poverty. Therefore this is not a time to play the prophet, but a time to listen more carefully to the voice of God calling within me.”<sup>69</sup>

Nouwen decided to follow the downward mobility, to be with the poor. The poor, especially the handicapped, were signs of the imperfection that exists in this world, to which all of us are also subjected. What is demanded to love and console them is loyalty, nearness and real presence. The poor expose our brokenness and we ourselves must become poor to enter into true relationship with them. The struggle about the decision making and the joy of discovering what was to be his life work is given very descriptively in his book *The Road to daybreak*. Nouwen began to feel that his vocation was to spend his life with the poor, not meaning the unwealthy, but the poor in spirit, the disabled.

---

<sup>67</sup> Cfr. Vinck, Nouwen Then 15.

<sup>68</sup> Henri Nouwen, In the Name of Jesus 10f.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Durback, Seeds of hope 29.

From August 85-86 Nouwen moved to Trosly to test his vocation. The decision was truly liberating. In his own words “As soon as I left, I felt so much inner freedom, so much joy and new energy that I could look back on my former life as a prison in which I had locked myself”<sup>70</sup>.

Nouwen’s leap into the dark or ‘burning the bridges behind’ can be seen as foolishness, restlessness and unsteadiness but it was a genuine search for his real vocation. In the text of Jn21/18: “when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go” Nouwen sees the way to spiritual maturity and justifies his decision.

From August 1985 to August 1986 Nouwen spent a whole year in Trosly. The journal *Road to daybreak* is the account of his experiences during the period and how his decision helped him to experience new light. Here he discovered that being fruitful is more important than being productive. He experienced the joy of living and working in a believing community. In a radical change of attitude he learned that the poor, the handicapped, can become guides for our spiritual life, healers and true barometers of the human spirit.<sup>71</sup> The academic world expected Nouwen to produce. In Trosly he learned that caring for the handicapped, the so-called useless people, could provide a different kind of joy, because through their vulnerability and honesty they could become our ministers and teachers. Their open display of feelings ranging from anger to unconditional love forces us to throw away masks and to be what we are. This is truly a healing ministry which is ‘fruitful’ rather than ‘productive’. Even in death he sees the end of success, productivity, fame and importance among the people but not the end of fruitfulness.

In October 1985 Nouwen visited ‘Daybreak’<sup>72</sup> in Richmond Hill, near Toronto in Canada. A letter received in December 1985 from there was decisive.

“We are asking you to consider coming to live with us in our community of Daybreak [...] We truly feel that you have a gift to bring us. At the same time, our sense is that Daybreak would be a good place for you, too. We would want to support you in your important vocation of writing and speaking by providing you with a community that will love you and call you to grow”<sup>73</sup>.

Nouwen began to feel within himself a new ‘call’. He did not make a hasty decision. He consulted several people and also flew to his native place to get the approval of his Bishop. He prayed a lot and finally when he received the blessings of his Bishop he was excited about his future- living and working in a believing community. During his visit to the Netherlands Nouwen was surprised to see, with a certain amount of disappointment, the prosperity and secularity of his homeland. There was not much space left inside or outside to be with God, God alone. The Dutch had become, including some of his family members, a distracted people- very good and kind, and good natured, but caught in too much of everything.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak* 22.

<sup>71</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Lifesigns* 73.

<sup>72</sup> Daybreak is the first L’Arche community in Canada and North America. With the gift of a barn house, 13 acres of farmland and a passionate belief in the value of every person Steve and Ann Newroth brought Vanier’s vision to Canada. I visited Daybreak in 1997 to have a direct experience of the place.

<sup>73</sup> Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak* 94.

<sup>74</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 108, 115.

Before moving to Daybreak Henri Nouwen made a world tour from May to June 1986. He admitted that the search for inner unity and peace was not achieved in one day. But he knew that he was growing and that he had become more intimate with Christ. In his own words: “Here I sense that I am not the same person that I was twenty- nine years ago”<sup>75</sup>. In August 1986 Nouwen became the Pastor of the Daybreak Community.

#### 1.1.4. The Final Station- Daybreak

For Nouwen Daybreak was a completely new world, not so rosy but the community life and the simple, authentic love of the members there certainly gave him a true home. The restless man who discovered prayer and solitude as the centre of spiritual existence and the foundation of true solidarity with the poor and the suffering settled down in a community as a way of giving and receiving love. L’Arche called Nouwen back to a life of prayer and the nurturing of his relationship with Jesus above all else. The only demand of L’Arche was to keep in touch with his heart through solitude and prayer and to love the people around him. It was more a matter of sharing his being with others than accomplishing a lot of things.<sup>76</sup> Nouwen slowly became enmeshed in the world of the disabled. He ate with them, played with them, worked with them and learned from them.<sup>77</sup> Daybreak was very happy to have a priest who would look after the spiritual needs. The community sensed the need to develop a rich spiritual life that celebrated the liturgical year, broadened their knowledge of the scriptures, and deepened their prayer life. However, they also made the commitment to honour, protect, and support Nouwen’s vocation to write as well as to fulfil speaking engagements.<sup>78</sup> Nouwen gave a new impetus to Christian spirituality in the Daybreak community. Many people came to hear his word.

“Over the years, the clear glass chalice has reflected the faces of many thousands who have come to hear the Word: Handicapped people lying across bean-bag chairs, lay care-givers, Catholic priests and protestant ministers, Latin American peasants, professors, middle-class Catholics, wealthy philanthropists, seminary students, and United States Senators. They come to hear the word, but also to be in the presence of the radiance that seems to stream from this man. They come because they hope to receive, into their own shadows of doubt, despair, and hopelessness, a bit of his reflected, dancing light. And perhaps to discover their own. They come because this man, more than anyone else they know, seems not only to speak the Word, but actually to *become* it. Some say that when Henri Nouwen presides at a Eucharist, one not only hears but *sees* the Word, right here, right now.”<sup>79</sup>

Nouwen also started a small retreat centre called *Dayspring* aimed at helping the spiritual renewal of not only those who lived there but also their friends and visitors. Sr. Sue Mosteller<sup>80</sup> a friend and co-worker of Nouwen confesses that she was impressed by his passion for God and for people. He was free and open and saw beyond the walls of the Roman Catholic tradition. Being his friend was complicated, desperate, horrible and

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>76</sup> Cfr. La Noue, *The spiritual legacy of Henri Nouwen* 37-38.

<sup>77</sup> Cfr. Durback *Seeds of Hope* 29.

<sup>78</sup> Cfr. La Noue, *The spiritual legacy of Henri Nouwen* 40.

<sup>79</sup> Jonas, *Henri Nouwen* xiii- xiv.

<sup>80</sup> A St. Joseph’s sister who lives and works in Daybreak for thirty years is presently the literary executrix for Nouwen and the director of the Henri Nouwen Literary Centre. She was associate pastor at Daybreak.

marvellous at the same time.<sup>81</sup>

Nouwen stayed in a home with six disabled people and he was assigned the task of caring for Adam, a twenty-five year old man who suffered epileptic seizures, who could not speak and seldom smiled. Slowly in Adam Nouwen saw the living Christ and Adam became Nouwen's mentor and friend. Caring for Adam Nouwen became aware of the value of a person irrespective of accomplishments.<sup>82</sup> In living and working with the Handicapped Nouwen discovered his own deepest handicap. Christopher de Vinck summarises the importance of this relationship:

“It had been difficult for him at first, Nouwen admitted. Physical touch, affection, and the messiness of caring for an uncoordinated person did not come easily. But he had learned to love Adam, truly to love him. In the process he had learned what it must be like for God to love us- spiritually uncoordinated, disabled, capable of responding only with what must seem to God like inarticulate grunts and groans. Indeed, working with Adam had taught him the humility and emptiness achieved by desert monks only after much discipline. The time he spent caring for Adam had become an indispensable time of meditation.”<sup>83</sup>

At Daybreak Nouwen tried to find a good balance between working and writing. Without writing Nouwen would become restless. As his books became famous, he had many invitations for lectures, to congresses and seminars besides his ‘ministry by letter’.<sup>84</sup>

In spite of having found his home Nouwen's inner struggles kept coming back. There was in him the longing for an intimacy which no friend or community could give him. In 1988 he had an emotional collapse due to the deterioration of a close friendship of which he mentions in the *Inner voice of Love*. The sudden interruption of the friendship, probably with Nathan Ball, sparked off a deep crisis leading to depression and Nouwen not only needed psychotherapy but also emotional and spiritual support which he found in a community in Winnipeg, Canada . The healing process consisted of being held physically with an enormous amount of nurture and tenderness.<sup>85</sup> Nouwen returned to Daybreak, at first with apprehension but later to became reconciled and stronger in spiritual and emotional life. “As is often true with those who experience the dark night of the soul, Nouwen came back with more depth of insight into the spiritual life. The tone of Nouwen's entire ministry changed subtly as he emphasized more and more the importance of grounding one's self-identity in the love of God alone.”<sup>86</sup>

Nouwen slowly became a spiritual adult. After a truck-accident in 1989 which brought him close to death, he begged pardon from his colleagues and then he wrote: “As I said this, I felt I was taking off the wide leather belts that I had worn as chaplain with the rank of captain in the army. Those belts not only girded my waist, but also crossed over my chest and shoulders. They had given me prestige and power: They had encouraged me to

<sup>81</sup> Cfr. La Noue The spiritual legacy of Henri Nouwen 42.

<sup>82</sup> They became such intimate friends that soon after the death of Adam Nouwen wrote a beautiful book on him, *Adam, God's beloved*. Nouwen confessed that Adam taught him that **being** is more important than **doing**, that the **heart** is more important than the **mind**, and that **weakness** forms a true **community**

<sup>83</sup> Vinck, Nouwen Then 38.

<sup>84</sup> Cfr. Beumer, Henri Nouwen 66f.

<sup>85</sup> Ford, Wounded Healer 169.

<sup>86</sup> La Noue, The spiritual legacy of Henri Nouwen 46.

judge people and put them in their place. Although my stay in the army was very brief, I had, in my mind, never fully removed these belts. But I knew now that I did not want to die with these belts holding me captive. I had to die powerless, without belts, completely free from judgement<sup>87</sup>.

Henri made peace with all his relations and friends and took a new step of faith and trust in God alone. The years in Daybreak were fruitful from the point of view of self fulfilment and writing books. Several inspiring books were written during this period which made him famous. In 1993 he visited the community of the handicapped in Ukraine as a sign of solidarity and encouragement.

Beumer and Ford felt that Nouwen's personal struggles had brought him to a special theme, the spirituality of the body, which would have been a subject for further studies and the matter for a book, had not death deprived him of more time.<sup>88</sup> In caring for Adam he discovered the sacredness of touch and slowly learned the body language. Beumer sees in Nouwen's restless seeking a genuine search for his call, finding the purpose of his life, his vocation.<sup>89</sup> Finally finding the vocation meant finding God in his own inner sanctuary. In the book *Return of the Prodigal son* this great discovery is beautifully narrated. Here we see clearly a shift in the attitude, from searching God outside to finding him inside, from ministering to being ministered. The path of his spiritual growth involved the living through the younger and older son and **becoming** the loving father.<sup>90</sup> It was a life of struggle but God helped it to victory and he finally could experience a sense of joy and peace.

During the years from 1986-96 Nouwen continued his seeking for God and refrained himself from theological formulas realizing that God is someone "hidden but nevertheless present in our lives and the life of this world, as a living reality, most brilliantly illuminated in humanity"<sup>91</sup> in the person of Jesus. Fidelity to Eucharist and loyalty to pen was the hallmark of his life. Writing was a grace in darkness and a form of salvation for him.

As a person he was simple and contagious and deep in his convictions. He could see the nature and paintings spiritually. The paintings of the Dutch painters Rembrandt and Vincent van Gogh had influenced him deeply to understand and overcome his own experience of the inner darkness. The agonizing inner journey like that of Van Gogh and Rembrandt must have led to his great admiration for these great men. Nouwen found in Rembrandt's painting of the prodigal son the summery of his life. He understood that claiming the fatherhood was the truth behind the homecoming.

Rembrandt helped Nouwen to understand his own process of maturing and the identity of God in a new way<sup>92</sup>. Rembrandt influenced the journey of Nouwen from the darkness of the periphery to the light which lies in the centre of the picture, the light emanating from the living relationship with God. He realized his belovedness, makes his way back home, and tried to become the father to those seeking relief from their burdens. His relationship

---

<sup>87</sup> Nouwen, *Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on death and life* 41.

<sup>88</sup> Cfr. Beumer, *Henri Nouwen* 69,168. Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 22. (The theme body was for Nouwen a taboo for long time and the cause of a lot of inner conflicts.)

<sup>89</sup> Cfr. Beumer, *Henri Nouwen* 73-78.

<sup>90</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *The return of the prodigal son* 114.

<sup>91</sup> Beumer, *Henri Nouwen* 167.

<sup>92</sup> Rembrandt himself had to experience the dark journey of the soul but could experience God in a unique way.

with Adam, the handicapped, showed him what it meant to be led by others and also taught him the meaning of passivity and reliance on God. This notion of passivity was intensified through his contacts with the trapeze and he developed a spirituality of the Trapeze.<sup>93</sup> A spiritual secret Nouwen learnt was that the important skill was not so much that of the flyer's but that of the catcher's. This brought him to a new reliance on God who is a skilled catcher, and a new perspective of his own spirituality of trusting the catcher, in ministry as well as in spiritual life.

September 95 to September 96 was again a sabbatical year for Henri but he engaged himself in writing and the preparations for a dear project, the filming of his book *The Return of the Prodigal son*. He was to join the television crew in St. Petersburg in Russia where the original painting is preserved in the hermitage. The time agreed upon was from 17<sup>th</sup> until 24<sup>th</sup> of Sep. 1996. In the meantime Nouwen was expecting another Pastor for Daybreak and he wanted to concentrate on 'Dayspring', the centre for daily worship, retreats and prayer. Nouwen had planned a new phase for himself in his life. On Sep. 15<sup>th</sup> he left for Amsterdam and suddenly fell sick. The condition of his heart was bad. He was treated and became better. All hoped that he would be able to start work again but on Saturday, September 21<sup>st</sup> 1996 he got another major attack and died in the hospital in the early hours in the company of the medical team battling to save his life. His wish to die in the company of friends had not been materialized.<sup>94</sup> The 93 year old grief-stricken father said prayers at the bed of his dead son.

Henri was laid out in a funeral home in Hiwersum. On Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> September there was a wake for the family and friends and in the evening another wake in the Cathedral Church of St. Catherine in Utrecht where his casket was placed on the same steps where he had prostrated himself as he was ordained Priest 39 years before. On the following day during a Eucharistic Celebration Henri was given farewell. Henri's Archbishop Adrianus Cardinal Simonis celebrated the mass. Jean Vanier gave an inspiring meditation in which he portrayed Nouwen as a wounded healer, a man with 'deep anguish' which gradually subsided.<sup>95</sup> The sunflowers around his casket were symbolic and reminded us of a Henri who always turned towards the light and it was a fitting gesture to an admirer of Vincent van Gogh.

According to the decision of his family and in accordance with his wish Nouwen's body was taken back to Richmond Hill, Toronto, for a full funeral mass and burial on Saturday, September 28<sup>th</sup>. The words of Paul, his brother on the occasion of the funeral mass in Utrecht are touching. "We wanted so much to keep you and to bury you in Geysteren, in the restfulness of the forests and the rippling of the river Maas, so close to father. But father and all of us believe that we must let you go once again, just as we did forty years ago. You are off on another journey"<sup>96</sup>. Deirdre La Noue having consulted the funeral reports describes beautifully the farewell given to Nouwen in Toronto. "The weather was melancholy as a light drizzle fell, but the mood was celebratory in the Cathedral of the transfiguration. Nouwen's casket was made of simple pine by the Woodery, the carpentry shop at Daybreak. Many of the members with disabilities made colourful drawings that were transferred to the lid of the casket by a Daybreak artist. During the mass songs were sung, accompanied by guitars, flutes and violins. Actors and actresses from the community

---

<sup>93</sup> Cfr. Beumer, Henri Nouwen 68-70. Ford, The wounded Prophet 20-22.

<sup>94</sup> In the account of Beumer Henri died alone p.174.(may be meaning without friends).

<sup>95</sup> Beumer, Henri Nouwen 176.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 176.

gave life to the Gospel reading. Dancers also contributed expression of praise to God on tiptoe and some even from wheelchairs. Sunflowers and irises, carried in by dozens of children, surrounded the altar and his body. One observer said it was not unlike the carnival atmosphere of a circus."<sup>97</sup> Henri is buried in the sacred heart cemetery, close to Daybreak which was his 'home'.

Henri is a simple and fascinating person because of his direct address to the inner feelings of the people of all levels. His knowledge of psychology and, more than that, the access to human experiences helped him to identify the real problems and to present them in a simple way. He believed that everybody is totally loved by God and yet he couldn't trust totally that he was beloved. The gift and struggle of his life remained intertwined, the struggle of his own chaotic emotional life, his insecurity and fear generating the gift of an enormous understanding and compassion for every other human being. The repetition of his favourite themes is a proof for it that he wanted to communicate a message so deeply which he both could and couldn't believe. It was an ongoing journey in which he glimpsed them and lost them, always finding new images like bread broken and shared, an empty church, open hands, clowning, circuses, mirrors, dancing, homecoming etc.<sup>98</sup>

Henri's stay in Daybreak is considered as the beginning of his deepest fulfilment as priest, friend, author, lecturer and mentor. For Nouwen the summary of his life was: 'I say yes to God's love, I live fully in the moment, I care for the weak, and I trust that my life will be fruitful'.<sup>99</sup>

The members of Daybreak acknowledge Nouwen as a blessing as he contributed a spirituality for Daybreak by creatively interpreting the Beatitudes, especially "Blessed are the poor" in a way that touched the hearts of those within and beyond the boundaries of L'Arche.

## 1.2. Early influences which shaped Nouwen's thinking

Nouwen owes his spiritual development to several mentors, spiritual guides, friends, artists and therapists. Similarly his theological insights are also shaped by well known persons. I just want to mention two of them to show how they influenced Nouwen.

### 1.2.1. Anton Boisen (1876- 1965)

Anton T. Boisen is the founder of the clinical pastoral training<sup>100</sup>. Although in those days the CPT was strange to theology, today it is an integral part of church's life and training of priests in U.S.A. His concept of the clinical pastoral care is characterized mainly by his research with the dement patients and the ongoing search in his own life<sup>101</sup>. Boisen saw a close connection between the physical, psychological and spiritual realms. He urged the need for a close co-operation between natural sciences and theology. For Boisen every

---

<sup>97</sup> La Noue, *The spiritual legacy of Henri Nouwen* 54.

<sup>98</sup> Whitney-Brown, in *The Globe and Mail*, a Canadian national news paper on Oct.2.1996 on the occasion of Henri's burial.

<sup>99</sup> Cfr. La Noue, *The spiritual legacy of Henri Nouwen* 55.

<sup>100</sup> He started in 1925 with 4 hours in the Worcester Hospital, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

<sup>101</sup> Boisen suffered from Schizophrenia. His works *The exploration of the inner world* and *Out of the depths* throw more light on his life and thinking.

crisis is also a religious experience with immense potency for creation or destruction<sup>102</sup>. He analysis the early loyalties and their disruptions or discrepancies in the later phases of life which throw the individuals into crisis. The crisis became catastrophe when for example the loyalties to family, friends or society- which are prone to setbacks- are not brought to connection with the supreme loyalty (to God) which alone is permanent and transcendent. The individual has to make a transformation of his loyalties and lets the conscience be determined by the future and not the past. A constant integration of the past with the future, of the individual's life situation with God's promises helps the self-realization of a person. Boisen's message is a message of hope. Boisen describes pastoral care as participation in God's 'plan of salvation' and means therefore helping those who are in crisis. Such care involves showing the positive meaning of a crisis in the context of one's relationship to oneself and one's own life situation, to others and to God. The ultimate aim is a transformation of the person, leading him to the future. Even those who are apparently in no crisis but are 'unawakened' need to be wakened to look at their own lives. The personal salvation is closely connected to the social salvation<sup>103</sup>.

The healing mission of the church demands that the minister sees and accepts his own conflicts, tries to cope up with them and has the ability to read the religious experiences of the 'living documents'<sup>104</sup>. According to Boisen the pastor should be able to counsel the individuals by listening to them without judging, respect the freedom of the other as partner, help him only to articulate his life, enable him to decide for himself. This gives him self-confidence and the feeling of worth and motivates him to move from the past to the future. The serving and dialogical character of pastoral care invites the pastor and the pastured not to hide the wounds in the process of seeing the healing connection between the individual, the universe and the supreme.

### 1.2.2. Seward Hiltner

Two important works *Pastoral counselling (1949)* and *Preface to pastoral theology (1958)* have made Hiltner well known. Hiltner started with pastoral counselling as his special field. For him pastoral care involves the healing of the whole person. This requires the necessary talents, the personal engagement and the gift of empathy. The pastor witnesses to God's healing presence through his words and actions. Pastoral counselling is more than psychological help as it views the life situations of the living documents from a higher point of view, in the light of God's promises and the realization of his kingdom. Pastoral counselling is shepherding and belongs to the general function of the pastor. It is not silencing the other or offering help, but guiding the other with theological insights to self-help. The client's own responsibility must be promoted and not prevented. The counsellor focuses on the life situation of the other, concentrates on the actual feelings and establishes faith and confidence. He should avoid offering solutions and making early moral judgements. The client must be free to express himself without crossing the boundaries. The client himself must suggest possible solutions and at the end the counsellor can show him where they have reached and what they have arrived at. It is important on the side of the pastor to exercise discretion, spell out clearly his own limits and keep sufficient emotional independence.

---

<sup>102</sup> Cfr. Stollberg, D. *Therapeutische Seelsorge*, Kaiser, München 1969 pp 163-191.

<sup>103</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 184.

<sup>104</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 186.

For Hiltner shepherding, communicating and organising form the ‘operation centred’ branch of theology. The operation centred and the logic centred branches together form the scheme of theology<sup>105</sup>. The shepherding pastoral care involves healing, sustaining and guiding<sup>106</sup>. According to Hiltner the pastor has different functions but only one task, namely leading the Christian community. It is important that the person seeking help is not treated as object. He is a partner. Nouwen makes use of Hiltner’s ideas in his works and even takes over certain terminologies as we see in the book *Living Reminder*.

Hiltner has contributed substantially to the theory-building of practical theology. For him the theological and theoretical significance of theology is the practice of the shepherding function in the context of the community. The theory of pastoral care is not any ready made teaching on pastoral care but a dialectic between empiricism and practice, between the specific and general, between the individual case and general norms. Therefore the pastoral counselling is a dynamic interpersonal process. The healing potency is already existing in the person seeking help. He only needs to be helped to see his circumstances in a new light and connect the particular with the total. The healing process of the individual or the community is to be understood in the context of God’s healing presence in our world through his Holy Spirit. The pastor can connect the concrete life situation to the Gospel. Hiltner confesses that a pastor in the context of a parish can offer only supporting or brief counselling compared to the professional counsellors. However it has its significance of not leaving alone the needy in the crisis. Through a first aid he may be able to draw a turning curve.

Boisen’s own woundedness and his caring for one’s own wound and considering them as sources of grace and healing is a theme which is connected to Nouwen’s life and comes out strongly in his writings. Hiltner’s pastoral categories and the dialectical approach to communicating, organising, healing, sustaining and guiding form Nouwen’s fundament. Boisen’s and Hiltner’s reverence and respect for the pastoral partner is very much reflected in Nouwen’s approach too. The pastured must be actively involved. Like them Nouwen also was more a practical man than a theoretical one. Nouwen developed further the biblical, christological, eucharistical and spiritual aspects of pastoral care.

### 1.3 A Sketch of Henri’s Person

Based on the Biography and certain works on Nouwen I am trying to lay down certain impressions I gathered about the person of Nouwen.

#### 1.3.1. Faithfulness to and continued search for his vocation

Nouwen seldom doubted his vocation to Priesthood. In his own words “Since I was six years old I have wanted to be a priest, a desire that never wavered except for the few moments when I was overly impressed by the uniform of a sea captain.”<sup>107</sup> However this way was far from being easy. It was his fervent desire to be faithful to his Christian and priestly life and the disciplines that kept him going and progressing. Retreat and spiritual direction was very important for him. Thus remaining faithful to the call to priesthood he was constantly in search of his vocation.

---

<sup>105</sup> Hiltner, S. ; Preface to pastoral theology , Abington Press , Nashville, Tennessee 1958 . Also Stollberg, p.240.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 88ff

<sup>107</sup> Nouwen, Genesee Diary 207.

Evaluating his stay in the Trappist monastery Nouwen confessed that he was not a new man after the retreat. His weakness kept confronting him. But the Tabor experience gave some hope and perspectives for the ongoing life. “I can say that I have a most precious memory which keeps unfolding itself in all that I do or plan to do. I no longer can live without being reminded of the glimpse of God’s graciousness that I saw in my solitude, of the ray of light that broke through my darkness, of the gentle voice that spoke in my silence, and of the soft breeze that touched me in my stillest hour. This memory, however does more than bring to mind rich experiences of the past. It also continues to offer new perspectives on present events and guides in decisions for the years to come. In the midst of my ongoing compulsions, illusions and unrealities, this memory will always be there to dispel false dreams and point in right directions.”<sup>108</sup>

The purpose of his Latin American tour and the underlying theme of the book *Gracias* is his search for an answer to the question whether God calls him to work with the poor in Latin America. “This journal records a six-month journey toward discernment”<sup>109</sup>

He searched for his vocation with great trust in God. “I am sure that I will find my direction in life when I search actively, move around with open eyes and ears, ask questions, and – in the midst of all that- pray constantly to discover God’s will. The Lord searches for me, I am sure, but only when I search for him too will I encounter him and will his word for me become clear.”<sup>110</sup> According to Nouwen the ministry in South America would be “a ministry of presence, but an active, articulate, considered presence. It would be a mutual ministry of continuous receiving and giving. It would be contemplation and action, celebration and liberation, study and work, ascetic and festive, fraternal and hospitable. [...]The core of this idea is that of living among the people to learn from them. This might sound romantic and sentimental, but in fact it requires discipline to allow the people to become our teachers.”<sup>111</sup>

The journal *Road to Daybreak* containing Nouwen’s inner movements is another important document regarding the discernment of his vocation. Nouwen realized that Latin America was not the right place for him. “I had to face the fact that I wasn’t capable of doing the work of a missionary in a Spanish-speaking country, that I needed more emotional support than my fellow missionaries could offer, that the hard struggle for justice often left me discouraged and dispirited, and that the great variety of tasks and obligations took away my inner composure.”<sup>112</sup>

Getting back to Harvard was not either the best thing for him. “Gradually I discovered that Harvard was not the place where I was called to follow Jesus in a more radical way; I was not really happy there, found myself somewhat sulky and complaining, and never felt fully accepted by the faculty or students.”<sup>113</sup> His dominant feeling towards Harvard was however, gratitude than indignation. “Harvard was the place where I met some of my most caring friends, where I became most acutely aware of my desire to love Jesus without compromise, and where I discovered my vocation to live and work with mentally

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 218.

<sup>109</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* xiii.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 148.

<sup>112</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 3.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 3.

handicapped people.”<sup>114</sup>

During his anxious searching for his vocation Nouwen had several visits to Trosly in France. The book *Road to Daybreak* contains a report of his stay in Trosly from August 1985 to July 1986. For Nouwen it was a search for a home, a thirst for emotional support. “When I visited the L’Arche community in France I experienced a sense of at homeness I had not experienced in Yale, in Latin America, or at Harvard. The non-competitive life with mentally handicapped people, their gifts of welcoming me regardless of name or prestige, and the persistent invitation to ‘waste some time’ with them opened in me a place that until then had remained unavailable to me, a place where I could hear the gentle invitation of Jesus to dwell with him.”<sup>115</sup>

For Nouwen the way was becoming clearer, although the struggle continued. “Many of the same pains I expressed in the *Genesee Diary* and *Gracias* can be found here (*Road to Daybreak*). The difference is not only the context, but also the direction. In the past I wanted to know where to go. Now I knew where to go, but didn’t really want to. Living and working with mentally handicapped people seemed precisely the opposite of what I had been trained and qualified to do.”<sup>116</sup>

The book describes Nouwen’s struggle to say ‘yes’ to the invitation of Jesus to follow him, “A ‘yes’ emerging from the recognition of my own brokenness and need for radical healing”.<sup>117</sup> Nouwen realized that to be healed one has to be seen by God, and it is possible only when “I allow God to see me, all of me, even those parts I myself do not want to see”.<sup>118</sup>

Nouwen’s search for his vocation and his desire to follow Jesus intensively brought him to Daybreak which became his final and true home. What attracted Nouwen to Daybreak is the openness of the inmates and their spontaneous sharing of their joy and sorrows. “They did not hide anything from me. They allowed me to see their fears and their love. I feel deeply grateful for having been part of it all.”<sup>119</sup> A community of broken, but loving people enables one to be what one is without having to be defensive or masked. In a community of broken people healing takes place easier.

Living with the poor Nouwen learned the true meaning of the beatitudes. Purity of the heart is essential to be able to see God. Living with the broken people helps us to become purer. “Indeed, Jesus speaks through the broken hearts of the handicapped, who are considered marginal and useless. But God has chosen them to be the poor through whom he makes his presence known. This is hard to accept in a success- and production-oriented society.”<sup>120</sup>

According to Nouwen, love for the poor must be seen in the light of God’s own poverty. “In L’Oratoire I meet the poverty of God, the God who became flesh and even our food and drink, the God who does not hold back any of his love, and who says, ‘Eat of me, drink of me’, the God who is so deeply hidden that he can be recognized only by the eyes

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 19.

of faith.”<sup>121</sup>

### 1.3.2. Nouwen, a restless seeker

Nouwen was a restless seeker as Jurjen Beumer puts it. According to him there is a link between spirituality and restlessness and the one who seeks God will experience a certain restlessness in the positive sense. “Henri Nouwen, an unbelievably restless man, yet a man who gradually felt more at home in the safe place within himself. Henri Nouwen, an eternal seeker, but someone who in the midst of all that searching gradually realized that he was being found.”<sup>122</sup> But besides this positive restlessness there was also a nervous restlessness which was the result of his woundedness. We have already mentioned in the biography that he suffered from the lack of unconditional love during his childhood.

Writing about Nouwen Michael Ford says that, within a short time he could become holy and restless, vibrant in the company of friends and lonely, being like a child and being wise. He loved the nature and art but looked more for people than places. He was authentic and vulnerable in his own suffering.<sup>123</sup>

Nouwen located the reason for his anger and restlessness in the feeling of rejection to which his response was disproportionate and without nuances. His desire for unconditional love made him very vulnerable as nobody could offer it and even if someone offered it, he would reject it as it might amount to an infantile dependency.<sup>124</sup>

Throughout his adult life Henri was caught up in a cycle of long hectic days of teaching and service, followed by periods of nervous exhaustion, depression and insomnia. There is an ambivalence and even a paradox in his desire to live for others. He wanted to and did not want to be alone. He suffered from an almost neurotic need to be needed<sup>125</sup>. “For all of Henri’s life, each of his sabbaticals and retreats would be interrupted by several quick taxi rides to bustling airports, to quiet death-bed scenes, or to rooms filled with hundreds of people who waited eagerly for a word of hope and inspiration. [...] He knew that often he could not follow his own advice, to stay home and pray”<sup>126</sup>.

“Like all Henri’s close friends, I knew that his periodic collapse into physical and nervous exhaustion was caused to some extent by his frenetic, emotionally intense eighteen-hour work days. From the moment he awoke in the morning until he fell into bed at night, his mind raced ahead toward the Kingdom of Heaven, toward the question of how he could help to make that Kingdom real for himself and others, especially the poor and the oppressed.”<sup>127</sup>

Nouwen, fully aware of his weakness, kept trying to overcome it and to become matured. Celebrating his 54<sup>th</sup> birthday he confessed being the same old self but was consoled by the growing desire to proclaim the riches of Christ. “Notwithstanding my many prayers, my periods of retreat, and the advice from many friends, counsellors, and confessors, very

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>122</sup> Jurjen Beumer, *A restless seeking for God* 167.

<sup>123</sup> Cfr. Michael Ford, *The wounded Prophet* 63f.

<sup>124</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Genesee Diary* 52.

<sup>125</sup> Cfr. Jonas, R.A.; Henri Nouwen xvii.

<sup>126</sup> Jonas, R.A.; Henri Nouwen xxxiv.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. Xvii.

little, if anything, has changed with regard to my search for inner unity and peace. I am still the restless, nervous, intense distracted, and impulse-driven person I was when I set out on this spiritual journey.[...] May be an increasing awareness of my sinfulness, as well as an increasing desire to make known the unfathomable riches of Christ, will prevent me from becoming proud, self-righteous, manipulative, and oppressive. I pray today that my sins will make me humble and my call to witness for Christ courageous.”<sup>128</sup>

Henri was attached to prayer but his distracted temperament was visible in the liturgy and during prayer also. He had a fine sense to feel intensively and do intensively but at times he was hasty also in doing things<sup>129</sup>. Nouwen yearned for God but failed to realize that God was so close to him, because he was always ahead of him.<sup>130</sup>

There was an ambivalence in his desire for solitude and company. “During his frequent monastic retreats, Henri would tell his friends not to contact him so that he could settle into his lifelong dream of living out Jesus’ story from within the regular practice of the monastic liturgy of the hours. To some extent, his strategy worked. But often, friends acknowledges his wishes and did not contact him, Henri took offence, as if they had abandoned and forsaken him. He both wanted, and did not want, to be alone.”<sup>131</sup>

Towards the end of his life he was swayed between the desire for solitude and prayer and the desire for active ministry. He also longed for a new freedom beyond his identity as catholic priest and beyond the expectations of family and friends.<sup>132</sup>

John Eudes helped Nouwen to realize that the reason for his aggressive, dominating and competitive spirit is due to the underdeveloped feminine qualities of receptivity and contemplation.<sup>133</sup>

### 1.3.3. A wounded Prophet

This is the title which Michael Ford prefers to give to his book on Nouwen. We have seen traces of this woundedness which is also partly the cause of Nouwen’s restlessness. One of the deep wounds received during the childhood was the strained relationship with the parents. According to Robert Jonas Henri’s relationship with his parents was not the best. His unconscious conflicts with his parents conditioned his childhood to certain extent. That could be the cause of his inner conflicts as well as the source of his spiritual power.<sup>134</sup> Through his presence and ministry Henri transcended the conditioning of childhood into a spiritual power although the conditioning animated his work and fuelled his inner conflicts.

<sup>128</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 127.

<sup>129</sup> Michael Ford, *The Wounded Prophet* pp 3-5.

<sup>130</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 115.

<sup>131</sup> Robert A Jonas, *Henri Nouwen* xxxiv.

<sup>132</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* ix.

<sup>133</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Genesee* 81.

<sup>134</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* Xxxvi f. (The mother lived ‘for others’ as Henri writes but the mother-son relationship which was very close and intimate could have been also a not very desirable ‘co-dependence’ which prevents seeing oneself deeper. It was rather a ‘problematic co-dependence’ in which each tried to forget one’s own suffering, joy, vision and power by being over involved in the life of the other. His father failed to give Henri enough attention. They did not acknowledge and appreciate his rich emotional life. The father used his personal power to distance himself from intimacy which Nouwen desperately needed.)

Jonas holds the opinion that Henri did not sufficiently express his resentment to his parents.<sup>135</sup> “Henri did not feel that his parents acknowledged his or appreciated his rich emotional life. But Henri does not share with the reader how he *felt* about this.[...] Henri’s published work does not directly explore his anger or any depth of suffering that may have arisen in relation to his father.”<sup>136</sup> A possible explanation according to Jonas is “I believe that the spiritual life can never be reduced to mere psychological categories. Henri dedicated his life to that within us which is truly beyond categories, the divine source and destination of our fragile and precious being.”<sup>137</sup>

Nouwen’s struggle with his loneliness and his longing for intimacy was a thorn in his flesh but also the fire which sparked off his spiritual quest and ministerial enthusiasm. Nouwen’s greatness was that he did not hide his own woundedness. In his journal he writes:

“The feeling of being abandoned is always around the corner. I keep being surprised at how quickly it rears its ugly head. Yesterday I experienced that nasty feeling in my innermost being. Just raw anxiety, seemingly disconnected from anything.[...] Talking lessened my anxiety and I felt peaceful again. No one can ever heal this wound, but when I can talk about it with a good friend I feel better.[...] It is such a familiar wound. It has been with me for many years. I don’t think this wound- this immense need for affection, and this immense fear of rejection- will ever go away. It is there to stay, but may be for a good reason. Perhaps it is a gateway to my salvation, a door to glory, and a passage to freedom! I am aware that this wound of mine is a gift in disguise. These many short but intense experiences of abandonment lead me to the place where I am learning to let go off fear and surrender my spirit into the hands of the One whose acceptance has no limits.”<sup>138</sup>

Nouwen’s account about his inner anguish written during his sabbatical and final year shows that he carried his wound throughout his life. “For some reason I feel quite anxious interiorly. I realize that I am walking around with some deep, unresolved emotions and that not much is needed to bring them to the surface and throw me off balance. I wasn’t expecting this but I feel quiet powerless in the face of these free-floating emotions of love, hate, rejection, attraction, gratitude, and regret. I wish I could come to a new peace but after so many years I fear that new tensions instead of peace may be in store. I know that prayer is very important at this moment.”<sup>139</sup>

Nouwen is deeply moved by the performance of the flying Rodleights and connected it to a deep spirituality. “It is hard to describe, but it is the emotion coming from the experience of an en fleshed spirituality. Body and spirit are fully united. The body in its beauty and elegance expresses the spirit of love, friendship, family, and community, and the spirit

---

<sup>135</sup> (Jonas feels that as a trained psychologist he would have been aware of the implications of the strained relationship with his parents and that grieving over it or showing anger at it was the right thing leading to self-acceptance and healing. He should have openly accepted the fact that his parents did not acknowledge or appreciate his rich emotional life.)

<sup>136</sup> Jonas, Henri Nouwen xxxviii-xxxix.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. XI.

<sup>138</sup> Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey 24 -25.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 160.

never leaves the here and now of the body.”<sup>140</sup>

Nouwen confessed that the reason why he was so taken up by the flying Rodleights (trapeze artists) was his own longing for affection which often led to frustration or depression. “They brought back in a vivid way the longings I had had as a seventeen-year-old boy for communion, community, and intimacy. Many of these longings went underground during my time at the seminary and the university and my years of teaching. They only manifested themselves in occasional mental wanderings, curiosities, and feelings of anguish. When I went to L’Arche I allowed all these feelings and emotions and passions to re-emerge. But seeing the Rodleights catapulted me into a new consciousness. There in the air I saw the artistic realization of my deepest yearnings. It was so intense that even today I do not dare to write about it because it requires a radical new step not only in my writing but also in my life.”<sup>141</sup> His own woundedness helped him to understand God’s love and the essence of prayer in different ways. Letting go and being caught is the essence of spirituality.

According to Ford Henri needed affirmation, got a lot of it but had never enough of it due to the deep seated anxiety caused by the strained father-son relationship.<sup>142</sup> He feels that Nouwen had a father who pushed him too much to perfection so that he was afraid of criticism and longed for praise.<sup>143</sup> He finds in Nouwen a sort of compulsion to be the perfect and ideal Priest because of his fame and high esteem from the people.<sup>144</sup> Henri needed intimacy and when he missed love he looked for admiration.<sup>145</sup>

The wound of love, accounted for the loneliness in his pioneering works was the source of his creativity but also the source of his despair. In him from an inflamed wound of love emerged also the gift to heal. The power of his writings transformed several people. His picture of God is that of a wounded lover, one who suffers with us and in entering into a relationship with him we can slowly experience the healing. According to Ford Nouwen’s great admiration for Van Gogh and Rembrandt could be due to his identifying himself with the agonising inner journey which they had in common.

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 121,194,195. (A testimony of Chris Glaser confirms that Henri wrote about intimacy but missed intimacy. “Henri told me he believed in his vocation as a celibate priest, yet he wistfully missed a companion in life. For those wit eyes to see and hearts to recognize it within Henri’s writings, Jesus seemed sometimes to serve as a substitute for this absent partner, and his enthusiasm meeting new friends as recorded in journals, revealed his undying hope to meet that special someone.” Henri’s statement in the video documentary *Angels over the net*, “It is nice to know that when I come back from my trip, there will be somebody to grab me” shows according to Chris a missing intimacy. “Though Henri theologizes the catchers as God and our need to trust in a God who ultimately catches us, there is, in this quote, an echo of the little Henri who constantly wanted to be picked up and held as a child. And, though here he is using ‘trips’ as in flying through the air, still I can’t help but think that, given his many trips all over the world, there is something in his words of the earning of a celibate to come home to the arms of an intimate companion.” See Chris 57-58,151.)

The stay at L’arche and the friendship with the Rodleights helped Nouwen to correct his disembodied spirituality and reclaim his body and his heart. The ‘flights over the net’ helped Nouwen to discover the spiritual truth, that not the failures but the willingness to start anew gives the feeling of just beginning to live.

<sup>142</sup> Michael Ford, *The wounded Prophet* 210.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 144.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 150f.

### 1.3.4. Nouwen's struggles with his sexuality

Robert Jonas perceived Nouwen's struggle with his sexuality in a very balanced way and writes about it in the following words: "Though Nouwen saw some problems with the rationale for celibacy, and though he felt sympathetic to the ordination of married priests and women, when it came to his own priestly vocation, he completely subscribed to the Roman Catholic world view. [...] Nevertheless, in spite of his intellectual commitment to celibacy, he sometimes found it exceedingly painful to avoid special relationships. All his life, Henri hungered to be 'special' in someone's eyes.[...] Henri himself was often not aware of the demands for attention that he put on certain close friends. Therefore, it was a complete surprise to him when they sometimes withdrew. He struggled to bring his instinctive reactions of anger and resentment to prayer. And his prayer would sometimes be flooded with the guilt of knowing he had gone too far. He often felt guilty and ashamed of his sexual feelings, even though his theology and his counselling to married people affirmed the goodness of sexuality and its share in divinity. [...] Most often Henri could not help but label all his erotic urges as mere 'lust'. He did not like the messiness of his emotional needs. He wished that his yearnings for love, attention, and affection could be met entirely in his relationship with Jesus, and he tried to live as if that were true, even when he felt no consolation."<sup>146</sup> Jonas adds further, "He had always had a difficult time listening to his body. He was much more interested in the life of the mind and tended to see his body as an encumbrance."<sup>147</sup> During the therapy in Winnipeg "He was learning the importance of allowing himself to be physically held and to know that such holding did not have to be erotic."<sup>148</sup>

According to Ford Nouwen's woundedness is also connected to his sexuality. Although Nouwen wrote frankly about his most personal feelings, Ford feels that there were also certain things which he did not find apt to make known.<sup>149</sup> Ford has researched deeper into Nouwen's struggle with his sexuality and concludes that Henri was a gay.<sup>150</sup> Michael Harank, Nouwen's part-time assistant at Harvard who honestly accepted himself as a gay, confesses "It was clear to me from the very beginning of our relationship that Henri was a gay man, but he was not able to say those words for a very long time. However he was eventually able to share with a small circle of friends that he was a gay. That he could share this truth gave him an enormous sense of relief"<sup>151</sup>. Harank sees the problem in the lack of a healthy theology towards sexuality, which should understand sexuality as one of God's most beautiful gifts.

Ford doubts the fear of rejection as the reason for Nouwen's not openly defending the homosexuality. Ford points out that Henri himself confessed that he had a homosexual orientation already at the age of six.<sup>152</sup> Regarding the same theme Robert Jonas feels that Henri was an enormously generous person with his time and kind gestures but suffered greatly from the need for attention and love. He counselled others to affirm the goodness of their sexuality and its share in the divinity but was ashamed of his own sexuality and

---

<sup>146</sup> Robert Jonas, *Henri Nouwen* Iv.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* Lvii.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* Iviii.

<sup>149</sup> Ford, *The Wounded Prophet* xv.

<sup>150</sup> From the accounts of Ford it is difficult to distinguish between whether it was only a tendency or a practice.

<sup>151</sup> Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 66.

<sup>152</sup> *Cfr. Ibid.* 73.

suffered great guilt feelings.<sup>153</sup>

Ford made a detailed study of Henri's struggle with his sexuality. According to him Nouwen was at one time true to the church teaching and was unsympathetic to the homosexuals. But later he advocated that the church should have a relaxed and unfearful approach to it. Henri himself struggled with it but did not dare to speak it out and Ford interprets Nouwen's having the icon of John the evangelist with Christ titled *Christ the Bridegroom*<sup>154</sup> as a way of dealing with and offering up his sexual struggles.<sup>155</sup> It may be necessary to clarify that Ford's claim can also mean that Nouwen had this tendency and that he had great struggle with it but may not have practiced it. Nouwen's high esteem for celibacy, loyalty to the church and fidelity to priesthood are factors that speak against an active gay life. Christopher de Vinck feels that Nouwen spoke of his attachment to friends but the vows kept him from consummating.<sup>156</sup>

Nouwen's view on homosexuality emerged clearer as he grew spiritually. "My own thoughts and emotions around this subject are very conflicted. Years of Catholic education and seminary training have caused me to internalise the Catholic Church's position. Still, my emotional development and my friendship with many homosexual people, as well as the recent literature on the subject, have raised many questions for me. There is a huge gap between my internalised homophobia and my increasing conviction that homosexuality is not a curse but a blessing for our society."<sup>157</sup> Ford sees in Nouwen a certain maturing in his sexuality and spirituality in the way he accompanied people who died of Aids and showed understanding towards the Homosexuals.

### 1.3.5. A generous and demanding friend

Nouwen had a great gift of friendship and for him friendship meant a lot. Nouwen disclosed himself a lot and made the impression to every friend that he was the best. At the sudden disappearance of friends he often experienced a sense of disintegration. He could count around 1500 friends, a man with 'connections'. Ford describes Nouwen as a complex personality. When friends after a friendly get-together took leave, he felt himself vanishing or in the midst of nowhere. Nouwen longed for friendship and hospitality which he himself offered faithfully. In fact he suffered from the poverty of being at the top.<sup>158</sup> He was sensitive, restless and needed friends to give expression to his inner struggles. The deprivation of love and friendship as child and in the seminary caused a longing for the same and he wanted generous and unconditional love as he himself offered, not as an author but as a human being.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>153</sup> Cfr. Robert A Jonas; Henri Nouwen Iv.

<sup>154</sup> Nouwen got this picture painted by Robert Lentz who was expelled from the monastery for being a gay although he did not practice it. Lentz had great understanding for Nouwen and says that the icon helped Nouwen to offer his homosexual feelings to the incarnated God. It was a physical reminder of his struggles and the desire to remain celibate. Lentz criticizes the hard position of the church towards homosexuals and says that celibacy is often misused to as an investment to buy power. Cfr. Ford, p. 142-144.

<sup>155</sup> Cfr. Michael Ford , Wounded Prophet 140ff.

<sup>156</sup> Vinck, Nouwen Then 35. (According to Chris labeling Nouwen as Homosexual, as claimed by Ford, or as a 'gay theologian' is categorizing Nouwen into a 'type' after considering only a glimpse of his life. This may be what Nouwen himself feared. Cfr. Chris, Henri's Mantle 168.)

<sup>157</sup> Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey 27.

<sup>158</sup> Michael Ford, Wounded Prophet 38 (there was a crack in the relationship and that caused Nouwen's breakdown.)

<sup>159</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 40f.

Nouwen was sensitive, restless and needed friends to give expression to his inner struggles. He had several friends but he also looked for someone with whom he could speak about everything. In Nathan Ball he found a sacred friendship<sup>160</sup> which was also the cause of a psychological breakdown. Nouwen refers to Nathan Ball very often in his writings and in the book *The inner voice of love* he describes the situations leading to the depression and how the friendship became deeper and stronger after the incident.

Nouwen describes their friendship as follows, “The great joy of our friendship is that we both deeply feel that it is Jesus who has brought us together so that we would be able to help each other to grow closer to him. Therefore we want to spend time together in prayer and silence acknowledging that the love we feel for each other is a love that is not of our own making.”<sup>161</sup>

At another place he writes “I will never think about this year without a deep gratitude for my friendship with Nathan and our long hours of sharing our joys and pains. Often it seems to me that the main reason for my being in Trosly was to be given this friendship as the safe context for a new vocation. Whatever happens at Daybreak, I am not going to be alone in my struggle, and Nathan will be there with me to keep me faithful to my promises.”<sup>162</sup>

It was clearly a deep and loving friendship between two intellectuals, an extrovert and an introvert, who shared a great love of the spiritual.

“Tomorrow Nathan is coming, and that makes me happy. [...] What a joy it will be to welcome him, show him my new home, and celebrate our friendship in prayer, meals, trips, and good conversation.[...]It is a joy for me to be able to have a friend who offers me trust, love, and safety and from whom I have no secrets.[...]Our friendship began in France and grew strong over the first year. Later, at Daybreak there were many stresses, and because I became too dependant, the friendship finally broke. This breakage triggered many things in me, and the pain of our separation was so deep that I had to leave the community for six months to try to rediscover trust and re-find hope. Without any doubt those were some of the hardest and most agonizing months of my life. During that time I wondered if I would ever return to Daybreak and live in the same community with Nathan. When the time was right I did return and ever-so-gradually the friendship was restored, and even deepened. Today we are committed friends, as people of faith, as co-leaders of Daybreak, and as men committed to share with and support each other.[...] During our supper Nathan challenged me to be less complaining and more affirmative. ‘When you say yes to an invitation, don’t complain that you are too busy, and when things go well for you, don’t make ambivalent statements about it as if you still need some special sympathy’. I thought I was beyond my complaining attitude but he was pointing out that they keep creeping up and preventing me from fully claiming the joy and

---

<sup>160</sup> Cfr. Ford, *The Wounded Prophet* 68.

<sup>161</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 175.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* 216.

peace that is mine.”<sup>163</sup>

Henri was generous and expected others to be generous. “As far as he was concerned, people should be giving each other flowers and other little gifts all the time. But when they didn’t, and when he noticed that he gave more of these things than he received, he struggled not to become depressed.”<sup>164</sup> Despite fame and public attention Nouwen’s life was deeply nourished by the daily Eucharist and by daily periods of silence and prayer. “But in his social life, especially with close friends and family, he felt a steady yearning for more: more love, more attention, more little reminders that he was special. Henri did enjoy the gratification of seeing five hundred, a thousand, sometimes two thousand people in his audience, eager to hear his message. But more and more, he also felt an aversion to such large, popular events. Henri struggled with this ambivalence until the day he died. He lived the irony of giving large audiences a hopeful message about their freedom and ultimate belovedness in God, but then often returning to his lonely room with an unshakable sense of emptiness and forsakenness. Since he knew someone in just about every time zone, he often stayed up late talking to friends on the telephone, relaxing into their voices and stories.”<sup>165</sup>

Nouwen was aware of his fragility even when everything went well. “These days I feel strong, alive and full of energy. Still, I am aware that much of that well-being is the direct result of the loving support of many friends.[...] In situations like this I easily forget how fragile I am inside, and how little is needed to throw me off balance. A small rejection, a light criticism might be enough to make me doubt my self-worth and even lose my self-confidence.”<sup>166</sup>

### 1.3.6. Ups and downs

There is no doubt that Nouwen made it to the top, what a priest-psychologist can attain. He was a renowned teacher and speaker with lecture-halls and auditoriums full to the maximum. He was a proved writer who made a difference in the lives of several people. He moved about with easiness with senators and influential people but was also a genuine friend of the poor and those in distress. He could console the dying Cardinal Bernardine of Chicago and at the same time did not shy away from the dying Aids victims.

But there were also moments in which he himself was dragged to the depth of darkness. Nouwen himself confesses that at times he was depressive. “The emotions of loneliness, isolation, and separation are as strong today as they were yesterday. It seems as if the depression has not lost any of it’s intensity. My mind keeps asking: why does nobody show me any personal attention? [...] What I am craving is not so much recognition, praise or admiration, as simple friendship.”<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 132-135.

<sup>164</sup> Jonas, Henri Nouwen liv.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. liv- lv.

<sup>166</sup> Nouwen, Sabbatical journey. 131. (Nouwen’s confession of his weaknesses and failures is in accordance with his concept of a minister who is supposed to be a confessor of himself.)

<sup>167</sup> Nouwen, Gracias 131. (The agony at the sexual level and the wounded child in him cast a great shadow that followed Henri always and which threw him at times into an inner darkness. )

The sudden interruption of the friendship<sup>168</sup>, sparked off the deep crisis in 1988 leading to depression which is narrated in the *Inner Voice of love* and Nouwen needed not only psychotherapy but also emotional and spiritual support which he found in a community in Winnipeg, Canada. He stayed in this small Christian treatment facility for seven months.

Patricia and Bart Gavigan, a couple with lots of experience in pastoral counselling, were friends of Nouwen and played a crucial role in helping him during his bleakest period. According to them the essence of Nouwen's struggle was his humanity rather than his sexuality. They discovered that besides the highly developed side of his personality namely a fine priest, a good scholar, a talented linguist, a brilliant teacher and a popular writer there were underdeveloped areas in his person: his ability to be faithful in friendships, to trust love, to believe his value regardless of his gifts, and to have significant relations that were not based on what he could do or what he could produce- in other words to be a person.

Through different therapeutic methods at the spiritual, psychological and personal levels Nouwen was provided an utterly safe, comprehensive relationship that allowed him to *be* which encouraged him to get into his body and into his prayer. Nouwen was a wounded child who needed to be held in a safe way with great purity.<sup>169</sup> The healing process consisted of being held physically with an enormous amount of nurture and tenderness.<sup>170</sup> Nouwen was helped to come in touch with his own body. He once again had to find his 'bearings'.<sup>171</sup> Daybreak was a safe home where the people with developmental disabilities around him proved to be a revelation of his own brokenness.

Nouwen's restlessness and woundedness did not hinder him from acting and speaking prophetically. According to Ford Nouwen's courage to make a public statement to a congregation of young students from a catholic high school, affirming the integrity of a homosexual relationship was as powerful as his speech against the U.S. policy in Nicaragua. "It illustrated the deep changes he was undergoing toward the end of his life and indicated something about the maturing of his own sexual identity. His increasing friendships with gay people, his private support to homosexuals in relationships, and his work for the National Catholic AIDS Network- all paralleled by his ministry at L'Arche-suggest that Henri Nouwen was gradually finding his own peace as a priest to the marginalized."<sup>172</sup>

### 1.3.7. An ardent Writer

Nouwen himself wrote how important it was for him to write. "For me writing is a very powerful way of concentrating and of clarifying for myself many thoughts and feelings. Once I put my pen on paper and write for an hour or two, a real sense of peace and harmony comes to me."<sup>173</sup>

Writing was the one thing which remained consistent and important for Nouwen. "Without writing I am not truly faithful to the ministry of the word that has been given to me. It is through writing that my hidden life with God and the handicapped people can

<sup>168</sup> Nouwen does not mention the name of the person but it is to presume that it was probably with Nathan Ball.

<sup>169</sup> Michael Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 167-177.

<sup>170</sup> Cfr. *Ibid* 169.

<sup>171</sup> Cfr. Jonas, *Henri Nouwen* lix.

<sup>172</sup> Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 60; cfr. Ford 213.

<sup>173</sup> Nouwen, *Genesee Diary* 121.

become a gift to the church and the world.[...] Laying down your life for your friend is what Jesus asks of me. For me that includes communicating as honestly as possible the pains and the joys, the darkness and the light, the fatigue and the vitality, the despair and the hope of going with Jesus to places where I would rather not go.”<sup>174</sup>

Some of Nouwen’s writings are pure responses to his own search for spiritual clarity. His longing for affection and love and the failure to experience simple and unconditional love kept drawing him to the unquestioning and unconditional love of God as in the case of the returned prodigal son.

Nouwen not only longed for simple living but also for simple speaking and writing. “The rest of the day I spent preparing for the evening presentation: *Can you drink the cup?* Since I have been writing about this question during the last month, my problem was not ideas or materials but simplification. I had quite a struggle to keep it simple, direct and penetrating, and not get lost in interesting but irrelevant details.”<sup>175</sup> His capacity to connect psychology and mysticism has won him several readers.

Nouwen’s life was an ‘organized chaos’ and he loved the freedom of interpretation. Although a serious man Nouwen had his clownishness too.<sup>176</sup> After all he is also the author of a theology of clowning.<sup>177</sup>

According to Ford Henri wrote beyond what he could live. There were disconnections between what he wrote and lived. Quoting Carolyn Whitney- Brown, a former member of L’Arche Daybreak community, Ford substantiates his observation. In remembering Henri, Whitney-Brown thinks of two books: “one is the book that Henri wrote 40 times, yet couldn’t quite live; the other is the book that Henri lived for almost 65 years, couldn’t quite write”<sup>178</sup>. Besides the forty books Nouwen wrote hundreds of articles too. Nouwen’s compulsion to write was mostly as a source of relief, concentration and solitude amidst struggles rather than becoming an author. He also considered it a ministry to make one’s thoughts available, articulating one’s own struggles without offering any answers, acting as a catalyst.<sup>179</sup> We find a lot of repetitions but they reflect the intensity and urgency of his convictions. His aim was to keep preaching that he might be converted by his own words. Some of his books are more ‘spiritual memos’ to himself than spiritual essays. May be he was also like Merton whose style he describes as; “Merton never tried to be systematic and never worried about being consistent. He articulated skilfully and artfully the different stages of his own thoughts and experiences and moved on to new discoveries without worrying about what people made of his old ones.”<sup>180</sup>

Nouwen was irritated when he could not write as he had planned. “I just couldn’t get to my table to work on the cup book and became quite irritated and depressed.”<sup>181</sup> Fidelity to the Eucharist and loyalty to the pen was his motto. “More than ever I realize that I have to

---

<sup>174</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 227.

<sup>175</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* 48.

<sup>176</sup> Michael Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 23.

<sup>177</sup> (Henri’s book *Clowning in Rome*)

<sup>178</sup> Michael Ford, *Wounded Prophet* xv.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>180</sup> Nouwen, *Genesee* 183.

<sup>181</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* 42.

keep writing and thus serving the truth in simplicity, honesty, and humility.”<sup>182</sup>

Something very typical of Nouwen’s writing or conferences is the use of **three** points, three little words to remember. His insights were characterized by a movement from *this* to *that*. But at times he also showed that there is no magical transformation. For example, power must be discovered *in* weakness, light *in* darkness, and resurrection *in* death.<sup>183</sup> A friend of Nouwen writes: “They (Nouwen’s words) urge us to trust God and our own hearts, and trusting results in fresh and surprising insights that bring great personal enrichment for ourselves and, through us, to those whom our lives touch.”<sup>184</sup>

### 1.3.8. The Priest - Psychologist

The reason for Nouwen’s desire to study psychology is interesting. “After my ordination I was asked to continue to study theology. I asked the Bishop to change the request and to let me study psychology instead. Somewhere I then felt that theology had left a whole area of my life experience untouched. I hoped that psychology would fill the need. It did so, although only very indirectly.”<sup>185</sup> Nouwen’s continued study of the spirituality brought him to the realization that theology in the sense of ‘mystical experience of God’ is the crowning of all knowledge.

As a psychologist Nouwen could sort out some of his conflicting and contradicting feelings and take them to the spiritual realm. He says that the ‘twin Thomas’, the believing and the doubting person, is present in every individual. It is the role of the community to help individuals to grow in faith. “In times of doubt or unbelief, the community can ‘carry you along’, so to speak; it can even offer you on your behalf what you yourself overlook, and can be the context in which you may recognize the Lord again.”<sup>186</sup>

His special interest in the spirituality and his quest for mysticism is expressed in the following words. “Ever since my studies for the priesthood I have felt especially attracted to what was then called, ‘Ascetical and Mystical Theology’ and all my other studies in psychology, sociology and similar fields never seemed fruitful for me unless they led me to a deeper understanding of the question of spiritual life. I have always moved from the psychological to the theological level and from clinical considerations to spiritual concerns.”<sup>187</sup>

According to Nouwen a highly developed psychological consciousness can prevent us from reaching that place in us where the healing powers are hidden, the place called heart. Heart is the place of trust, a trust that can be called faith, hope or love, depending on how it is being manifested. The ability of the heart to trust makes us truly human. The conscience

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>183</sup> Cfr. Jonas, Henri Nouwen xxxv.

<sup>184</sup> Vinck, Nouwen Then 47.

<sup>185</sup> Nouwen, Genesee Diary 172.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 207

acts more at the moral level. “When the moral life gets all the attention, we are in danger of forgetting the primacy of the mystical life, which is the life of the heart.”<sup>188</sup> Here we see the reason why Nouwen always wanted to go beyond ‘issues’ into the realm of mysticism. Following the ideas of one of his mentors, Pere Thomas, cofounder of L’Arche, Nouwen says that the mystical life lies at the beginning of our existence and not just at its end. “Our heart is that divine gift which allows us to trust not just God, but also our mother, our father, our family, ourselves and the world.”<sup>189</sup> That is the reason why children have a very deep, intuitive knowledge of God, a knowledge of the heart, that gets obscured and suffocated in the course of time. Thus the heart is seated beyond knowledge and is much wider and deeper than affections. “It is before and beyond the distinctions between sorrow and joy, anger and lust, fear and love. It is the place where all is one in God, the place where we truly belong, the place from which we come and to which we always yearn to return.”<sup>190</sup> This is closely connected to Nouwen’s favourite theme, the first love.

Some of Nouwen’s students became his later friends and were successful ministers like Father Don Mc Neill, who founded and still directs the university’s centre for social concerns. Nouwen contributed to psychology by emphasising the people’s experiences at a time the classical behaviourism understood psychology as a science and emphasised the behaviour. He pointed out to the transcendental dimension of psychology and the necessity of connecting the Gospel to human experiences. He loved psychology from a pastoral purpose. “I didn’t study psychology to become a psychologist. I studied psychology more to be able to be a better minister, to, in a way, connect the message of the Gospel more directly with the very concrete human experience of every day.”<sup>191</sup> His quest to go further from the level of psychology and his fascination for the charismatic movement which stressed the inner conversion and community life made him to connect psychology to theology.

Nouwen emphasised the connection between theology and prayer. He believed that prayer, community and ministry are integral parts of true theological understanding. The study of theology must have a prayerful quality about it. A theological question is not an attempt to disqualify what is present but a prayerful request to be more deeply led into the truth. “The purpose of theological understanding is not to grasp, control or even use God’s word but to become increasingly willing to let the word of God speak to us, guide us, move us and lead us to places far beyond our own comprehension”.<sup>192</sup>

He was very faithful to the celebration of the Eucharist but rather loose towards the church position. Henri with a great talent to articulate what was in his heart sought for the questions ‘from below’, answers ‘from above’.<sup>193</sup>

He kept himself away from church ‘issues’ which were political battles for power rather than spiritual search for the truth.<sup>194</sup> His Christian faith was such that he had a profound sense of freedom and a deep sense of fidelity to the tradition. For some people freedom means break away from the past tradition. But Nouwen sees the past as the ground for our

<sup>188</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 48.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* 48.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* 59.

<sup>191</sup> Vinck, *Nouwen Then* 132.

<sup>192</sup> Michael Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 107. (Taken from one of Nouwen’s Articles in *Reflection*)

<sup>193</sup> *Cfr. Ibid.* 6-9

<sup>194</sup> *Cfr. Nouwen, In the name of Jesus* 30.

roots. That must be the reason for his great attraction to the orthodox church. Henri by studying intensely the eastern and western spirituality and by honestly seeking an answer to his internal conflicts could attain a mystical prayer life. The practice of prayer did not come easily. His deepest contemplative moments were reached in writing in which he often found solitude and the centre of himself.<sup>195</sup> Henri showed preference to spiritual guidance more than to psychotherapy to solve his unmet needs.

### 1.3.9 A social critic

Henri wanted to be identified with the disenfranchised. The days in the ‘missions’ created a social dimension to Nouwen’s spiritual journey. Nouwen brought together contemplation and active commitment to social change. At the end of his first teaching semester in Harvard Nouwen went to Mexico and then to Nicaragua. Along with experiencing the social realities there he did not forget to celebrate Eucharist and pray with them. During his contacts with the Sandinista leaders he drew their attention to the true meaning of compassion. Ford portrays Nouwen as “a mixture of evangelical preacher, Harvard intellectual and a catholic saint”<sup>196</sup>.

His vision of peace and justice and socio-political activities speak clearly that all work for peace and justice must not be grounded in fear and hatred but in love. Henri hoped in a non-violent evolution of peace and justice. During the Latin American stay his mind was occupied not only with the question of his vocation but also with thoughts about a more just and peaceful world. Henri had a consistent position about peace. Peacemaking is possible only when we relinquish our private agendas and turn inwardly to Jesus who points to Abba as the source of peace, justice, goodness, mercy, love, and creativity. In the struggle for justice and peace both the dangers must be avoided; that of acquiescence to oppression and rage. Activism leads to fanaticism which is not guided by the joy and peace of God’s Kingdom, but by a human instinct seeking to replace one form of oppression with another.<sup>197</sup> True peacemakers stand firm in the affirmation of all people, regardless of race, class, gender or social role.

In Nouwen one can trace the elements of both physical participation and witness as well as critical voicing against social injustices<sup>198</sup>. His campaign against Reagan-administration’s policy towards Nicaragua is an example of his political awareness and active involvement. But the centre of his action was the theology of compassion and ministry of peace and justice, using the weapon of pen, an activism of active compassion. Nouwen was a prophet not in the sense of a fearless proclaimer but in the sense of a person who cannot be controlled or assimilated by human ideologies and systems, who judge and love the world by divine standards of justice and compassion.<sup>199</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> Cfr. Ford, *The Wounded Prophet* 12.

<sup>196</sup> Michael Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 137.

<sup>197</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Gracias* 138.

<sup>198</sup> The days in the ‘missions’ created a social dimension to Nouwen’s spiritual journey. He brought together contemplation and active commitment to social change.

<sup>199</sup> Cfr. Ford, *Wounded Prophet* 214.

### 1.3.10 An intensive and sensitive Preacher

Nouwen was ecumenical and a good preacher and in the opinion of Ford Nouwen had at times some premonition or a psycho-spiritual experience of losing his identity in a crowd because it was so painful for him to maintain the boundaries of giving himself to others and his own identity and integrity.<sup>200</sup> He was someone who intensely gave himself to others without thinking of his own identity. He was clear about what he wanted to communicate and in the midst of words and gestures there was a tremendous focus on what he wanted to communicate.

Beumer who has heard him speak says that “His arms and legs were fully engaged when he spoke to a room full of people. And in the heat of the arguments his whole body danced around the podium. [...] His listeners and readers were given a ‘wide berth’ pulled out of the oppressiveness of their daily occupations.”<sup>201</sup>

Jonas’s memory as a student runs as follows, “I watched him roam the hall, gesturing wildly with his large hands, sometimes closing his eyes in deep concentration, sometimes rocking forward on tiptoe in the exhilaration of an ecstatic vision that became more and more vivid to him, and to us, as he declared its reality.”<sup>202</sup> According to Jonas Nouwen spoke so convincingly about the mystical theology of John and wanted that his listeners not only *heard* the word but also *saw* the word made flesh. One who listened with the heart would feel that the unfinished, incomplete story of Jesus must be completed through the incarnation of our own lives.

Nouwen realized that touching the life realities and letting the uplifting message emerge spontaneously is more effective than his usual approach of a moralistic presentation of the message. “May be I have been afraid to touch the wet soil from which new life comes forth and anxious about the outcome of an open-ended story.”<sup>203</sup>

In 1992 the televising of the ‘Hour of power’ in which he gave a series of talks made him well-known among the Protestants, and in a survey of 1994 ranking second only to Lyle Schaller and ahead of Billy Graham.<sup>204</sup>

Nouwen wrote about the reasons to leave Harvard, namely uncertainty about his real call by God, too much of academic competition, too little intimacy and the lack of community. Ford thinks that possibly the discrepancy between what he really was and the enormous praise he got from the students made him uneasy to teach there.<sup>205</sup> In his comment on Nouwen Jim Dittes says that he was confident, but troubled, more intuitive than systematic, artistic, tactless but with a huge ego. He loved being a centre stage<sup>206</sup>

According to Christopher de Vinck Henri touched many people with his honesty, his wisdom and his panic and joy.<sup>207</sup> He made people feel special and holy and loved and interesting and he was a man on a journey. He had a way of meeting people and making

---

<sup>200</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 37.

<sup>201</sup> Jurjen Beumer, Henri Nouwen 166f.

<sup>202</sup> Jonas, Henri Nouwen xviii

<sup>203</sup> Nouwen Sabbatical Journey 10.

<sup>204</sup> Cfr. Robert Jonas; Henri Nouwen Iviii

<sup>205</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 139.

<sup>206</sup> Cfr. Michael Ford, Wounded Prophet 113.

<sup>207</sup> Vinck, Nouwen Then 16.

them feel good. Henri discovered the individual's longing to be 'well doing' and he asserted that the well doing is there even in the midst of sadness.

The legacy of Henri according to Philip Yancey<sup>208</sup> "consists for some (people) of his many books, for others his role as a bridge between Catholics and Protestants, for others his distinguished career at Ivy League Universities. For me, though, a single image captures him best; the energetic priest, hair in disarray, using his restless hands as if to fashion a homily out of thin air, celebrating an eloquent birthday Eucharist for an unresponsive child-man so damaged that many parents would have him aborted. A better symbol of the Incarnation I can hardly imagine"<sup>209</sup>. Henri was interested in living a million small and concrete kindnesses; eyes filled with light and attention; ears quick to hear; feet and hands eager to serve. He modelled fellowship over competition. He offered the light of life over the heat of self asserting ideas. He valued simplicity to scholarship, wisdom to knowledge and transformation to information.

Nouwen had to fight his own contradictions. "I can't tolerate wasting time, even though I want to write about wasting time with God, with friends, or with the poor! There are many contradictions within me. [...] The distance between insight and practice is huge."<sup>210</sup>

During his last years Nouwen often complained about fatigue. He looked for ways to make this experience to help deepen his soul. His own fatigue helped him to see the great fatigue of the human race and respond to the invitation of Jesus to take on God's burden which is light. Ford feels that Nouwen was burnt out because he tried to be all to all.

As theologian and teacher Nouwen did not remain at the intellectual luxury but moved far outside his own protected Catholic community for conversation, music and books. For Nouwen ministry as "a bridge over troubled waters"<sup>211</sup> was a meaningful image.

Henri avoided direct criticism of persons and institutions, focussing instead on the positive motivating vision of the Good News.

### 1.3.11 Growing in Maturity

Nouwen slowly became emotionally and spiritually mature. His struggles continued but he became more free, confident and enthusiastic about beginning a new life. He realized that internal peace is achieved when all the parts, the whole being, belongs to Jesus. "The anxiety that has plagued me during the last week shows that a great part of me is not yet 'abiding' in Jesus. My mind and heart keep running away from my true dwelling place, and they explore strange lands where I end up in anger, resentment, lust, fear, and anguish. I know that living a spiritual life means bringing every part of myself home to where it belongs."<sup>212</sup>

With the sabbatical year Nouwen wanted to end another phase of his life and begin a new one. "Deep within myself I feel that something new wants to be born: a book with stories, a novel, a spiritual journal- something quite different from what I have done in the past.

---

<sup>208</sup> Philip Yancey is the editor-at-large for *Christianity Today* and the co-editor of *Student Bible*. He is the author of several best-seller books and lives with his wife in Colorado.

<sup>209</sup> Vinck, Nouwen Then. 39.

<sup>210</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* 13.

<sup>211</sup> The sentence comes from the famous singer Paul Simon.

<sup>212</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* 165.

There is a sense of conclusion and new beginnings. This sabbatical year seems to be the year of transition from an active travelling life to a life of contemplation and writing. I realize, though, that it will require a lot of discipline to refocus my life. But without such a refocusing I will end up busy, restless and always looking for human affirmation. It's time to make a radical choice for solitude, prayer, and quiet writing."<sup>213</sup>

The restless and wounded Nouwen became peaceful and reconciled. Celebrating the ninety-third birthday of his father, Nouwen confessed that it took him a long time to find his way to his father. "It is for me the best time we have ever had together. May be he had to be ninety-three and I had to be sixty-four to make this possible! Thirty years ago the closeness that now exists between us was unthinkable. Then it was my mother who offered closeness, affection, and personal care. My father seemed more distant. He was the provider who loved his wife, expected much of his children, worked hard, and discussed important issues. A virtuous, righteous man, but I found it difficult to feel intimate with him. [...]When I was thirty-two and my father was sixty-one, we belonged to different generations and we were far apart. Today it seems that we have become part of the same generation and grow very close, close to death and close to each other."<sup>214</sup>

Nouwen's description of his stay with Jonas and the spiritual atmosphere in Empty Bell, Jonas's prayer-centre, shows that Nouwen longed for a more simple and quiet life. "What better place for me to live my sabbatical? A place where psychology and spirituality meet, a place of prayer and contemplation, a place of family life and inter-religious dialogue, a place of solitude, and a place of friendship, a place for children and adults. This is not a big centre or gathering place. It is very simple, small, and intimate."<sup>215</sup>

Nouwen lived his wound and used his wound as a means of his own transformation. In his own words:

"Most of all, I found new confidence in myself through the gradual renewal of the friendship that had triggered my anguish.[...] This does not mean that there are no longer tensions or conflicts, or that moments of desolation, fear, anger, jealousy, or resentment are completely absent. There is hardly a day without some dark clouds drifting by. But today I recognize them for what they are without putting my head in them! I have also learned to catch the darkness early, not to allow sadness to grow into depression or let a sense of being rejected develop into a feeling of abandonment.[...] Many friends and family members have died during the past eight years, and my own death is not so far away. But I have heard the inner voice of love, deeper and stronger than ever. I want to keep trusting in that voice and be led by it beyond the boundaries of my short life, to where God is all in all."<sup>216</sup>

Nouwen's strong faith led him from anguish to freedom. His agony turned out to be a fertile ground for greater trust, stronger hope, and deeper love.

---

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 81-82.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>216</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of love* 116-118.

Nouwen's inner transformation is visible in the changing priorities.

“My Week in Boston, New York, and Richmond Hill informs me that my inner priorities are quietly shifting. Instead of yearning to be among many people, I yearn for intimate friendships. Instead of wanting to lecture to large groups, I desire to speak to a few people. Instead of being excited about huge celebrations and liturgies, I feel inspired by small prayer gatherings, and instead of enjoying travelling and moving around a lot, I feel most happy in my little room writing for long hours. I know that these shifts are taking place within me, but my old self keeps acting as if they are not happening and I am still planning much more than is good for me. It will probably be a few years before my new self is fully in control.”<sup>217</sup>

In his writing Nouwen reflects the maturing and discovering of himself. “I am pondering new writing, new thinking and a new way of living after this sabbatical is over.[...] But whether it is a book about Adam or one about the Rodleights, it is always going to be a book about me. It is my experience of Adam and the Rodleights that finally makes a book about them possible.”<sup>218</sup>

The desire for and the new freedom and courage to write as he wanted is clearly mentioned in his journal. “Without wanting to, I feel a certain pressure within me to keep living up to that reputation and to do, say, and write things that fit the expectations of the Catholic Church, L’Arche, my family, my friends, my readers. I’m caught because I’m feeling that there is some kind of an agenda that I must follow in order to be faithful. But since I am in my sixties, new thoughts, feelings, emotions, and passions have risen within me that are not all in line with my previous thoughts, feelings, emotions, and passions. So I find myself asking, What is my responsibility to the world around me, and what is my responsibility to myself? What does it mean to be faithful to my vocation? Does it require that I be consistent with my earlier way of living or thinking, or does it ask for the courage to move in new directions, even when doing so may be disappointing for some people.”<sup>219</sup>

Answering to a question about the most important things in his life Nouwen says, “Well, three things: living a vision inspired by the Gospel of Jesus; being close to the poor, the handicapped, the sick, and the dying; and finding a way to satisfy my deep yearning for intimacy and affection.”<sup>220</sup>

According to Nathan Henri lived and died well and entered into his dream home. “Although he was fully expecting to live for many more years, Henri was not afraid to die. He had many struggles and had shared them openly with his friends and through his numerous writings. But this I know: Henri died at peace with himself, his family, his own faith community of L’Arche, his friends, his vocation as a priest, and the God whose

---

<sup>217</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* 144.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* 171.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* 168. (Here we find again hints about his struggle, probably his sexual struggle and the lack of courage to move away from the strict position of the Catholic Church)

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.* 170.

everlasting love had been Henri's beacon for sixty-four years."<sup>221</sup>

Robert Jonas values the life and the writings of Nouwen in the following words: "Henri's friends remember clearly his ordinary human weakness, especially the rapacious yearnings and temptations that assailed him from his depths. We think about his many books- more than forty in all- in which he courageously stood with one foot in the shadow of self-rejection and one foot in the daylight of God's love. We know that he stood there for all of us, articulating so simply and beautifully what that wild, dangerous territory between the human and divine looks like. Many of us would have preferred that Henri's human woundedness be less visible. But somehow, we know that his ever-present, accompanying shadow was there only because of the light in which he walked."<sup>222</sup>

According to Christopher de Vinck Henri was a messenger of hope and salvation. He was an articulator of the inner movements. "He was a man of faith, a simple faith that did not get lost in academic, cumbersome definitions. Henri refused to allow his Christian faith to be categorized as catholic or evangelical. I think of Henri's expression of faith as I think of Walt Whitman's expression of the soul or Carl Sandburg's definition of a nation: all one soul, the people, yes, all one person.[...]For many people Henri was able to articulate the 'well doing' that we seek during the confusing and difficult times that we sometimes have to endure. For others Henri was able to corroborate what was already in their souls: that conviction that such 'well doing' was already there, even in sadness."<sup>223</sup> He could urge people to be hopeful, faithful and trusting, even in the midst of darkness and evil forces, because he trusted in God's promises. God is present even in the midst of sadness and failures.

Henri made many people he met feel as if they were special, as if they mattered, as if they were someone extraordinary. Nouwen teaches that we are on a journey, that everyone has to make his own journey, that we need fellow-travellers, that we need to know that there is an invisible self, an inside self. This journey needs nourishment on the way, renewed courage every time we are disheartened, an open heart, a strong faith, and the knowledge of the beginning and the end of the journey.<sup>224</sup> Henri focussed on God's presence here and now and that helped many to find themselves again in the spiritual pursuit. "Henri's companionship had prepared me to look at life with new eyes, with a certain attentiveness, with a certain expectation. From this new vantage point, I began to see the look, hear the voice, feel the activity of something that just might be ripples of the presence of God. I began to touch the God who waits for me, longs for me and hopes that I will meet Christ in every part of my life, every dimension of this world."<sup>225</sup>

#### **1.4. A summary of the Bibliography**

From the biography it is rather clear that for Nouwen writing was his 'second nature'. He wrote in order to get concentration, clarity and consolation. For him writing was also ministry. Most of his books are compilations of his lectures and conferences.

---

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. 226.

<sup>222</sup> Robert Jonas, Henri Nouwen xiv

<sup>223</sup> Vinck, Nouwen Then 11-12.

<sup>224</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 19.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. 91.

#### 1.4.1. Lectures and conferences

All that Nouwen wrote is not yet completely sorted out and made accessible for the public. The most important books which were published are:

During his Notre Dame years he wrote *Intimacy* and *Creative Ministry* which made him well known in the academic world. His teaching career in Yale brought out *The Wounded Healer*, *The Living Reminder*, *Clowning in Rome* and *In the Name of Jesus*

#### 1.4.2. Journals and Diaries

During a retreat at the Abby Nouwen wrote *Genesee Diary* The Latin American interlude shaped *Gracias* and *Love in a Fearful Land*. The result of his search for a true break through in his life is described in *The Road to Daybreak* The fruit of his sabbatical year is the *Sabbatical Journey*.

#### 1.4.3. Meditations and prayers

Most of Nouwen's books belong to this category. Between 1972 and 1982 he wrote *With Open Hands*, *Aging*, *Out of Solitude*, *Reaching Out*, *The Way of the Heart*, *Making all Things New*, *A Cry for Mercy* and *Compassion*. During his stay at L'Arche he wrote *Lifesigns*, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord*, *Letters to Marc about Jesus*, *Heart Speaks to Heart*, *Beyond the Mirror*, *Walk with Jesus*, *Show Me the Way*, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, *Life of the Beloved*, *Jesus and Mary*, *Our Greatest Gift*, *With Burning Hearts*, *Here and Now* and *The Path of Waiting-Freedom-Power-Peace*. The final year which was a sabbatical year was also spent usefully in writing the moving books: *Can you drink the cup*, *The inner voice of Love*, *Bread for the Journey*, *Adam God's beloved* and A collection of his writings on Peace and Justice which were not contained in other books was edited by John Dear under the title *The Road to Peace*.

#### 1.4.4. Dedications

Nouwen's closeness to his parents and to the spiritual author Thomas Merton are expressed in the books *In Memoriam*, *A Letter of Consolation* and *Thomas Merton*,

Three Henri Nouwen Readers appeared between 1988-89: *Henri Nouwen: arranged for daily reading*, *The primacy of the Heart* and *Seeds of Hope*. In 1996 and 1997 came out two 'Three in one' books *Ministry and Spirituality* and *Spiritual Journals* respectively.

In this work I am limiting to the pastoral books. Naturally I have screened through all the spiritual books and journals in view of the spirituality of the pastoral as envisaged by Nouwen. This theme is not yet worked out by other works although indications are present in the books like that of Jürgen Beumer on Nouwen. I was able to visit the Nouwen Archives but could not yet use it for this work.

### 1.5. Spreading the legacy of Nouwen

The death of Nouwen was a great loss for the Daybreak L'Arche. But following the teaching of Nouwen that life continues to bear fruit even after the death, the community and the friends of Nouwen are trying to keep his spirit alive and spread his legacy. It was Henri's dream to have a new Chapel and a new house for retreat and solitude. Through a Nouwen memorial Fund they have achieved this goal in 1999. The house for solitude is

called *Cedars*. The chapel named *Dayspring* is meant for worship and sacred meetings. The threefold mission of Dayspring, as envisaged by Nouwen is solitude, community and ministry.

There is a Henri Nouwen Literary Centre which is practically the 'Henri's office'. Sr. Sue who was named in Henri's will as Literary Executrix of his estate takes care of collecting archives, working with authors and publishers and planning projects for the future. She is helped by a team. Their mission is to gather, preserve and spread the legacy of Henri Nouwen.

Henri Nouwen Societies were formed to preserve Henri's legacy, to live the Gospel and to announce the good news. They conduct sessions, workshops and retreats. The society in New York focuses on three words that were dear to Henri: Solitude, community and compassion. The *Henri Nouwen Stichting* in Holland is chaired by Nouwen's own brother Laurent. They conduct lectures, popularize Nouwen's books in Holland and Germany and encourage spiritual writings. There is a growing interest about Nouwen in Latin America and friends of Nouwen are spreading his spirituality in South Africa. Presently there are websites for the Henri Nouwen societies in U.S.A. (<HenriNouwen.org>), Holland and South Africa. Talks, retreats, seminars and distant education courses are being offered to spread the thoughts and spirituality of Nouwen.

A *Henri J.M. Nouwen Archives and Research Collection* is built up at the University of St. Michael's College, John M. Kelly Library in Toronto.

*Daybreak Publications* is part of the life of Daybreak. They are engaged in publishing Nouwen's writings and other spiritual books. They also give out a quarterly *Letters of L'Arche*.

## Chapter 2 : The Academic Phase (1969-1981)

### Introduction

In this chapter which follows up Nouwen's upward mobility in the academic world, I am concentrating on the books written during the teaching years to see where Nouwen's concentration goes to : the language of empirical knowledge or the language of the spiritual tradition of the church. According to Nouwen the pastor is challenged not only with his professional competence but also with the struggle of his personal and spiritual development. The pastoral categories or fields, used by Nouwen attempt to point out to the functional aspect of ministry. But for Nouwen the spiritual realm also runs very close and parallel to the professional competence. It is difficult to separate them or mark out the borders. Through an analysis of the books in the historical order we can get a glimpse of the development as to which direction his attention is getting more importance.

The books will be analysed by going into the context and immediate inspiration to write it, recapturing the main contents, binding together the important points and connecting to the previous and following books.

### 2.1. Intimacy: Essays in Pastoraltheology

Parallel to his intellectual developments as trained psychologist and teacher of pastoral psychology and spirituality Nouwen kept a close watch on the developments outside and the developments within himself. This is clear from the fact that for Nouwen writing was not an isolated vocation but a confession of his own experiences and thoughts. He does not present his insights in abstract theories but in simple and direct words. His words are appealing because for him the knowledge of people, their unique life situations and experiences form the starting point of his reflections. As teacher of theology and psychology the formation of the ministers was an important concern for him. During his teaching career Nouwen came to know closer some of the problems in the training for ministry, in the ministry and in the life of the minister<sup>1</sup>. According to his friend Robert Jonas, Henri was frustrated about some of the chronic problems in the seminaries, especially the lack of a cohesive, supportive spiritual community. "Too few people lived out the joy of the Holy Spirit, too many were narrow in outlook, often depressed under the burdens of personal suffering, paperwork, or academic competition and cynicism. [...]many religious and seminary leaders were sleepwalking when they could be dancing"<sup>2</sup>

In the book *Intimacy* written in 1969 Nouwen compiles the essays in Pastoraltheology under four headings: Intimacy and sexuality, Intimacy and prayer, Intimacy and community and Intimacy and the ministry. This book which is very much pastoral and psychological, is the result of his two year stay in Notre Dame. His active participation in the campus life and his discussions with the Priests in the campus in preparing the essays on ministry helped Nouwen to be tuned to the problems of the priests on the campus and the turbulent changes in feelings, thoughts and actions of the modern society. In the first book itself we confront the problem of the spirituality of pastoral care. Although the book gives the first impression

---

<sup>1</sup> Nouwen's observation of the deficiencies in the exercise of the ministry as well as in the formation of the ministers and his conviction that ministry and spirituality are inextricably connected to each other prompted him to question the existing tendencies and deficiencies in the pastoral field and to develop his own contribution to a different pastoral approach and a spirituality of the ministry.

<sup>2</sup> Jonas, Henri Nouwen xLi.

that it contains essays on pastoral functioning with psychological insights, a closer examination shows that Nouwen looks at pastoral care from a spiritual point of view. So he begins with the question of the intimacy of the minister which is determined very much by his personality, friendships, the life circumstances etc. A maturing in his person and in his spirituality is the prerequisite for a healthy and creative pastoral care about which Nouwen writes in several of his books. In every individual there is a deep seated desire for a place of intimacy. Nouwen considers the important aspects of a creative and fulfilling intimacy with God and with one another which is applicable to celibates as well as people living a married way of life.

### 2.1.1. The Problem

Based on different questions raised by students, friends or someone connected with ministry Nouwen saw in the theme intimacy a pastoral need as well as a pastoral concern. Therefore, in this book he deals with the problem of living a creative and fulfilling intimacy with God and fellow human beings, the possibility and desirability of a fruitful intimacy with another person and the role of intimacy in the community and celibate life. Nouwen addresses a key question, namely “the priest who wonders how to understand what he sees in the light of God’s work with people”<sup>3</sup> and a unifying theme namely “how can I find a creative and fulfilling intimacy in my relationship with God and my fellow human beings”.<sup>4</sup> Intimacy or ‘desire for a real home’<sup>5</sup> has become a need for people of every aspect of life and Nouwen tries to show that the ministers need a careful balance between intimacy and distance. Before going into the various aspects of intimacy Nouwen first of all deals with a more basic question, the question of faith. He starts with a psychological perspective of religious maturity.

### 2.1.2. From magic to faith

Man is basically religious but to attain the religious maturity he has to move from the magic world to real faith. It is a gradual process embracing all the stages of life. Nouwen sees a parallel between the mental development of a child and the religious maturing. We enter into a new world as a new born child, later in the school, and finally as youth and as adult. Similarly we have to pass through different stages in the spiritual life too. We remain spiritually immature as long as God is someone who must be pacified, prayers are tools to manipulate God and religion is a soft bed without hardships.<sup>6</sup>

The question of faith is important in the context of ministry because only a minister who has attained a certain spiritual adulthood and maturity can lead others to faith. One of the barometers measuring the ministers personal and professional integrity is his attitude towards his sexuality and the way he lives it.

### 2.1.3. Intimacy and sexuality<sup>7</sup>

Nouwen explores the possibility and desirability of love. Because of the complexity of the world outside and the complexity of the inner feelings and emotions many people pose the question whether a person can truly love another. Nouwen illustrates the problem in the

---

<sup>3</sup> Nouwen, *Intimacy* 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Cfr. Ibid.* 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Cfr. Ibid.* 11. (A detailed treatment of the physical and psychological development and it’s parallel to the spiritual development is found in *Intimacy pp.5-20*)

<sup>7</sup> Here the theme is not the erotic aspect of love, instead it is about entering into a loving relationship.

following words. “The question is not, What should I do if I find myself in deep love with another stranger in this world? But rather, can this love ever be a reality at all? Many are asking themselves if we are doomed to remain strangers to each other. Is there a spark of misunderstanding in every intimate encounter, a painful experience of separateness in every attempt to unite, a fearful resistance in every act of surrender? Is there a fatal component of hate in the centre of everything we call love?”<sup>8</sup> To answer this dilemma Nouwen distinguishes between *the taking form of love* and *the forgiving form of love* and explores the possibility and desirability of love.

#### 2.1.3.1. The taking form of love

This is the form of love driven by the force of power and it is violent in nature. The taking form uses the vulnerability as a weapon to overcome the other. It is the exercise of subtle but pervasive power over the other. Often it is manipulative, vicious and destructive.

#### 2.1.3.2. The forgiving form of love

The forgiving form is a mutuality of confession and an invitation to share the existential experiences. “Love is based on the mutuality of the confession of our total self to each other.”<sup>9</sup> This form is the true form of love. It is possible but challenging. True love is truthful, accepting the basic human condition that no one has power over the other. It is tender and allows full self-expression of the other and surrenders oneself fully and fearlessly. It disarms itself by revealing oneself to the other in total vulnerability. In sharing the weakness the tendency to violence decreases. The vulnerability poses for many a too great risk factor to love. Therefore the desire for the true form of love asks for a total disarmament.

#### 2.1.3.3. The possibility of love

Having distinguished between the destructive form of love and the creative form of love, the question Nouwen poses is, is love a possibility or is it only an utopian dream? Intimacy in Nouwen’s understanding is a loving relationship of openness, vulnerability, availability and confession. We always shift between the poles of taking and forgiving love. To be on the side of forgiving love we need the freedom from fear and insecurity. Therefore true love is a possibility when we love each other because God loved us first<sup>10</sup>. (1Jn.4/7-19) To be free from the fear of being not accepted and misunderstood, one must be carried by a deeper unconditional love which we can experience only with God’s help and ultimately only in God. According to Nouwen when human love is carried by the divine love it is safe to love and love becomes a real possibility. God’s love does not take offence at our weakness and failures and our basic trust in his great promises turns our fearful selves into welcoming homes and our weakness into creative strength. “Love then is not a clinging to each other in the fear of an oncoming disaster but an encounter in a freedom that allows for the creation of new life.”<sup>11</sup> For every minister it is desirable and possible to have intimate relationships because it is founded on the perfect love of God who wants us to live in love and bear witness to his love. This leads us to the natural conclusion that intimacy or communion with God nurtured through prayer is an indispensable theme when we speak about ministry or minister.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>10</sup> The ‘first love’ becomes in the course of time a key theme in Nouwen’s writing.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 36.

#### 2.1.4. Intimacy and prayer

For most of the people prayers tilt between confusion and hope. Nouwen experienced this very much in the lives of the students on the campus. Confusion, self-doubt and disinterestedness are not to be condemned or avoided because through them one can lead oneself to clarity, self-acceptance and hope for the new things to come. When prayer is no longer an exercise of banning the tyrannical God and when we enter through prayer into a dialogue with the living, loving and caring God, we enter into true freedom. Spiritual maturity is self-awareness, self-acceptance and moving from confusion to hope. Trusting in the compassionate God we can free ourselves from the compulsion to do better and better. This is the new mystic of emptying oneself to create space for the divine spirit. An intimate experience of and a communion with the God of faithfulness, God of mercy and the God of love is a basic requirement for the minister to help those who seek a God-experience. Many people leaving the traditional religiosity and seeking new ways pose a challenge for the ministers to renew themselves and to search for ways to make an experience of the living God possible. The challenge ahead is to bring theology “from brain level to gut’s level”<sup>12</sup> and to make religious life something vibrant, a living source of constant inspiration.

#### 2.1.5. Intimacy and community<sup>13</sup>

The possibility of living intimacy in a community is as important as intimacy with other individuals and intimacy with God. Nouwen looked at the seminary life to identify its problems and to propose remedial measures. There is a growing depression in the formation houses. The reason is mainly the identity problem- that of the students as well as of the staff’s. The students seek *competence* as a weapon to meet the demands of the society, *control* to overcome the unruly impulses and feelings in themselves and *vocation* to be sure of what they want to be<sup>14</sup>. The danger of such a formation is that sooner or later the students are frustrated as they do not reach what they aim at. The natural consequence is depression. The staff on the other hand is disappointed when the students misuse their freedom, when they are ungrateful and do not show trustworthiness. When the staff is personally hurt and use subtle forms of punishment such as speaking about lack of trust or showing long faces the student-staff relationship becomes chocking. Secondly when the staff members themselves doubt certain values or even the foundations of their commitment, the students are confused, discouraged and land up in depression<sup>15</sup>.

The solution lies in the renewal of the personal lives as well as of the community spirit. The guiding principle must be that “all formation has its primary task to offer a meaningful structure which allows for a creative use of the student’s energies.”<sup>16</sup> We have to provide a meaningful structure which helps the student to form his many as yet undirected and unfocussed potentialities, a “structure allowing one to judge which feelings to trust and which feelings to distrust, which ideas to follow and which to reject. Structure providing unity to the many seemingly disconnected emotions and ideas of the student. Structure which helps to decide which plan is just a fancy and which contains the seed for a workable project. Structure, which offers the possibility to organize the day, plan the year, and steer the course of life.”<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Here the reference is mainly to the life in the seminary where the students and staff live as a community.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 83.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 84-98

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 99.

Religious community is a vocation to move from the land of slavery to the land of freedom, from the land of depression to a new and yet undiscovered country, God leading it in a pillar of fire.<sup>18</sup> The vocation of the individual is participation in the vocation of the community. The divine love is what makes it possible to understand the cross not as a sign of depression but as a sign of hope. Thus every minister must equip himself with the necessary religious, mental and emotional maturity, the development of which is possible only in a training with an atmosphere that takes away fear, doubts, anxieties and worries giving way to faith, hope and trust. A conducive spiritual atmosphere can prevent depression and frustration to a great extent.

#### 2.1.6. Intimacy and ministry

Intimacy and ministry are closely connected to each other. Only a person who is able to keep the healthy balance between intimacy and distance in his relationship to others and a deep intimacy with God in prayer, both personal and communal, can engage in fruitful and creative ministry. In ministry the mental health of the minister is of utmost importance. This is determined by his *personal identity* judged by his time, place and person and his *professional identity* as well. Nouwen recommends certain disciplines also which are of much help.

##### 2.1.6.1. Time

Healthy timing, both long-range and short-term timing, is important. The minister wanting to be all for all with a 'redemption-complex' can end only in physical and spiritual fatigue. Such a life-style is an unhealthy long-range timing. The short-term timing refers to the way a priest uses his hours during one day. Both working without relaxation and working at random are unhealthy. A defined rhythm of doing and withdrawing, work and play, duty and hobby makes the day creative and inspiring<sup>19</sup>.

##### 2.1.6.2. Place

A too institutionalised life under the same roof, the same rule and the same authority is an unhealthy place. A priest or seminarian who is not free to be himself and decide things on his own will experience suffocation. When everything is institutionalised and controlled from a central point, one has only 'responsibility without authority'.<sup>20</sup> Many students and priests hang in the air due to undue control and interference from the higher authorities. "Healthy spacing not only refers to healthy defining of places and rooms, but also, connected with that, to healthy clarification of responsibilities and authority which belong to the different roofs under which we live."<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. 102. (Nouwen proposes some guidelines to create the conducive structure. The main one is that the staff has to be authoritative without being authoritarian. "Authoritative simply means that the source of the staff member's authority lies in his competence, maturity and faith. He knows his field, is able to cope with the tensions of life and believes that he is called to do a meaningful work." (*Intimacy P.100*) It is inner-directed and not depending on external opinions. The second one providing good leadership. A good leader safeguards the boundaries of the community as well as the individuality of the members. He prevents the group processes from becoming amateur forms of group therapy which probes into personal problems and forgets the common interests. He can create an atmosphere for a discussion on existential issues in which no one loses trust in the safety within a community. He keeps the degree of communication in a community open. Such a community is a creative space and is no reason for depression. )

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 110f.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 115.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 117.

### 2.1.6.3. Person

The most important of the three is a healthy self-understanding. This refers to his individual and professional identity. To be sure of one's own individual identity two things are necessary; having one's own inner privacy and establishing a hierarchy of friends.<sup>22</sup> An inner privacy is possible only when I distinguish between the close and wider circles of dear ones, friends, relatives and *my* world. There is also a place of my inner privacy where nobody can enter, where I am completely by myself, where I meet God. Instead of looking around everywhere for friends he needs to have a few good friends who help in need.

### 2.1.6.4. Professional identity

Not only the personal identity but also the professional identity of the minister is important. The professional identity of the priest consists of finding his unique place in the team of the helping professions, keeping himself informed and further trained. Professional underdevelopment due to insufficient training and guidance can lead to insecurity. This leads to frustration. Like in every profession the minister must also enjoy certain humble gratification through his work. Ministers are also professionals but in a unique way. His role is unique, different from and incomparable with other professional fields. His reflections are not primarily the ready made formulations contained in books, rather he makes the 'living human documents and their actual social conditions'<sup>23</sup> the source of his theological reflections. This way he can always be new, surprising, inspiring and creative.<sup>24</sup> According to Nouwen there is no human problem, human conflict, human happiness or human joy, which cannot lead to a deeper understanding of God's work with man. His profession asks him to remain responsible for God, to keep God alive always changing and always the same, as man himself.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1.7. Training for the ministry

The focus of Nouwen's reflections here is the campus ministry. But it throws light on the new challenges which every priest is faced with. The ministers are today deprived of the traditional tools which are ineffective. The questions are: What is the real skill of the minister? What should be the focus of the training?

#### 2.1.7.1. Efficiency and skill

The question is, can the minister rely on his own most personal resources? According to Nouwen it is a challenge and the efficiency and skill of the pastor consists of being able to offer *a healthy climate, an encouraging word and a home where intimacy can be experienced*. The training must be aimed at forming ministers who are able to respond to the needs of today.

##### 2.1.7.1.1. Climate

Most students desire not an answer to the questions related to the meaning of being but a climate in which they are allowed to ask these questions without fear. A fearless climate in which the student can accept the many internal and external questions without having to work out a self-defence is the way to religious maturity. It is a climate which allows

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>23</sup> Nouwen quotes Anton Boisen, *The exploration of the Inner World* 185. (Harper 1962)

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 124.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 124.

“searching without fear and questioning without shame.”<sup>26</sup> Growth can take pace only when belief and unbelief, doubt and faith, hope and despair can exist together.

#### 2.1.7.1.2. Word

When a pastor thinks that all the good words are good for everyone and tries to sell the whole church as a package at once to everyone, he will soon disappoint many. Instead of global and general words the campus minister should be able to offer “a word which is an honest response to the unique and highly individual needs of the students.”<sup>27</sup> This applies also to ministry outside the campus.

#### 2.1.7.1.3. Home

A third thing to offer is a home where some degree of intimacy can be experienced. Due to the academic competition many students suffer from loneliness. They need some form of intimacy and some form of community. This can be tried in discussion groups, week ends, celebrations and Eucharist together. The golden principle is a healthy balance between closeness and distance which allows the Christian community “to be intimate *and* open, to be personal *and* hospitable, to receive the daily core-group as well as the occasional visitors, to be nurturing as well as apostolic”<sup>28</sup>.

#### 2.1.7.2. Training

Pastoral efficiency and pastoral spirituality demand training in the form of supervised pastoral experience. Initiation into Pastoral ministry requires the assistance of the experienced people as it touches the “most sensitive areas of life, and requires us not only to understand the highly individual needs of the other but also the many complex responses of the self.”<sup>29</sup>

The nature of such a supervisory process is anti-projective, training in alternatives and new possibilities and a way to the basic questions about one's own life. The centre of attention is the trainee himself who has to take back projections and the main goal is confronting oneself instead of hiding behind the problems of other people. What is supervised is the pastoral experience. Finally it doesn't advice as what to do but offers the freedom to ask the more basic questions than investing time and energy in peripheral and accidental questions.

#### 2.1.8. The spirituality of the minister

Another important point about ministry deserving attention is the spirituality of the minister. As the minister himself is most personally involved and his concern is *the whole man, the mature Christian*, the important question is: How can the minister himself become and remain a whole and integrated man in a community which is constantly changing and by it's own nature constantly challenging his commitment?<sup>30</sup> Answering the questions of the students regarding the meaning of their lives can one day become a question to the minister himself regarding the meaning of his ministry. The stress-filled life of the pastor needs also pastoral care. Three valuable tips in this regard are: *silence, friendship and insight*.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 134.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 135.

### 2.1.8.1. Silence

The intellectualisation and rationalisation of the university can tempt someone to be too noisy and academic, “adoring the products of man’s consciousness, trying to catch even the divine in the net of his explicit awareness. He can become entangled in the ropes of his own sentences and unable to be moved by the great power which is beyond his capacity to articulate”<sup>31</sup>. Therefore becoming available for God in silence is very important. In silence we allow “something creative to happen not by us but to us”.<sup>32</sup> In silence we can accept our identity as a gift, and find God in us who recognizes himself in others. Without silence we lose our centre and become the victim of the many who constantly demand our attention.

### 2.1.8.2. Friendship

The minister must be a friend to the students but he should not become dependant on the friendship or intimacy of the students<sup>33</sup>. It is unproductive as it may block the creative relationship. The campus minister needs privacy, a home where he is not with students, where he is free for himself and can live with friends and have his own intimacy.

### 2.1.8.3. Insight

The minister’s insight here refers to a sound perspective of his own priesthood. His own understanding of God must be that of a liberating God. Narrow theological ideas may cause more frustration than fulfilment. “A growing insight through study of the Word and a deepening understanding of our own task as witnesses of this Word can prevent us from being a victim of our own narrow-mindedness.”<sup>34</sup> Theological narrow-mindedness make us anxious instead of free, unbelievers instead of faithful, suspicious instead of trustful.

## Observations

From the above considerations it becomes clear how important it is for the minister to grow in true intimacy and how the training for ministry should not lose sight of this internal aspect of the spirituality of ministry. God is the underlying fact both in intimacy and ministry.

Nouwen’s starting point was the doubts, anxieties and uncertainties of the ministers and candidates for the ministry. He touched the most basic and intimate question of intimacy and analysed it in the individual and communitarian context. Finally he touched the various aspects of ministry and points to the spirituality of the pastor as the real answer. Nouwen saw the possibility of intimacy in the creative way of relating to each other and living from the centre of one’s own existence. The minister can truly minister only if he is able to live from his centre and feel at home with his own self. This calls for religious maturity.

The thrust of the book *Intimacy* is the person of the pastor, his relationships with others, and the climate of his personal maturing. Supporting a mature intimacy and contributing to it is a real challenge to the formation. It should help the minister to enter into creative relationships and pastoral care by remaining at home and feeling at home with himself. Nouwen felt very much the inadequate maturity and spirituality of the candidates for ministry and it became his real concern. Most of his books have this theme as focal point.

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 137.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>33</sup> This can be applied to other fields of pastoral activities as well.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 141.

The question of Intimacy is further treated in the books like *Lifesigns* and *Life of the beloved*.

Nouwen's concern for the ministers and those in training for the ministry and his suggestions for improving the formation is not isolated from his own life. He too suffered from the problem of intimacy. Here he used his own wounds, as in the case of Boisen, as source of helping and healing because he believed and experienced that in the wounds the gift of healing is also hidden. We will see that later on as he becomes more mature, he writes more about the essence of Christian life like God's ways and plans with one's own being and vocation. His writings tend gradually to address all Christians. We will also notice a gradual conversion in his own person and in his writings, from 'outwards' to 'inwards'. The content of his books are very personal. For example the spiritual thoughts in *Reaching Out* or in *The return of the prodigal son* are more a search and examination of the 'inside', a confession of his own life. These thoughts throw important light into the 'inside of ministry'. Nouwen's experience of the vulnerability of intimacy helped him to speak about the wounded healing which comes up later. It was his own search into the inside of the ministry which attracted Nouwen to Thomas Merton who claimed that contemplation and prayer are two forms of radicalism which should never be separated. Nouwen's affinity to Merton took its expression in a book titled *Thomas Merton: a contemplative critic* (1972) in which he treated themes like contemplation, silence, solitude and social critic.<sup>35</sup> Nouwen is very much influenced by the person and writings of Merton.

Merton has a dynamic understanding of solitude. The desert of solitude doesn't need be a geographical one. It can be also a "solitude of the heart in which created joys are consumed and reborn in God"<sup>36</sup>. True solitude is "a participation in the solitariness of God –Who is in all things. His solitude is not a local absence but a metaphysical transcendence."<sup>37</sup> Compassion is the most important sign of solitude. Compassion is an arid but fruitful wilderness in which one lives the quietude and solitude and discovers the silence in the lives of others and being a member of humanity.<sup>38</sup> Merton believes deeply in the value of non-violence. Nouwen also considered non-violence as the true Christian way. Non-violence does not believe in eliminating the evil but rather in turning evil into good. Christ has made forgiveness possible and non-violence is a prerequisite for being a Christian. Non-violence needs a unique bravery because eliminating the oppressor is much easier than feeling pity for the oppressor. The highest form of spiritual freedom is to be sought in the strength of the heart which is capable of liberating the oppressed and the oppressed together.<sup>39</sup> The concept of compassion unmask the illusion of the violent society and brings home the teaching that only through solitude, compassion and non-violence we can change the world in spirit and truth. Merton's insights are very relevant for our times and Nouwen's attraction to Merton may be attributed to this shared vision. Nouwen was naturally an activist and his search was

---

<sup>35</sup> A short biography is given in *Nouwen, Thomas Merton 7-10* (Merton born in 1915, lost his mother at the age of six and in 1931 witnessed the death of his father from a brain tumour. That was not the end of it all. His younger brother died during the war in 1943. In spite of the set backs Merton could pursue his schooling and studies and did well with a special interest in Literature. At the age of 23 he was received into the Catholic Church. At the end of his studies he taught English at Columbia University Extension, N.Y. and did book reviewing for New York Times and New York Herald Tribune. His desire to become priest was discourteously rejected and after some radical experiments of working in the Ghettos entered the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1942 where he lived in contemplation for 26 years. His book *The seven story mountain* in 1948 made him well known and he kept writing many inspiring books and giving lectures until he died in 1968 of an electrocution from a defectively wired fan, only a few hours after he gave a lecture in Bangkok on Marxism and monasticism.)

<sup>36</sup> Quoted after: Merton, *The sign of Jonas* 59; *Ibid.* 44.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted after: Merton, *The sign of Jonas* 262; *Ibid.* 46

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 47.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Thomas Merton* 66.

for the missing part of it which he called silence, solitude prayer and contemplation. It is thus natural that Nouwen dedicated soon a whole book to prayer namely *With open hands*. For Nouwen prayer is the answer to our own personal sufferings as well as the sufferings outside. In Merton the spiritual growth and contemplation comes out much earlier than in Nouwen who needed a life long to become serene and really contemplative.

## 2.2. With Open Hands (1971- in Dutch)

This book translated from the Dutch titled 'Met Open Handen' published in 1971 was revised and translated in 1994 and its 25<sup>th</sup> printing in 1997 with 350, 000 copies is a clear proof of the positive effect the book has evoked. It is not the work of a single author but the result of the "sharing of lived experiences .... during many hours of intimate and prayerful conversations"<sup>40</sup> of a group of 25 theology students around a classroom table in the Netherlands. These reflections containing personal experiences with prayer are the answers to the fundamental question: what is it that I myself find in prayer? With the emerging conclusion that prayer has something to do with silence, acceptance, hope, compassion and even with criticism. Nouwen's reason to write about prayer which is very personal is his own conviction that "what is most personal is most universal"<sup>41</sup> with the assumption that superficial, private sensations are to be distinguished from deep, personal experiences.

### 2.2.1. Our clenched fists

Our hesitation to pray is like the clenched fist which does not want to give away the things with which we identify ourselves. Overcoming our fear of God and of ourselves and detaching ourselves from the things which hold us captive is the beginning of prayer. The most important thing in prayer is to open the clenched fists, a radical conversion of mind and heart. To be truly praying is difficult as it demands a relationship in which "you allow someone other than yourself to enter into the very centre of your person, to see there what you would rather leave in darkness, and to touch there what you would rather leave untouched".<sup>42</sup> Letting someone to enter the most intimate part evokes defences, tension, fear and a desire to cling tightly to oneself. Attachment to familiar ways and the fear of change leads to clinging to the sorry past rather than trusting in a new future. The clenched fists may contain also bitterness, hate, jealousy, disappointment and desire for jealousy. To pray one must open the hands, not with violence or forced decision, but by listening to the voice which says 'Do not be afraid'. Only by letting one fear after the other go, in a patient gesture of receiving God's love in a long spiritual journey of trust, we become totally free to pray. Opening the hand and letting go seems impossible through our own efforts, but it becomes possible when we let God do it. Praying then becomes a joy, an act that spontaneously includes the world and the other people. When the festive and still, joyful and sorrowful moments become moments of prayer, we discover that we *are* not what we *own* but what God *gives* and slowly we come to the realization that to pray is to live.

### 2.2.2. Prayer and silence

Prayer is connected to silence. Silence can be frightening and threatening, it can be peaceful and reflective. The frightening silence looks for noise but the reflective silence hears the sounds of "the wind murmuring, the leaves rustling, the birds flapping their wings, the waves washing ashore.....our own quite breathing, the motion of our hands over our skin,

---

<sup>40</sup> Nouwen, *With Open Hands* 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

the swallowing in our throats and the soft pattern of our footsteps”<sup>43</sup>. Freeing oneself from the exterior noises is not everything because then we will be more intensively confronted with the interior noises coming from the unanswered questions, unsure feelings and tangled desires. Silence is being fully awake and following the inner movements. “It offers the freedom to stroll in your own inner yard and rake up the leaves and clear the paths so you can easily find your way to the heart”.<sup>44</sup> Staying at home and recapturing the life with a new confidence gives an inner space where the different feelings can be sorted out with a gentle hand. The silence of prayer is free from compulsions, false pretences and fear. It brings us back to the one who leads the life and is the birth place of a new perspective, of a new life.

### 2.2.3. The next characteristic of prayer is acceptance

Only in prayer we can accept God’s life in the nature, in the people around us and in the situations we run into. If we accept our limitedness we constantly stretch out our hands to receive life but the fear of vulnerability forces us to grab and defend life. The awareness of the nails that may pound the open hands compel us to be prepared with our arms and prompt us to keep a safe distance. In prayer accepting is difficult because giving is often associated with manipulation and receiving with obligation. Receiving the gift of God, “the life breath of God, the spirit poured out on us through Jesus Christ”<sup>45</sup>, the gift of love in prayer renews and expands us. It frees us from fear and gives us new room to live. In prayerful acceptance of others the spirit of God binds us together in love and we do not define others. Instead we see them always new and different and instead of prejudice towards others we let them appear to us as ever new. In prayer we receive the courage to be led.

### 2.2.4. Prayer and hope

Prayer is an expression of hope, expecting the coming of something new. In acceptance we bow to our limitedness but in hope instead of clinging to the concrete circumstances of the present situation we trust in the promises. The prayer of little faith desires the direct satisfaction of the immediate needs but the hopeful prayer is open, fearless and without despair. “Hope includes an openness by which you wait for the promise to come through, even though you never know when, where or how this might happen”.<sup>46</sup> Hope which trusts in the fullness of God’s goodness drives away fear and “everything we are given and everything we are deprived of is nothing but a finger pointing out the direction of God’s hidden promise which one day we shall taste in full”.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.2.5. Prayer and compassion

Prayer does not exclude others. According to Nouwen a little prayer can’t do any harm but can’t do much good either. Prayer must be necessary and indispensable. This is possible through compassion. In compassion we do not merely confess our weakness. It is a “humble recognition of our condition as broken human beings”<sup>48</sup> which does not lead to shame, guilt, despair or bitterness. In compassion we recognize our own woundedness and feel one with those who are wounded, sharing the humanity. The compassionate heart identifies in oneself the suffering people and those who cause the suffering. The compassionate prayer recognizes God’s intimate love for others and shares in their joys and pains as envisaged by

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 83.

the outgoing sentence of the document *Gaudium et Spes* of Vat.II. A compassionate person walks forward together in solidarity and trusting in God rather than depending on one's own strength.

#### 2.2.6. Prayer and prophetic criticism

Prayer remains sentimentalism without the prophetic criticism. True prayer develops a feeling for the pulse of the world, a conviction about its need for conversion, a desire for change. As Christians we are called to the realization of the new kingdom and urging everyone we meet with a "holy unrest to make haste so that the promise might be soon fulfilled".<sup>49</sup> In this connection the prophetic challenge is not activism but leaving footprints "which make us suspect that someone has passed by who is worth getting to know".<sup>50</sup> They attract by their inner power, they speak with a self-possessed authority and are guided by a vision. They possess an inner freedom even the freedom to die as they are not dependant on the course of their life, on whether others listen and follow. They often disturb our 'secure way of life' and artificial happiness. We can see such a visionary in every person "who in one way or another draws life from a vision which is seen shining ahead and which surpasses everything ever heard or seen before"<sup>51</sup>, in the one who enters into a dialogue with the perfect love and work for the renewal of the earth. Finding and being touched by the power at the centre of life, gives a "creative distance so that everything you see, hear and feel can be tested against the source".<sup>52</sup> Through prayer we share in the power of God but praying demands poverty, making oneself vulnerable which helps to see the world and to let the world show itself in its true form. The consequences are frightening but courage is also a gift from God.

#### Observations

Nouwen knits together beautifully the various aspects of prayer which are closely connected to each other. By opening the hands, letting go, finding stillness in the midst of the busy world, receiving life as gift and being united with others in compassion and working for the renewal of the world we become free to be led where we would rather not go and experience that **to live is to pray**.

The clenched fists show our fears, anxieties, woundedness and defences. In opening them up we seek help and let God heal us. In prayer we fold our hands in worship and adoration, which very often tends to keep God away or manipulate him. The same hands we can reach out to our fellow human beings in compassion or when it is needed even raise up in prophetic resistance.

We have seen in *Intimacy* how important the theme prayer is for Nouwen. Prayer brought Nouwen great consolation. He was not ashamed to bring all his sufferings to God by prostrating on the floor and pray while weeping in order to express his helplessness and powerlessness. Prayer is also the secret of his powerful words and fearless deeds which made him a successful minister.

The theme prayer comes from Nouwen's heart. The pious family background and his own experience of the need for prayer and intimacy with God resulted in deep penetrating reflections on prayer. Some of Nouwen's later books about prayer like *Reaching Out*,

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 117.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 120.

*Genesee Diary* and *Here and Now* need special treatment. We will be dealing with them in the upcoming chapter.

Nouwen's reflections on prayer are deepened in a small book *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian life*, first printed in 1974 containing meditations which were first given as sermons at 'Battel', the united church of Christ at Yale University, in which he spoke about the praying and caring ministry of Christ in Mk 1/32-39. Divided into three parts the first part of the book deals with action and solitude, the second with care and community and the third with Expectation as patience and Expectation as joy.

According to Nouwen the secret of Jesus ministry lies hidden in the lonely place where he went to pray. This stillness with God and with oneself provides the necessary rest and solitude to follow God's will. "Without silence words lose their meaning, without listening speaking no longer heals and without distance closeness cannot cure.... [and]the careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of Christian life and should therefore be the subject of our most personal attention".<sup>53</sup> Ministry out of solitude is not compulsive but compassionate.

Silence is stressed in the book *Genesee Diary* also. Words out of silence are more effective. "Even in the most elevated discussion, something enters that seems to pollute the atmosphere. In some strange way speaking makes me less alert, less open, and more self-centred. [...] I realize that the more I speak, the more I will need silence to remain faithful to what I say."<sup>54</sup>

To care means to be present to each other. Sharing humanity, sharing the joys and sorrows leads to communion and community which is the essence of the mystery of incarnation. Loving care prerequisites solitude and compassion. "As long as we are occupied and preoccupied with our desire to do good but are not able to feel the crying need of those who suffer, our help remains hanging somewhere between our minds and our hands and does not descend into the heart where we can care. But in solitude our heart can slowly take off its many protective devices, and can grow so wide and deep that nothing human is strange to it".<sup>55</sup> Care goes further to a hopeful expectation of the day of fulfilment, the day of joy. The reason for our expectation is the promise of Jesus in his farewell words that the sorrows will turn to joy. Jn16/16-22 Patience is the mother of expectation and expectation brings joy in living the present.

For many of us waiting is an inevitable part of our human condition, a waste of time. But for Nouwen waiting has enormous value. Waiting is a period of learning. The longer we wait, the more we hear about him for whom we are waiting.<sup>56</sup>

Whereas in the book *With open hands* Nouwen writes about how to pray, he speaks more about the importance, implications and fruits of Prayer in the other books. Prayer bears fruits like hope and joy. If we live through hope, it points out towards Easter joy. God's love is stronger than death. "The solid stream of God's presence moves deeper than the small waves of our minds and hearts".<sup>57</sup> Prayer gives the necessary stillness to experience his

---

<sup>53</sup> Nouwen, *Out of solitude* 14.

<sup>54</sup> Nouwen, *Genese Diary* 133f.

<sup>55</sup> Nouwen, *Out of solitude* 45.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Vinck compares this to a waiting in darkness, like a baby in the womb of the mother, only to see one day the face of the mother. (Cfr. Vinck, *Nouwen Then* p.48)

<sup>57</sup> Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy* 39.

presence. The risen Lord calls us and enters into us, maybe in the stillest hour. His absence may be a purifying absence. In Prayer it is important, despite the spiritual aridity, to cling to God in faith. All human love must be exercised as a reflection of the first great love of God. "Prayer is the ongoing cry of the incarnate Lord to the loving God. It is eternity in the midst of mortality, it is life among death, hope in the midst of despair, true promise surrounded by lies. Prayer brings love alive among us."<sup>58</sup>

For Nouwen the horizontal relationship of prayer leads automatically to the vertical relationship which he calls compassion. In the compassionate prayer we transcend the distinction between joy and pain and this unifying experience of God is the beginning of a new life."<sup>59</sup> In mystical prayer both active protest and passive surrender are present, and man struggles with God as Jacob wrestled with the angel. It is a meeting with God and the rest of the humanity in compassion.<sup>60</sup> "Compassion lies at the heart of our prayer for our fellow human beings. [...] In praying for others, I lose myself and become the other, only to be found by the divine love which holds the whole of humanity in a compassionate embrace."<sup>61</sup>

It is interesting to note that Nouwen's answer to the poverty, injustice and threat of war in the world is prayer, contemplation and non violent resistance. He suggests the need for a new spirituality, "a spirituality that takes the end of things very seriously, not a spirituality of withdrawal, nor of blindness to the powers of the world, but a spirituality that allows us to live in this world without belonging to it, a spirituality that allows us to taste the joy and peace of the divine life even when we are surrounded by the powers and principalities of evil, death and destruction. I wonder if a spirituality of liberation does not need to be deepened by a spirituality of exile or captivity."<sup>62</sup> The energy for the struggle for social justice can easily run out. Therefore it is important to make prayer the centre of every action. Ministry involves hardships but in and through prayer nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. (Rom. 8/35f)<sup>63</sup> A life which is rooted in the Bible<sup>64</sup> fills us with new spirit and gives us a new life.

---

<sup>58</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* 12. (Also the journal *Road to Daybreak* contains Nouwen's confessions about his own struggles with prayer. For Nouwen keeping the balance between the exterior and the interior and bypassing the insistence that something happens in prayer slowly led him to trust God and rest in Him. "So I am praying while not knowing how to pray. I am resting while feeling restless, at peace while tempted, safe while still anxious, surrounded by a cloud of light while still in darkness, in love while still doubting." See Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 134.)

<sup>59</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Genese Diary* 142.

<sup>60</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 143.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

<sup>62</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* 40.

<sup>63</sup> Nouwen, *Love in a fearful land*. 103f. (Narrating his experiences in Guatemala Nouwen pleads for prayer even in the midst of suffering and social injustice. "If ever I saw the connection between martyrdom and prayer, it was in Guatemala. When malnutrition, poor health, poor housing, low pay, and long, tiring work mark life every day; when terror fills the air and torture and death are a constant threat, the human heart has to choose between despair and hope, between resignation to the power of darkness or a defiant reaching out to the light, between victimization and liberation. It is an inner choice, not dependant on outer conditions but on the will to claim one's freedom whatever the circumstances. To cry out to the god of life in the midst of darkness, to hold on to joy while walking in a valley of tears, to keep speaking of peace when sounds of war fill the air- that is what prayer is about. [...] In its pure form, prayer is the divine breath of those whom the world tries to suffocate with terror. Prayer is the martyrdom of those who live". *Nouwen, Love in a fearful land*. 103f)

<sup>64</sup> Reflecting on Nouwen's thoughts Christopher Vinck writes that spiritual life needs focus and attention and needs elevation from daily preoccupations. It is a life in which all that we do comes from the center, a life anchored in God and guided by his will. It is a life immersed in Scripture. "Scripture is a sea of marvels from which our spiritual life slowly emerges to stand on the terra firma of the world; Scripture is an uncharted wilderness where cloud and fire may be our only guides. [...] In Scripture's oceanic depths and vast

Nouwen took a sabbatical break to concentrate on his own prayer life. “Prayer is the bridge between my unconscious and conscious life. Prayer connects my mind with my heart, my will with my passion, my brain with my belly. Prayer is the way to let the life-giving spirit of God penetrate all the corners of my being. Prayer is the divine instrument of my wholeness, unity and inner peace.”<sup>65</sup> Nouwen pointed out that one way of keeping depression at bay is to become busy. But the real way out is prayer in which we sit in God’s presence and show God all the darkness.<sup>66</sup>

From the outside to inside is typical of Nouwen. In the earlier books we see the outside - the specific pastoral fields - and the how of exercising them. Some of the important aspects of spiritual life like allowing God to take control of our life instead of trying to be in control, to trust in God and bring our anxieties and fears to him whose heart is bigger and more generous than ours come up repeatedly and elaborately in the later books. That corresponds to Nouwen’s spiritual motto of being led (Jn 21, 18). Hope in order to make us available for the greater horizon God’s goodness is Nouwen’s beloved theme. In prayer we can share with compassion and solidarity the joys and sorrows, fears and hope with our fellow men (GS Nr.1). Here Nouwen is close to the heart of the Council Fathers. The recognition of one’s own helplessness sharpens our attention for the needs of others. Nouwen’s earlier books are very scholarly but later we see the trend towards concentrating more on personal spirituality. An example of the scholarly presentation of the classical pastoral fields is found in the book *Creative ministry*.

### **2.3. The Pastoral Spectrum in *Creative Ministry* (1971)**

Nouwen confesses that this book is the result of the stimulation of the summer school students of Notre Dame who encouraged him to put together what he taught and discussed. The honest criticism of the Chicago priests has also contributed to it<sup>67</sup>. Nouwen’s motivation to write a book specifically on the pastoral fields is the result of his desire to share his ideas and experiences with others as a source of help. His own inner struggles and his sharing of thoughts with other people revealed to him the truth of Carl Roger’s saying; ‘what is most personal is most universal’. This gave him the inspiration to put together his reflections in this inspiring book *Creative Ministry* published in 1971<sup>68</sup>. “The main concern of this book is the relationship between professionalism and spirituality in ministry”<sup>69</sup>. Nouwen admits that this book which is, in fact a very personal one, contains a ‘confession’ of his own experiences.<sup>70</sup>

The question of ministry is intimately related to the spiritual life of the minister. Therefore Nouwen explored in this book the relationship between professional formation and spiritual guidance in pastoral ministry. “Perhaps we have to say that one of the main reasons for the many frustrations, pains, and disappointments in the life of numerous Christian ministers is rooted in the still-growing separation between professionalism and spirituality.”<sup>71</sup> Nouwen

---

landscapes, we meet a reality that causes fear and trembling not only because of its unimaginable majesty but also because of its boundless solicitude.” (See Vinck, Nouwen Then 59.) The Scripture places before us “a God self-given to our cause, a God who therefore desires above all else to fashion us into the pattern of our proper end.” (Ibid. 59.) (See. Is 44/21, 24 and 49/15. Is. 43/4 ; Jer. 31/3)

<sup>65</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* 5.

<sup>66</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 101.

<sup>67</sup> Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* xi.

<sup>68</sup> The period in which he wrote this book was characterised by a shift in emphasis, more supervised pastoral training and less of prayer and spiritual guidance.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. xvii.

<sup>70</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 121.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Xix.

observed with concern that the emphasis on action led to burn-out symptoms and the ministers started doubting their own integrity and wholeness. A general picture of the ailing ministry is summed up by him as:

“Many of these men have given so much of themselves in their daily, often very demanding, pastoral activities that they feel empty, exhausted, tired, and quite often disappointed. This fatigue strike so hard because thanks are rarely expressed, progress is seldom obvious, and results not often visible. Even when one knows how to be a good counsellor and how to respond meaningfully to the needs of individuals and groups, even when one is fully prepared to be an agent of social change, the most burning question remains: What moves me to do all this; where do I find the strength to find unity in all my diverse activities?”<sup>72</sup>

Nouwen made a careful analysis of the problem and it became obvious to him that the true source of ministry lies beyond professionalism. While not undermining the value of professionalism and the need for it, Nouwen points out that the solid foundation of the Christian ministry is the spirituality of the minister himself. Nouwen is not against degrees and grades, but he criticises the wrong importance attached to academic degrees. He claims that unlike other professions, ministry is not merely a job but primarily “a way of life, which is for others to see and understand so that liberation can become a possibility”.<sup>73</sup> The minister too needs a new experience of God which should be found not outside the ministry but in the centre of Christian service. “Prayer is life; prayer and ministry are the same and can never be divorced.”<sup>74</sup> Desire for silence and contemplation must be born out of our concern for this world and if God is not found in those we minister too, he cannot be found in the desert, in the community or in the silent hours.<sup>75</sup> Through an analysis of the five main functions of the ministry- teaching, preaching, individual pastoral care, organising and celebrating- Nouwen showed that what is important is not the ‘what’ but the ‘how’ of ministry<sup>76</sup>. This calls for a new approach summarised by Nouwen in the word ‘beyond’. The ‘how’ of ministry is closely connected to a sound spirituality. In the absence of a sound spirituality ministry can degenerate into clerical manipulation. Therefore Nouwen focused in *Creative ministry* on the ‘how’ of concretely practicing the implications of intimacy in the pastoral fields. Going beyond merely fulfilling one’s duties the pastor is able to enter into a relationship of trust and mutual respect leading to a creative pastoral care in which the heart and soul are also involved.

### **2.3.1. Teaching: *Beyond the transference of knowledge***

Schools and colleges are supposed to be places where teachers and students together search for a better understanding of themselves and their complex society. It should help them to define the meaning and goal of their lives. Only if both the teacher and the students are sure of the direction they want to go, they provide insights as a way to freedom. The meaning of education as ministry does not depend on the content of what is taught but on the nature of the educational process, that is, the teaching relationship.

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Xx.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Xxiii.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Xxiii.

<sup>75</sup> Cfr. Ibid. Xxiii.

<sup>76</sup> This book does not lay down guidelines for pastoral ministry but highlights the underlying factors that facilitate the minister to live and proclaim the liberating good news. The effectiveness of the ministry depends on the spirituality of the minister who trusts that God is the source of all life and graces and that his role is only that of facilitating life in others. God is the healer and the spirit of God is the wonder behind all good works. Ministry is allowing God’s creative spirit to work.

### 2.3.1.1. Teaching as a violent process

When teaching becomes a process of enabling the students to equip themselves with the skills, methods and techniques to ‘get things under control’, the aim of teaching focuses on giving the students the necessary tools to tame the dangerous lions they are going to face as soon as they leave the training field.<sup>77</sup> It caters only to the satisfaction of the immediate needs. The characteristics of such a violent process of teaching are: *competitive, unilateral and alienating*.

#### 2.3.1.1.1. Competitive

The modern education is more competitive than co-operative. The competition and rivalry in order to be better than others and the anxiety that the future depends on one’s accomplishments make the students victims of a paralysing fear. Undue importance on the grades, suspicious attitude towards the world and other people take away the freedom and spontaneity of the students. In a competitive atmosphere there is little room to show one’s ignorance and be willing to learn from others.

#### 2.3.1.1.2. Unilateral

Much of the modern education is unilateral as it is based on the understanding that education is a process of the knowledge flowing from the knowing to the not-knowing, from the strong to the weak. When this ideal of transferring knowledge is reached they cease to be teachers and students.

#### 2.3.1.1.3. Alienating

Finally it is an alienating process because this system directs the eyes of the students outwards and not inwards where real things are supposed to happen. Teaching of this sort turns the school into “an indoor training, a dry-swim, a quasi life”<sup>78</sup>. When the individuality or the regular relationships with each other of the teachers and students do not become the primary source of learning, education becomes a preparation for the future and not an experience here and now and many students are alienated from their true selves.

### 2.3.1.2. Teaching as a redemptive process

Contrary to the violent teaching which stresses the ‘doing’ the redemptive process concentrates on ‘being’. Only through a mutual acceptance, mutual enabling and mutual empowering of the teachers and students the teaching can become a redemptive process. “Teachers can only become teachers when there are students who allow them to be their teachers, and students can only become students when there are teachers who allow them to be their students.”<sup>79</sup> Thus the mutual acceptance leading to a teacher-student relationship is a decisive factor of the redemptive way of teaching. The redemptive process is *evocative, bilateral and actualizing*.

#### 2.3.1.2.1. Evocative

Good teaching evokes the potentials in each other. This is possible only in a fearless, trusting and friendly relationship. The students must offer the teachers the freedom to share their life experiences as sources of insight and understanding. Similarly the students must allow access to their life experiences, their talents, weaknesses, anxieties and fears. Avoiding judgement, suspicion, competition and defences create an atmosphere in which real learning can begin without fear.

---

<sup>77</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 5.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 11.

### 2.3.1.2.2. Bilateral

Secondly it is a bilateral process in which both play each other's roles and together search for what is true, meaningful and valid. It is a creative process in which life-experiences are exchanged and the insights are left open-ended leading to new and surprising perspectives and insights.

### 2.3.1.2.3. Actualizing

Thirdly teaching as a redemptive process actualizes its goals and ideals already in the teaching-learning process in some form and degree. The future becomes present in the existential situation. "When schools are places where community can be experienced, where people can live together without fear of each other, and where learning can be based on a creative exchange of experiences and ideas, then there is a chance that those who come from them will have an increasing desire to bring about in the world what they experienced during their years of formation."<sup>80</sup> Teaching then is a way of creating a new life style and learning a way of life that goes beyond grades and degrees.

### 2.3.1.3. The resistance to learning

Learning is not without resistance and the main reason for it is the exclusion of painful insights. The darkness, or the blindness which prevent new insights are: *A wrong supposition, false pressure and horror of self-encounter.*

#### 2.3.1.3.1. A wrong supposition

The wrong supposition that giving is greater than receiving and the feeling of the students that they are only receivers cause resistance to learning. The teachers and students are valued for what they can give. "Many students could be better students than they are if there were someone who could make them recognize their capacities and could accept these as a real gift. Students grow during those moments in which they discover they have offered something new to their teachers making them feel not threatened, but rather, thankful. And teachers could be much better teachers if students were willing to draw the best out of them and show their acceptance by thankfulness and creative work."<sup>81</sup>

#### 2.3.1.3.2. False pressure

There is a false pressure from the society that grades, degrees and rewards are very decisive for the future life. "This false pressure of the society which forces us to pay undue attention to the formal recognition of our intellectual accomplishments, tends to pull us away from our more personal needs and to prevent us from coming to insights into our own experiences that can form the basis of a creative life project."<sup>82</sup>

#### 2.3.1.3.3. Horror of self-encounter

The horror of self-encounter is the fear of confronting our basic human condition that we all must die naked and powerless. It is the solidarity of this weakness and powerlessness that help the teachers and the students to free themselves for real learning. "Only in the depths of our loneliness, when we have nothing to loose anymore and do not cling any longer to life as to an inalienable property can we become sensitive to what really is happening in our world and able to approach it without fear."<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 19.

Differentiating between the violent process of teaching and the redemptive process of teaching, Nouwen draws our attention to the healthy forms of teaching and pleads for a mutual and interactive communication in an atmosphere of trust and friendliness.

Thus true teaching and learning involves a 'conversion' and a 'conversation' and is aimed at discovering the source of one's own existence. It fosters the creative dynamics of mutual learning. It must offer a safe and fearless space in which free from judgement one can lay aside defences and come to new insights. Such a teaching process is liberating as it nurtures the inner growth and freedom to face the realities of life.

### **2.3.2. Preaching: *Beyond the retelling of the story***

The purpose of preaching is to help people to come to an insight into their own condition and the condition of their world that they can live their lives as authentically as possible as followers of Jesus. Insight is "knowledge to which the whole person can say 'yes'".<sup>84</sup> The aim of preaching is to remove the obstacles that make us to listen without understanding<sup>85</sup>. Indifference and irritation are two obstacles which prevent the Word from falling on fertile grounds. Nouwen does not enter into the many aspects of preaching but focuses on an important factor, the spirituality of the preacher which is also instrumental in leading the people to insight. Three important considerations are: *The problem of the message, The problem of the messenger, The spirituality of the preacher.*

#### 2.3.2.1. The problem of the message

A message which is not relevant to the life and which does not speak to the individuals personally does not get into the heart. What cannot be accepted or that which is not desired is irritating. The reasons for the lack of motivation from the part of the listeners are: *Redundancy and Fear of the truth.*

##### 2.3.2.1.1. Redundancy of the message

This happens when there is no real news in the Good-news. The listener's attention slowly drifts away from the proclaimed word when they feel that they have already heard it a thousand times. The message that evokes indifference stands on the way of coming to insights.

##### 2.3.2.1.2. Fear of the truth

Many do not want to hear words that confront. "There is, in fact such an outright fear to face the truth in all its directness and simplicity that irritation and anger seem to be a more common human response than a humble confession that one also belongs to the group Jesus criticised"<sup>86</sup> Despite their irritation many people are also not free to walk out of the Church because of the fear of God's wrath. The message can lead to liberating insights only if the stones of irritation and fear are rolled aside from the way.

#### 2.3.2.2. The problem of the messenger

The preacher can increase the irritation through: *Assumption of non-existing feelings and theological preoccupation.*

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>85</sup> The current theology realizes the importance of the theory of communication in preaching and there are a number of books about the problems of communication in preaching and how to communicate effectively.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 28.

#### 2.3.2.2.1. Assumption of non-existent feelings

When the preacher projects his feelings or simply presupposes that the majority thinks and feels as he thinks and feels, many people will become indifferent and hostile to his words. It is a challenge to avoid clerical feelings that are alien to the laymen and to take the audience along with.

#### 2.3.2.2.2. Preoccupation with a theological point of view

The preacher's enthusiasm to convert all people to his theology, to his view point can cause irritation among those who have their own view points about the same theme.

#### 2.3.2.3. The preacher who can lead to insight, namely, the disposition of the preacher

The task of the preacher is to help people become fully human through an ongoing process of change and growing willingness to be guided. "Every preacher is called upon to take away the obstacles that prevent this painful process of man's becoming man."<sup>87</sup> The aspects that facilitate this process are: *Dialogue* and *Availability*.

##### 2.3.2.3.1. The capacity for dialogue

Dialogue of this sort is not verbal but "a way of relating to men and women so that they are able to respond to what is said with their own life experiences. In this way dialogue is not a technique but an attitude of the preacher who is willing to enter into a relationship in which partners can really influence each other.[...] This can be a completely internal process in which there is no verbal exchange but it requires the risk of real engagement in the relationship between the one who speaks and those who listen".<sup>88</sup> It is an experience in which the Word has touched the life experiences. This requires that the preacher does not remain outside the realm of life experiences. He cannot remain untouchable and invulnerable.

##### 2.3.2.3.2. Availability

The process of dialogue depends on the preacher's willingness to be available to the congregation in a very basic sense. "Preachers who are not willing to make their understanding of their own faith and doubt, anxiety and hope, fear and joy available as source of recognition for others can never expect to remove the many obstacles which prevent the Word of God from bearing fruit."<sup>89</sup> One cannot be available to others without being available to oneself. This means looking at the positive and negative experiences at one's own disposal. "A preacher who wants to be a real leader is the man who is able to put the full range of his life-experiences – his experience in prayer, in conversation and in his lonely hours- at the disposal of those who ask him to be their preacher."<sup>90</sup> Care must be, however, taken to avoid self-indulgence. Through the ministers availability a real dialogue can take place leading to new insights. "The Word of God which is a sign of contradiction and a sword piercing the human heart can only reach people when it has become the flesh and blood of those who preach it."<sup>91</sup> The spirituality of the preacher consists of his "willing to lay themselves down and make their own suffering and their own hope available to others so that they too can find their own, often difficult way. [...]No preacher can bring anyone to the light without having entered the darkness of the Cross himself."<sup>92</sup> Christ is the perfect

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 40.

example of having entered into a deep dialogue by laying down his life for others in total availability.

Thus true preaching touches the life experiences of both the listeners and the preacher. By making his own life experiences, with its ups and downs, the preacher enables a non-verbal dialogue between the preacher and the listener enabling them to come to new insights. It demands courage to enter into oneself and to discern what experience can really help others to open themselves to the promise of God.

### **2.3.3. Individual pastoral care: *Beyond the skilful response***

The important factors that make the Individual pastoral care fruitful are: *The pastoral identity, the pastoral relationship* and *the pastoral approach* which are determined by the spirituality of the pastor.

#### 2.3.3.1. Spirituality and pastoral identity

In a society of increasing specialized services, the pastor finds himself entangled in a competitive market and often asks himself: What is my special tool? As most of the priests are amateurs in many fields and masters in nothing they suffer from a sense of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Two ways of claiming his identity are: *Self-affirmation* and *Self-denial*.

##### 2.3.3.1.1. Self-affirmation

The minister is called upon to give meaning to life and death which the other professions can hardly offer. He gives life by offering hope, by converting hate into love, and by helping others to make death an ultimate human gift. His ability to give perspective depends very much on his spirituality. The minister must affirm his own existence and must stand erect at the centre of his real life conditions. Only by being in touch with the core of his existence-life with its joys and sorrows, the certainty of death and the hope of a new life- he can live with a sense of purpose and fulfilment. Such a person can affirm the life of others and lead them to courage and hope. By affirming the lives of others the minister affirms his own centre.

##### 2.3.3.1.2. Self-denial

This is not the opposite of self-affirmation but a quality beyond it. This involves not trusting merely in our abilities and tools but unarming and loosing oneself to create space where God can work.<sup>93</sup> Self-affirmation stresses individuality and self-denial unification. Both creativity and mystical union belong to the spirituality of the pastor. "Through long and often painful formation and training, ministers have to find their places in life, discover their own contributions, and affirm their own selves: not cling to the self and claim it as their own unique property but go out, offer their services to others, and empty themselves so that God can speak through them and call people to new life."<sup>94</sup> According to Nouwen the identity of the minister is found in the creative tension between self-affirmation and self-denial, self-fulfilment and self-emptying, self-realization and self-sacrifice.

#### 2.3.3.2. Spirituality and pastoral relationship

The nature of the pastoral relationship depends on the spirituality of the pastor. There are two possibilities in the pastoral relationship: *Contract* and *Covenant*.

---

<sup>93</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 50.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 52.

#### 2.3.3.2.1. Contract

This refers to the well defined and well planned official meetings, conversations and celebrations which belong to our professional life. The minister has several of them every day. However there are also many informal and secret contracts which take place behind and besides the formal ones and the pastor has to take note of them, too. The pastor must also be open to the many other forms and possibilities of relating to people because often besides the formal contacts a lot or little can take place in the many casual contacts depending on how sensitive the pastor is. Therefore, both the well planned as well as the informal meetings belong to the field of pastoral relationship.

#### 2.3.3.2.2. Covenant

This term indicates that something more than a contractual relationship is expected of a Christian minister. The pastoral relationship goes beyond a contract of seeking and giving help under certain conditions. Yahweh's covenant with his people explains the true nature of pastoral relationship. The nature of the pastoral relationship can have the qualities of a professional contract but is ultimately based on the covenant of God with humanity which is unconditional. A pastoral relationship too, therefore, is "the unconditional commitment to be of service."<sup>95</sup> It is a giving of oneself in love without expecting immediate results and responses. If the pastor offers help under the not explicit condition that the other should change his way of life, it becomes a spiritual manipulation and often leads to the frustration of the pastor when the expected changes don't take place.

#### 2.3.3.3. Spirituality and pastoral approach

It is important that the pastor trains himself and keeps on learning. Other than the formal trainings there are two other important elements: *Role- definition* and *theological contemplation*.

##### 2.3.3.3.1. Role-definition

It is helpful that the pastor writes down his pastoral experiences and studies them to see clearly what took place in the past and to define what has to be done and how it has to be done in the future. By watching his experiences carefully the minister continues to learn.

##### 2.3.3.3.2. Contemplation

The pastoral experiences are to remain not merely sources of studies but the real life conditions of the 'living human documents' can become also the source of theological contemplation. Thus pastoral approach goes beyond the expertise of the behavioural sciences and even beyond professionalism. "In this sense every pastoral contact is a challenge to understand in a new way God's work with humanity and to distinguish with a growing sensitivity the light and the darkness in the human heart. [...] It is the continuing search for God in the life of the people we want to serve."<sup>96</sup>

Thus competence and contemplation are the foundations of individual pastoral care. The spirituality of individual pastoral care which goes beyond skilful response can be summed up as: "In the search for professional identity ministers move from self-affirmation to self-denial; in the establishment of professional relationships, they move from contract to covenant; and in the professional approach to the individual needs of their sisters and brothers they move from role definition to contemplation."<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 64.

The remarkable feature of Nouwen's idea on individual care is that it goes beyond professional help. Nouwen never denied the value of professional training. But ministry, according to him, is unlike other professional help. Here the minister's own life with its joys and sufferings and the concrete life-situation of the help seeking individual are placed at the centre. By affirming one's own life the minister can affirm the lives of the other person. Finally he must go even a step further and deny his own life making room for God to heal. This needs a covenantal relationship of unconditional love which is possible only through a contemplative life.

#### **2.3.4. Organizing: *Beyond the manipulation of structures***

There is a growing tendency among the ministers to engage in social changes because they feel that only by curing the sick society they can prevent the people from becoming the victims of the social evils. So they work for changing the evil social structures. However when the minister takes all the social projects into hands and claims himself to be a specialist in this field, the outcome may be disastrous. The best change the Christian organiser can bring about is to help the people to organize themselves. "When it indicates the vocation to make people aware of their hidden potentialities, to unify many different self-interests into a common concern, to remove the paralysing influence of fatalism and to offer a vision that make people see their social responsibility and strive beyond the many concrete actions to a Christian community in faith, then ministers might very well consider themselves organizers in a unique way."<sup>98</sup> It is a great service when he can break through the chain of pessimism and collective depression. He can also warn about apathy and destructive escapism. In promoting creative action he can lead others to new possibilities and perspectives. That needs, however, a strong spirituality without which the organizer finds himself trapped amidst worldly standards. To protect themselves from getting trapped into the pitfalls of a manipulative world the Christian agents of social change must be rooted in a sound spirituality. Therefore the first consideration is regarding the dangers.

##### 2.3.4.1. The pitfalls of the organizer

The minister is subject to three common dangers called *concretism*, *power* and *pride*.

###### 2.3.4.1.1. The danger of concretism

Many ministers work for immediate and concrete changes and end up in frustration when the expected change is not seen. The cause of the failure is often the fact that they enter the work with preconceived ideas about how things should be.<sup>99</sup> The preconceived ideas stand more as a hindrance than assistance to help our fellow men. The ministry misfires often when the people are not involved and their real needs, potential resources and interests are not taken into account.

###### 2.3.4.1.2. The danger of power

Many ministers are tempted to play the subtle power game of helping others to create a centre of power on which the people are dependant and to which they are thankful. One concrete example is in the field of education. "Education itself can become a form of power when we think that we are helping people by presenting them with our value system as the ideal way of life."<sup>100</sup> Subtle exercise of power with a sugar-coating of service to the neighbour is more a reminder of dependency and a threat to self-respect.

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>99</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 73.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 75.

#### 2.3.4.1.3. The danger of pride

It is the fantasy that one is always right and just and only the society outside needs conversion. “Everyone who wants to change society is in danger of putting himself above it and being more conscious of the weaknesses of others than of the weaknesses in his own soul.”<sup>101</sup> Nouwen saw these dangers as the basic temptations which Jesus himself had to overcome<sup>102</sup> to become the metaphysical and spiritual revolutionary which demands going beyond political revolution. Jesus was tempted to bring about immediate results and change the stones into bread, to take the power and the glory of all the kingdoms of the world, and to prove his invulnerability by throwing himself down from the parapet of the temple and allowing the angels to guard him. But only through overcoming these temptations could he become a revolutionary who was able to break through the narrowing chains of his world and surpass all political ambitions in order to make visible the Kingdom to come.<sup>103</sup>

#### 2.3.4.2. Christian agent of social change

When activism leads to frustration the immediate reaction is to withdraw and follow the other extreme inward way called Yoga with the conviction that “All the conflicts of the world find their origin in the human heart, and that their internal life is just a miniature of the cruel battlefields of the large society, that for them the only real place to start changing the world is in the centre of their own inner life.”<sup>104</sup> The task of an organizer is to live and help live in the tension between action and contemplation and reach for a synthesis. “Christian agents of social change are called upon to be social reformers and people who do not lose their own souls, people of action and of prayer at the same time.”<sup>105</sup> The ministry of organizing is living this perspective and making it visible to others. Such a perspective involves *hope, creative receptivity* and *shared responsibility*.

##### 2.3.4.2.1. The perspective of hope

Hope is not the same as wish-fulfilling in the future. The desire for wish-fulfilment is an immature form of faith which easily leads to despair when the wishes are not fulfilled. Hope on the other hand trusts in the goodness of the giver and puts no conditions. “Those who work for social change usually have very specific things in mind, as they must, but they can only remain a people of faith when they view every result they have achieved as a gift which they are asked to accept in freedom.”<sup>106</sup> Hope offers a perspective beyond the immediate results. They do not worry about the results of their work because they believe that God’s promises will be fulfilled and that it is only a temptation to desire to know exactly how this will happen.<sup>107</sup> In this way the organizing minister does not harm the basic Christian values like loving the enemies and desires the total freedom of the human person—that of both the oppressed as well as the oppressor. Hope works for change *now* but waits patiently and non-violently for the fulfilment of God’s promises. In hope we overcome the temptation to satisfy the immediate needs.

##### 2.3.4.2.2. Creative receptivity

This refers to the realization that we can discover many hidden treasures in the people we are ministering to which we can receive in return. “Those who want to bring about change have first of all to learn to be changed by those whom they want to help. [...] we will never

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>102</sup> Please see Mt.4/1-11 or Lk.4/1-13.

<sup>103</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 77.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>107</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 82.

be able to really give if we have not discovered that what we give is only a small thing compared with what we have received.”<sup>108</sup> The ‘poor’ are blessed in the words of Jesus. Not only are the rich the givers but also the poor have their own unique gifts to share with the rich. They radiate a unique happiness and in them we can see the hidden beauty of God. Through creative receptivity we do not give in to the temptation to exercise power over others.

#### 2.3.4.2.3. Shared responsibility

Some individuals with exceptional talents may play a unique role in bringing about great social changes but the role of small communities in which the responsibility as well as authority is shared is in no way insignificant. There are many ways and means of sharing the responsibility, namely, planning together, delegating tasks and co-operating with similar groups. Sharing responsibility as well as authority is a rewarding leadership quality. Not only acting together but also contemplating together belongs to organizing. “To share each other’s experiences, to carefully contemplate the reality in which they live, to make each other see why people do what they do and say what they say, and to celebrate the Eucharist together as a thanksgiving for being allowed to be of service to the people.”<sup>109</sup> To be real agents of change, ministers have to be contemplatives at heart. Only then they can “hear God’s voice in the midst of the crying children and see His face behind the dirty curtain of misery.”<sup>110</sup> Thus the shared responsibility helps us to temper the individual pride.

The new perspective for social change goes beyond structural changes. It is aimed at the coming of the Kingdom, the rule of God who makes everything new. “To avoid concretism, power and pride, agents of change have to live in the perspectives of hope, receptivity, and shared responsibility- all of which means that they must be contemplatives. [...] Real social action is a way of contemplation and real contemplation is the core of social action.”<sup>111</sup>

#### 2.3.5. Celebrating: *Beyond the protective ritual*

Faith is discovering the mystery of our being alive. In Christian life it is vital to live one’s life as the only life, accept it as a gift and discover that all of it is good. “Ministers are the ones who challenge us to celebrate life; that is, to turn away from fatalism and despair and to make our discovery that we have but one life to live into an ongoing recognition of God’s work with (humanity). Life must be celebrated and the celebrations must be an authentic expression of what really happens in life. “We can only celebrate if there is something present that can be celebrated. We cannot celebrate Christmas where there is nothing new born here and now, we cannot celebrate Easter when no new life becomes visible, we cannot celebrate Pentecost when there is no Spirit whatsoever to celebrate”<sup>112</sup>. Henri’s words challenge us to listen to the message hidden behind the celebrations; the message of goodwill in the incarnation, the message of hope in the resurrection and the message of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives in the Pentecost.

Nouwen conceded that it is not so easy to truly celebrate our lives. “Our lives vibrate between two darkneses. We hesitantly come forth out of the darkness of birth and slowly vanish into the darkness of death. We move from dust to dust, from unknown to unknown, from mystery to mystery. We try to keep a vital balance on the thin rope that is stretched

---

<sup>108</sup> Nouwen, *Ministry and Spirituality* 74. (A Three-in-one revised edition of *Creative ministry, Wounded Healer and Reaching Out*)

<sup>109</sup> Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* 86.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 88.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 93.

between two definitive endings we have never seen or understood. We are surrounded by the reality of the unseen, which fills every part of our life with a moment of terror but at the same time holds the secret mystery of our being alive.”<sup>113</sup> The uncertainties and dark moments of life tend to take away the celebrating spirit from us. Therefore the two necessary considerations are: how do we celebrate life? What kind of a person makes celebration possible. That leads us to the spirituality of celebrating.

#### 2.3.5.1. How do we celebrate life

Celebration in the Christian sense is not just parties and festivities. “Celebration is only possible through the deep realization that life and death are never found completely separate. Celebration can only really come about where fear and love, joy and sorrow, tears and smiles can exist together. Celebration is the acceptance of life in a constantly increasing awareness of its preciousness.”<sup>114</sup> Life is precious not only because it is there but also because one day it will be gone.

We can celebrate life only when we can look into this mystery and see that life and death, joy and sorrow exist together. “We can indeed make our sorrows, just as much as our joys, part of our celebration of life in the deep realization that life and death are not opponents but do, in fact, kiss each other at every moment of our existence. When we are born we become free to breath on our own but lose the safety of our mother’s bodies; when we go to school we are free to join a grater society but lose a particular place in our families; when we marry we find a new partner but lose the special tie we had with our parents; when we find work we win our independency by making our own money but lose the stimulation of teachers and fellow students; when we receive children we discover a new world but lose much of our freedom to move; when we are promoted we become more important in the eyes of others but lose the chance to take many risks; when we retire we finally have the chance to do what we wanted but lose the support of being wanted. When we have been able to celebrate life in all these decisive moments where gaining and losing- that is, life and death- touch each other all the time, we will be able to celebrate even our own dying because we have learned from life that the one who loses it can find it.”<sup>115</sup>

The Eucharist is the inspiration and source of all self-giving. It helps us to give ourselves happily and grateful. Eucharist as a thanksgiving means also celebration. The communal eating of bread and wine is a celebration in which we realize that life and death are intertwined, that fear and love, joy and sorrow co-exist. Three ways by which we accept and celebrate the life are: *affirming*, *remembering* and *expecting*.

##### 2.3.5.1.1. Affirming

Affirming life is saying with full consciousness “we are, we are here, we are now, and let it be that way”.<sup>116</sup> Instead of wandering about in the past or in the future we must be available to our present situations and feelings about them. This helps also affirming each other when we pray together. It forms also a community in which we affirm and celebrate the multiformity.

##### 2.3.5.1.2. Remembering

The present is rooted in the past. The past must be therefore embraced and remembered. For many the past is a prison of guilt feelings or the source of pride. “We are instead invited to

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 93-94.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 96.

look at our histories as the sequences of events that brought us where we are now and that help us to understand what it means to be here at this moment in this world.”<sup>117</sup> That means to live the ‘kairos’ in the light of God’s plan for our lives.

#### 2.3.5.1.3. Expecting

Remaining imprisoned in the past or clinging to the present prevents us from embracing the future. “The present holds promises and reaches out to the horizons of life, and this makes it possible for us to embrace our future as well as our past in the moment of celebration.”<sup>118</sup> In celebrating the present life we create space for the future and expect more to come. This is not that easy as it is easier to complain about the past and look with despair into the future. Jesus summarizes this in the Eucharist as God-with-us, in His memory and until He comes again. Even where liturgy is not the centre of life, life can be affirmed in the deepest Eucharistic sense.

#### 2.3.5.2. What kind of a person makes celebration possible

In a culture in which the people consider the past as missed opportunities, the present as the chance for accomplishments and the future as a doubtful paradise it is difficult to celebrate life in its true sense. “Our culture is a working, hurrying, and worrying culture with many opportunities except the opportunity to celebrate life.”<sup>119</sup> The vocation of the Christian minister is “to make it possible for man<sup>120</sup> not only to fully face his human situation but also to celebrate it in all its awesome reality.”<sup>121</sup> Only the minister who is obedient to the voices of the nature, the voices of other people and the voice of God can help people celebrate life.

##### 2.3.5.2.1. Obedience to the voices of nature

The nature tells us about the real nature of life. “It seems that we have become so concerned with mastering nature that we have become deaf to the voices of the rivers, the trees, the birds, and the flowers which are constantly telling us about our own condition of life, our beauty, and our mortality.[...] If we become more and more aware of the voices of all that surrounds us and grow in respect and reverence for nature, then we also will be able to truly care for man who is embedded in nature like a sapphire in a golden ring.”<sup>122</sup> It tells us that life is precious not only because it *is* but also because it does not have to be, that life means death also. We understand better the bread and wine as sacramental signs when we realize that the whole of nature is a sacrament pointing to a reality far beyond itself. In the Eucharist we see the “concentration of a mystery about which all of nature speaks day and night.”<sup>123</sup>

##### 2.3.5.2.2. Obedience to the voices of other people

This means recognizing people’s desire for as well as their fear of celebrating. “Celebration asks for the willingness to be enraptured by the greatness of the mystery which surrounds man, and for many, who would like to be in real touch with the ground of their own existence, there is a deep seated anxiety about being absorbed by it and losing their identity.”<sup>124</sup> The minister can use the liturgy as a window for the people to come in contact with the ultimate, the unseen reality. “Then ministers will keep searching for ways and channels, forms and rituals, songs, dances, and gestures that enable the brothers and sisters

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 98.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>120</sup> The initial writings of Nouwen was male dominated but this tendency left him later.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 103-105.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 106.

to come into vibrant contact with the Holy without fear.”<sup>125</sup> His role to lead the people into the mystery is not a privilege but a responsibility. To be able to lead others to the source of their existence one must have found the source of his existence, God.

#### 2.3.5.2.3. Obedience to the voice of God

A minister must be someone who has gone beyond the walls of fear and lives in intimate contact with God. “Ordination does not make anybody anything, but it is a solemn recognition of the fact that this individual has been able to be obedient to God, to hear God’s voice and understand the call, and that the ordained can offer others the way to the same experience.”<sup>126</sup> He is thus a man of prayer. He is guided by a vision and strives to make it come true without getting entangled in the day-to-day ups and downs and without forcing himself on others. He works for the kingdom without clinging to his own life. Others discover soon in him the source from which he draws his power. In humility the minister stretches out his hands, accepts life as a gift to be celebrated.

#### 2.3.6. An evaluation of the book *Creative Ministry*

The spirit of ministering can be summarized as going beyond professional expertise and the willingness to lay down one’s life for his friends. Jn. 15/13. “If teaching, preaching, individual pastoral care, organizing, and celebrating are acts of service that go beyond the level of professional expertise it is precisely because in these acts ministers are asked to lay down their own lives for their friends.”<sup>127</sup> The Christian ministers are called upon to respond to the restless and confused people who search for a new meaning, who are “experimenting with new methods of relating to each other, new ways of non-violent communication, new approaches to the experience of oneness and union, new means of mutual care, and new attempts to celebrate their lives”<sup>128</sup>. Nouwen saw the rich mystical tradition of Christianity as “a source of rebirth for the generation searching for new life in the midst of the debris of a faltering civilization”.<sup>129</sup>

Nouwen summarized the essence of his concept of the spirituality of the minister in teaching, preaching, individual care, organizing and celebrating as follows: “Teaching becomes ministry when teachers move beyond the transference of knowledge and are willing to offer their own life experiences to their students so that paralysing anxiety can be removed, new, liberating insight can come about and real learning can take place. Preaching becomes ministry when preachers move beyond the ‘telling of the story’ and make their own deepest selves available so that their hearers will be able to receive the Word of God. Individual care becomes ministry when those who want to be of help move beyond the careful balance of give-and-take with a willingness to risk their own lives and remain faithful to their suffering sisters and brothers even when their own names and fame are in danger. Organizing becomes ministry when organizers move beyond their desire for concrete results and look at their world with the unwavering hope for a total renewal. Celebrating becomes ministry when celebrants move beyond the limits of protective rituals to an obedient acceptance of life as a gift.”<sup>130</sup>

According to Nouwen what is very important in the ministry is to keep the goal always in mind. As instruments of ministry we have to be attuned to the will of the master and listen

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 108.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 117.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 114.

to him constantly who gives us the right word to be said and shows us the right steps to be taken. The purpose of ministry is to give new life. "All functions of the ministry are life giving. Whether one teaches, preaches, counsels, plans or celebrates, the aim is to open new perspectives to offer new insights, to give new strength, to break through the chains of death and destruction, and to create new life which can be affirmed. In short- to make the minister's weakness creative."<sup>131</sup> Such a minister uses his own weakness and the weakness of others as sources of creativity.

In ministry we have to rediscover the relevance of the Christian mystical tradition. The challenge to the future ministry is to help people to come to an experience of the transcendent Spirit of God who can renew our hearts as well as our world.

"This way of the transcendental experience is a way that requires ministry. It calls for men and women who do not shy away from careful preparation, solid formation, and qualified training but at the same time are free enough to break through the destructive boundaries of disciplines and specialities in the conviction that the spirit moves beyond professional expertise. It calls for Christians who are willing to develop their sensitivity to God's presence in their own lives, as well as in the lives of others, and to offer their experiences as a way of recognition and liberation to their fellow man. It calls for ministers in the true sense, who lay down their own lives for their friends, helping them to distinguish between the constructive and the destructive spirit and making them free for the discovery of God's life-giving Spirit in the midst of this maddening world. It calls for creative weakness."<sup>132</sup>

The use of the term 'creative weakness' reflects Boisen's influence too. Boisen's teaching that weakness or woundedness is the starting point of pastoral considerations is developed in Nouwen's *Wounded healing*.

Nouwen ends each point confessing that we are far from being true ministers. Only Jesus could live it perfectly. To partake in his ministry we must be followers of Jesus.

### **Some observations**

*Creative ministry* is a well structured book in which Nouwen limited himself to the five pastoral fields. The content shows the theoretical quality of his practically intended books. He gave a 'lifting' to the existing thoughts in the form of a 'beyond'. However one gets the feeling that his theory is not for the sake of theory. He is concerned about the practice and the reader feels directly addressed to. There are also consequences for those who are involved in ministry as well as consequences for those who are ministered to. For both sides there is the need to be actively involved and the whole person is wanted. That is typical of Nouwen, a man who was wholehearted and wholly involved in his thinking, doing and dealings.

In this book we find the strength of Nouwen who made a sharp diagnosis of the problems in ministry, sets the vision of a 'new' approach to ministry and suggests therapeutical measures for improving the ministry<sup>133</sup>. Nouwen identified the competitive, unilateral and the violent character of teaching and pleads for an interactive, dialogic and life-oriented process of teaching which needs overcoming the wrong supposition, false pressures and the

---

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 115.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>133</sup> The under-titles after Teaching, Preaching, Individual care, Organization and Celebration, namely, beyond transference of knowledge, beyond retelling of the story, beyond skilful response, beyond manipulation of structures, beyond protective ritual respectively, show the deficits in ministry as well as the new direction.

horror of self-encounter. The preacher suffers from the problem of the message and the problem of the messenger. His goal must be to lead people to insight through dialogue and availability. This requires overcoming the resistance to make one's own experience available. In individual care one of the main hindrances is the inadequate relationship. Ministry will become more effective when the minister claims his identity and exercises the right relationship and the right approach. This is possible through self-affirmation, self-denial and a covenantal relationship which comes as the fruit of contemplation. The inherent dangers of organization are concretism, power and pride. The desired pastoral qualities are hope, creative receptivity and shared responsibility which again has its root in contemplation. The celebration loses its true character if it limits itself to ritualism and fails to celebrate life in its total reality, as a gift to be lived with joy and thankfulness and to which death belongs as an inevitable part. True celebration involves affirming, remembering and expecting. For that we have to be obedient to the voice of nature, to the voice of others and the voice of God. For Nouwen to contemplate is to **see** and to minister is to **make visible**. Through a contemplative life the minister comes to a vision and the life of ministry is a life in which this vision is revealed to others. Nouwen illustrated this point with the example of the sculptor seeing a lion in a block of stone. This is narrated in *Clowning in Rome*<sup>134</sup>. Nouwen is a visionary and for him ministry is first of all a vision. That Nouwen's vision is radical is evident from the concluding remarks of the book<sup>135</sup>. Nouwen's book does not end with a rounding up but leaves an arrow pointing to something new and radical, carrying the power to break through the 'normal' and 'ordinary'. Opening oneself to God and obediently following his creative spirit is the way to creative ministry. Nouwen's focussing on the intimacy and going beyond in ministry which starts and ends in prayer tries to divert the danger of routine-religiosity and concentrating on the church 'business'. He gives a soul to ministry which enables us to grow up and progress on one's own unique way.

For Nouwen the secret of creative ministry lies in the personal approach to others in the light of the personal knowledge of God. True learning is not learning facts and figures, but knowing myself and the meaning and goal of my life. This demands dialogue and availability which exposes us to certain vulnerability too. Nouwen cautioned against professional self-complacency and social activism. The kingdom of God is the ultimate aim and its realization in and around us should be our true fulfilment. These thoughts are later deepened in the book *Gracias*. Nouwen cherished the gift of life and stressed the need for celebrating it. In the Eucharistic celebration, about which he wrote extensively, we find an expression to it. Later he qualified it as the 'livesigns of spiritual life'. The seeds of the later themes like weakness, woundedness, emptying etc. are already hidden in the book *Creative ministry*.

A general look at the book *Creative ministry* shows that Nouwen here goes beyond the need for intimacy as in the case of the first book, and looks at the person of the pastor in his totality with the pastoral situation. Nouwen complemented in the later works the need for intimacy with the need for withdrawal, in order to be in intimate communion with God. This is an aspect which is very much neglected even today and Nouwen does not hesitate to criticise the ministers inability to break through the boundaries of their imprisoned

<sup>134</sup> (Nouwen uses the image of the sculptor who carves out a beautiful figure out of a large stone to explain the interdependence of prayer and action in ministry. "There once was a sculptor working hard with his hammer and chisel on a large block of marble. A little boy who was watching him saw nothing more than large and small pieces of stone falling away left and right. He had no idea what was happening.. But when the boy returned to the studio a few weeks later, he saw to his great surprise a large powerful Lion sitting in the place where the marble had stood. With great excitement the boy ran to the sculptor and said, 'Sir, tell me how did you know there was a Lion in the marble?' *Nouwen, Clowning in Rome P.87.*

<sup>135</sup> See Nr. 2.3.6. above.

existence, their confusions and restlessness so that they can enter into the mystical world where God is the centre of their existence, from where they can pasture creatively. What is common in Nouwen's books is the sensible description of the real life situation. He narrates concretely the destructive powers in and around us and the negative dynamics which can creep into ministry. We constantly have to drive our energies and talents to a joyful and meaningful celebration of life with each other. The pastoral situation outside demands the minister to protect himself from being swallowed up by the demands outside. He has to create for himself an island of survival, a personal oasis, a centre from where ministry unfolds itself, a 'beyond' the realms of information, co-operation and therapy. Beyond means not being satisfied with order and discipline, but opening up oneself to the horizon of love, freedom and growth. It is a critical look at the existing thinking pattern of keeping up status quo, bringing everything under the per view of law and moral, clericalism and duty for the sake of duty.

A careful analysis of the book shows that the main point involved is the 'how' of ministry. The two pillars carrying Nouwen's thoughts are: the function and the identity of the minister. The traces of these aspects are found in one or other of his books. Nouwen wants to convey unequivocally that the foundation of ministry is a sound spirituality<sup>136</sup>. The inner development of Nouwen's thoughts in the later works show the shift of importance from professional knowledge to spiritual identity. Nouwen is also clear about the fact that the spiritual maturing is an ongoing process of moving from magic to faith and further to contemplation. Ministry involves a personal relationship to the persons ministered to and a personal relationship to God. Here Nouwen applied the earlier treated **intimacy** into the different professional and pastoral fields and showed how it makes the ministry creative. Creative ministering involves entering into a relationship, sharing experiences and seeing our lives in the light of God. So the pastoral identity is inseparable from the function. Interestingly one leads to the other but Nouwen tended to say that the relationship to God is the primary.

In the book *Creative ministry* we notice that Nouwen does not place the minister into the classical catholic role of priest - teacher – shepherd, but more into his Pastoralpsychology teacher, S. Hiltner's model, from whom he takes the above treated five pastoral fields. Nouwen's pastoral concept is an alternative to the 'triple office' model. His concept opens a broader horizon which includes the implications of the kingdom of God and the existential human living conditions. Here we find his teacher's influence on him although, typical of him, Nouwen sets his own accents like personal commitment and spiritual foundation. Nouwen's training in renowned universities helped him to concentrate at the empirical level on the problems and real life situations in pastoral ministry which are at times not sufficiently articulated by the dogmatic theology. Nouwen tried to extend the diaconal aspect of the ministry which is now getting importance in Germany also<sup>137</sup>. However the spiritual Niveau of Nouwen is yet to be felt in the academic level although he is well read among the common people as a spiritual author.

Nouwen's style is narrative. He describes the living circumstances and human behaviour in a realistic way, judges the situation objectively and points out the problems specifically. Nouwen's style is encouraging and comforting because he speaks about progressing and maturing in which everyone can see the perspectives and chances of his own personal growth. These new perspectives are mostly scattered in different books. The depth of

---

<sup>136</sup> Ministry is coupled with the spirituality of the minister. See *Creative ministry* Pages xix, xx, xxiii (preface) and our work.

<sup>137</sup> An example is Herbert Haslinger's works. The difference here is that it is more human science oriented compared to Nouwen's connecting the whole to the spiritual realm.

Nouwen's spiritual perspective and the invitation to grow in spiritual life is clearly visible in the following book *Wounded healer*.

#### 2.4. The Wounded Healer (1972)

In the book *The Wounded Healer*, published in 1972, Nouwen put together his ideas some of which were originally presented as lectures. Here he explored the meaning and significance of the ministry in the contemporary society in which the ministers realize that the familiar ways crumble and they stand stripped of their traditional protections. The reflection on the predicament of the contemporary humanity led Nouwen to an equally important subject, namely, the predicament of the minister himself. Therefore he took up the extension of the question of *intimacy* and *creative ministry* to situations in which the priests themselves are at times powerless and thrown to the bottom. Here the question is whether only to lament over one's own fate in life or open oneself for changes or healing.

The wounded healing is one of the most original and radical views in Nouwen's teachings and writings on ministry. Nouwen feels that ministers are called to recognize the sufferings of their time in their own hearts and to make that recognition the starting point of their service. The under-title of the above book - 'In our own woundedness we become a source of life for others' - suggests the thrust of the book, namely showing the woundedness as a source of grace, healing and new life.

Nouwen looked into the contemporary society through four open doors: the suffering world, the suffering generation, the suffering man and the suffering minister. Corresponding to this diagnosis of the modern world, Nouwen presented in four parts therapeutical measures for a fruitful ministry in a dislocated world, ministry for a rootless generation, ministry to a hopeless individual and ministry by a lonely minister. The ministers of today have to leave behind the pompous and magical and enter into the mystery of Christ, the wounded healer. "The minister is called to recognize the sufferings of his time in his own heart and make that recognition the starting point of his service. Whether he tries to enter into a dislocated world, relate to a convulsive generation, or speak to a dying man, his service will not be perceived as authentic unless it comes from a heart wounded by the suffering about which he speaks."<sup>138</sup> We shall trace the main points in this book to evaluate its contribution to Nouwen's pastoral spirituality.

##### 2.4.1. Ministry in a dislocated world<sup>139</sup>

Modern man finds himself a victim of the contemporary society. He is confused and looks for help. He is no more able to distinguish the boundaries between good and evil, ugly and beautiful, attractive and repulsive. He cannot differentiate between his self and his social milieu. He has lost the meaningful connections between the past, present and the future. He is rather a victim of the forces outside than someone pursuing a worthwhile goal. The life of the nuclear man simply drifts away. The predicament of the modern man is his historical dislocation, a fragmented ideology and a new search for immortality<sup>140</sup>. His way to true liberation, according to Nouwen, is the Christian way.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Nouwen, *Wounded Healer* xvi.

<sup>139</sup> Nouwen makes use of some of the ideas and terminology used by Robert Lifton in his books: *History and Human Survival*, N.Y., Random House, 1970 and *Boundaries* N.Y., Random House, 1970.

<sup>140</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 5-14.

<sup>141</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 15-20. (According to Nouwen some people choose the mystical way of liberation and others the revolutionary way. For Nouwen the Christian way is a synthesis of both. Nouwen studied a lot about the Christian mystical tradition. He came also in touch with the teachings of the East. He has great respect for the mystical traditions of other religions and his thinking was undoubtedly influenced by them.)

### 2.4.2. Ministry to the rootless generation

Here Nouwen focuses on the younger generation of our society who are the shapers of tomorrow. Unfortunately they are a fearful lot not getting sufficient attention and care and running away from the cruelties of the society. Only by redeeming them we can expect them to redeem us. So the questions at stake are: How do they look like and how to help them so that they can help us. The men and women of tomorrow can be characterised as *the inward generation, the generation without fathers and the convulsive generation.*<sup>142</sup>

According to Nouwen the eyes of the young men and women reflect to some extent the darkness of our society and they can very well be termed as the children of a lonely crowd. The young generation of today are self-centred, suspicious of authority and undirected or violent in their behaviour.

### 2.4.3. The minister as tomorrow's leader

The most important roles to be played by the Christian leader are: *as articulator of inner events, as a compassionate fellow human being and as a contemplative critic.* This means for the minister spiritual guidance, compassion and spiritual challenge.

#### 2.4.3.1. The leader as spiritual guide

More and more people are searching the God within than going after the God 'out there'. Therefore the basic task of a minister of tomorrow is "to clarify the immense confusion which can arise when people enter this internal world [...] and to offer men creative ways to communicate with the source of human life."<sup>143</sup> Many are afraid of this task and avoid it by concentrating on many other apparently more urgent things. The first step towards spiritual guiding is to turn to ourselves, to "the centre of our existence and become familiar with the complexities of our inner lives. As soon as we feel at home in our own house, discover the dark corners as well as the light spots, the closed doors as well as the drafty rooms, our confusion will evaporate, our anxiety will diminish, and we will become capable of creative work"<sup>144</sup> The minister must first of all articulate his own inner movements which become a helpful source for others to articulate theirs. "The man who can articulate the movements of his inner life, who can give names to his varied experiences, need no longer be a victim of himself, but is able slowly and consistently to remove the obstacles that prevent the spirit from entering. He is able to create space for him whose heart is greater than his, whose eyes see more than his, and whose hand can heal more than his. [...] The Christian leader is, therefore, first of all, a man who is willing to put his own articulated faith at the disposal of those who ask his help. In this sense he is a servant of servants, because he is the first to enter the promised but dangerous land, the first to tell those who are afraid what he has seen, heard and touched."<sup>145</sup>

#### 2.4.3.2. The compassionate leader

Unlike the 'fathers' the minister must claim a new authority, the authority of compassion. "Compassion is born when we discover in the centre of our existence not only that God is

---

<sup>142</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 24-35. (Nouwen takes this idea from *Psychology Today, October 1969* by J.K. Hadden and David Riesman.)

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 37-38.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 38.

God and man is man, but also that our neighbour is really our fellowmen.”<sup>146</sup> The evils and sufferings of the world confront the compassionate man with his own sins and weaknesses and can forgive others as his own brothers and sisters. “For a compassionate man nothing human is alien: no joy and no sorrow, no way of living and no way of dying”.<sup>147</sup> A compassionate man is not compelled to conform to the group-pressures. In compassion he is able to stand in the midst of the people avoiding the ‘distance of pity’ as well as the ‘exclusiveness of sympathy’.<sup>148</sup> The way of compassion goes beyond professional training. There is a danger that specialism becomes an excuse to avoid the difficult task of being compassionate. “The danger is that his skilful diagnostic eye will become more an eye for distant and detailed analysis than the eye of a compassionate partner. [...] More training and structure are just as necessary as more bread for the hungry. But just as bread given without love can bring war instead of peace, professionalism without compassion will turn forgiveness into a gimmick, and the kingdom to come into a blindfold.”<sup>149</sup>

#### 2.4.3.3. The minister as contemplative critic

Only a contemplative at heart can confront the inward, fatherless and convulsive generation with his critic. The term contemplation does not suggest passivity. It is an active, engaged form of contemplation of an evocative nature. “As a contemplative critic he keeps a certain distance to prevent his becoming absorbed in what is most urgent and most immediate, but that same distance allows him to bring to the fore the real beauty of man and his world, which is always different, always fascinating, always new.”<sup>150</sup> The minister has to chose a careful balance between withdrawal and action. With sarcasm and cynicism blaming the society for its failures without pointing out alternatives is only escaping the responsibility. The contemplative takes a creative distance from the world. Instead of nervously trying to redeem the people he affirms the good news that the humanity is already redeemed once and for all. By not gratifying his immediate needs he makes visible in daily events the fact that “behind the dirty curtain of our painful symptoms there is something great to be seen: the face of him in whose image we are shaped.”<sup>151</sup> This way he helps the compulsive generation to break through the compulsions and convulsions. The creative energies of the young people can be used to work for a better world. “In fact, the Christian leader who is able to be a critical contemplative will be a revolutionary in the most real sense. Because by testing all he sees, hears and touches for it’s evangelical authenticity, he is able to change the course of history and lead his people away from their panic-stricken convulsions to the creative action that will make a better world.”<sup>152</sup> The contemplative questions from his non-violent heart are free from the false motives and dubious objectives. “The contemplative is not needy or greedy for human contacts, but is guided by a vision of what he has seen beyond the trivial concerns of a possessive world. He does not bounce up and down with the fashions of the moment, because he is in contact with what is basic, central and ultimate. He does not allow anybody to worship idols, and he constantly invites his fellowmen to ask real, often painful and upsetting questions, to look behind the surface of smooth behaviour, and to take away all the obstacles that prevent him from getting to the heart of the matter. The contemplative critic takes away the illusory mask of the manipulative world and has the courage to show what the true situation is.”<sup>153</sup> He does not curse the now because he sees in the mustard seed the biggest shrub where the birds of the air can rest. Leading the convulsive generation is

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>148</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 41

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. 45.

essentially instilling hope. “The Christian leader who is able not only to articulate the movements of the spirit but also to contemplate his world with a critical but compassionate eye, may expect that the convulsive generation will not choose death as the ultimate desperate form for protest, but instead the new life of which he has made visible the first hopeful signs.”<sup>154</sup>

Finally leadership is a shared vocation which develops by working closely together in a community and the leader must be a man of prayer. “A man of prayer is, in the final analysis, the man who is able to recognize in others the face of the Messiah and make visible what was hidden, make touchable what was unreachable. The man of prayer is a leader precisely because through his articulation of God’s work within himself he can lead others out of confusion to clarification; through his compassion he can guide them out of the closed circuits of their in-groups to the wide world of humanity; and through his critical contemplation he can convert their convulsive destructiveness into creative work for the new world to come.”<sup>155</sup>

#### 2.4.4. Ministry to a hopeless man

Like fragmentation and rootlessness, hopelessness is another predicament of the modern man. Hope is an essential virtue in life. ‘But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation’ (1Thess 5/8). The ministers are leaders leading to wholeness, leading to a vision and leading to hope. The effectiveness of the ministry to the hopeless man depends on the quality of the leadership. Most of us are exposed to some or other form of leadership relationship- be it at home, during work or while playing. The principles of a leadership relation in its simplest form, the one-to-one relationship, is worth pondering as it implies also the basic principles of complex relations. Leadership involves leading one another from point to point, from view to view, from one conviction to another.<sup>156</sup> The task of a Christian leader can be stated as leading the hopeless man to a new tomorrow. So we at first consider the condition of man today and then how to lead him to tomorrow. The hopeless man is characterised as one living in an *impersonal milieu, afraid to die and also afraid to live*<sup>157</sup>.

#### 2.4.5. How to lead to tomorrow

The mystery of a man is too immense and too profound to be understood by or explained by another man. The quality of leading someone to tomorrow lies in the ability to enter into the painful human condition where one waits for the other to respond in a very personal way, giving life and hope. The minister’s personal presence, his waiting in life and waiting in death are sources of hope.

##### 2.4.5.1. Personal presence

For someone who is in agony the personal presence of someone is more important than well-formed words or clever ideas. Therefore a very personal presence, attentive to the person and his/her situation, is the answer to the impersonal milieu.

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>156</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 52.

<sup>157</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 55-61.

#### 2.4.5.2. Waiting in life

The minister is expected to lead the other from fear to hope by reinforcing his desire to live. We can do it by showing that someone is waiting for him in life. When the minister is willing to enter the hopeless man's life as someone who loves him, someone who wants him to live and someone waiting to receive him at times of need, he becomes the hopeless man's tomorrow. Then tomorrow is no longer an endless dark tunnel but becomes "flesh and blood in the brother who is waiting and for whom he wants to give life one more chance."<sup>158</sup>

#### 2.4.5.3. Waiting in death

That someone waits in life may make less sense when the patient is sure of death or when the possibility of survival is uncertain. Therefore waiting can be even a waiting in death. The waiting as an expression of love goes beyond life and death. It is entering into a deeper relationship where two men "reawaken in each other the deepest human intuition, that life is eternal and cannot be made futile by a biological process."<sup>159</sup>

#### 2.4.6. Principles of Christian leadership

The basic principles of Christian leadership which can be summed up as the spirituality of the minister are: *personal concern, faith in the value and meaning of life and hope*. The mystery of incarnation clearly points out that God has empowered us to lead our fellow men to freedom.

##### 2.4.6.1. Personal concern

Personal concern is the willingness to give his life for his fellowmen. It is the commitment to go after the lost sheep, to be totally present to and participating in the agony of the other. It is a martyrdom, a witnessing "that starts with the willingness to cry with those who cry, laugh with those who laugh, and to make one's own painful and joyful experiences available as sources of clarification and understanding."<sup>160</sup> Entering into the most personal brings us closer to the most universal too.

##### 2.4.6.2. Faith in the value and meaning of life

A true Christian leader does not follow the beaten track which often leads people only to a dead-end but rather helps them to discover new life in the midst of despair. "For a man with a deep-rooted faith in the value and meaning of life, every experience holds a new promise, every encounter carries a new insight, and every event brings a new message. But these promises, insights and messages have to be discovered and made visible. A Christian leader is not a leader because he announces a new idea and tries to convince others of its worth; he is a leader because he faces the world with eyes full of expectation, with the expertise to take away the veil that covers its hidden potential. Christian leadership is called ministry precisely to express that in the service of others new life can be brought about."<sup>161</sup> The desire to live and the desire to have someone who walks along with me or waits for me is a deep rooted desire in every man. The minister must be sensitive to it and must realise that the human encounters are opportunities to discover or rediscover the basic search of the

---

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. 67.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 74.

human heart. This requires “a deep rooted faith in the value and meaning of life, by one who knows that life is not a static given but a mystery which reveals itself in the ongoing encounter between man and his world.”<sup>162</sup>

#### 2.4.6.3. Hope

The Christian leader with a personal concern sustained by his growing conviction in the value and meaning of life is ultimately a man of hope. “Hope makes it possible to look beyond the fulfilment of urgent wishes and pressing desires and offers a vision beyond human suffering and even death. A Christian leader is a man of hope whose strength in the final analysis is based neither on self- confidence derived from his personality, nor on specific expectations for the future, but on a promise given to him. [...]Leadership therefore is not called Christian because it is permeated with optimism against all odds of life, but because it is grounded in the historic Christ-event which is understood as a definitive breach in the deterministic chain of human trial and error, and as a dramatic affirmation that there is light on the other side of darkness.”<sup>163</sup> In its Christ-Centeredness the minister’s spirituality of hope in the promise of God is an act of discipleship. “Hope prevents us from clinging to what we have and frees us to move away from the safe place and enter unknown and fearful territory. This might sound romantic, but when a man enters with his fellow man into his fear of death and is able to wait for him right there, “leaving the safe place” might turn out to be a very difficult act of leadership. It is an act of discipleship in which we follow the hard road of Christ, who entered death with nothing but bare hope.”<sup>164</sup>

#### 2.4.7. Ministry by a lonely minister

Here we come to the heart of the wounded ministry. Ministry is aimed at inviting the brothers and sisters to trust in the promise of God that the Messiah, the liberator will let peace and justice take the rightful place. The Jesus-way is the way of the minister too. Jesus took upon himself the human limitations and sufferings. He was however not concerned merely with his own wounds. He took time to wind up the wounds of others. The minister too is a wounded healer.

##### 2.4.7.1. The wounded minister

Using a Talmud legend<sup>165</sup> Nouwen illustrates the woundedness of the minister, the courage not to hide it and the spirituality of helping others to heal their wounds while suffering one’s own wounds. As ministers we have to look after our own wounds and be prepared to look after the wounds of others. Jesus has made his own broken body the way to health, to liberation and new life. The minister is called “not only to care for his own wounds and the wounds of others, but also to make his wounds into a major source of his healing power.”<sup>166</sup> One example of the minister’s woundedness is his loneliness. “The loneliness of the minister is especially painful; for over and above his experience as a man in modern society,

---

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>165</sup> Rabbi Yoshua ben Levi came upon Elijah, the prophet, while he was standing at the entrance of Rabbi Simeron ben Yohai’s cave.... He asked Elija, “When will the Messiah come ? “ Elija replied, “Go and ask him yourself”. “Where is he?” . “Sitting at the gates of the city”. “How shall I know him?”. “He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and then bind them up again. But he unbinds one at a time and binds it up again saying to himself, ‘perhaps I shall be needed: if so I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment’.” *Taken from the tractate Sanhedrin. (Nouwen, Wounded Healer p. ?)*

<sup>166</sup> Nouwen, Wounded Healer 82.

he feels an added loneliness, resulting from the changing meaning of the ministerial profession itself.”<sup>167</sup> The loneliness can be personal or professional.

#### 2.4.7.1.1. Personal loneliness

The growing competition and rivalry of our society leads to increasing loneliness causing intensive desire for unity and community. The result is the search for ways and means to experience intimacy and belonging. Nouwen holds the radical position that loneliness belongs to our Christian way of life and instead of avoiding it or running away from it we have to protect it and cherish it as a precious gift. “The painful awareness of loneliness is an invitation to transcend our limitations and look beyond the boundaries of our existence. The awareness of loneliness might be a gift we must protect and guard, because our loneliness reveals to us an inner emptiness that can be destructive when misunderstood, but filled with promise for him who can tolerate its sweet pain.”<sup>168</sup> According to Nouwen no human intimacy can take away this basic loneliness. “No love or friendship, no intimate embrace or tender kiss, no community, commune or collective, no man or woman will ever be able to satisfy our desire to be released from our lonely condition. This truth is so disconcerting and painful that we are more prone to play games with our fantasies than to face the truth of our existence. Thus we keep hoping that one day we will find the man who really understands our experiences, the woman who will bring peace to our restless life, the job where we can fulfil our potentials, the book which will explain everything, and the place where we can feel at home. Such false hope leads us to make exhausting demands and prepare us for bitterness and dangerous hostility when we start discovering that nobody, and nothing, can live up to our absolutistic expectations.”<sup>169</sup> The minister who sees in his loneliness the invitation to enter into a deeper communion with God and helps others to realize the same is a wounded healer.

#### 2.4.7.1.2. Professional loneliness

Today the minister is no more the much sought person but rather someone who is pushed away to the edge. The experience of his diminishing importance is frustrating for many ministers. “The minister is called to speak to the ultimate concerns of life: birth and death, union and separation, love and hate. He has an urgent desire to give meaning to people’s lives. But he finds himself standing on the edges of events and only reluctantly admitted to the spot where the decisions are made.”<sup>170</sup> The pain caused by his failure to change the world and the pain of being pushed to the edge, if they are understood by the minister as sharing in the human condition, can be converted into a “source of healing to those who are often lost in the darkness of their own misunderstood sufferings.”<sup>171</sup>

#### 2.4.7.2. The healing minister

Here we come to the important consideration, how can the wounds become source of healing. It is the minister’s willingness not to hide his own experiences, not in the sense of spiritual exhibitionism, but in the sense of “a constant willingness to see one’s own pain and

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 84. (It may sound like undermining the possibility and desirability of human love. Nouwen esteemed human love very much and longed for it. But he made a clear distinction between the human love and the divine love and repeatedly pointed to the limitations of human love. Interestingly there is less indication in Nouwen that the human love and divine love are inseparable and that the experience of the one lead to the experience of the other. Either the wanting more of the human and not getting it or the desire for the lasting love made Nouwen put the divine love over the human love and not both of them in a unity. )

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 87.

suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men share.”<sup>172</sup> According to Nouwen it doesn’t contradict the concept of self-realisation or self-fulfilment but deepens and broadens it. Hospitality is the source of healing “which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveller[...]It requires first of all that the host feels at home in his own house, and secondly that he create a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor.”<sup>173</sup> The main components of hospitality are concentration and community.

#### 2.4.7.2.1. Concentration

Hospitality is a virtue which needs discipline. According to Nouwen it is “the ability to pay attention to the guest. This is very difficult, since we are preoccupied with our own needs, worries and tensions, which prevent us from taking distance from ourselves in order to pay attention to others.”<sup>174</sup> To be able to ‘pay attention’ without ‘intention’, one has to concentrate on the other person without ‘imposing’ himself upon the other with ‘intrusive curiosity’.<sup>175</sup> Concentration leads to contemplation and withdrawal and vice versa. “Paradoxically, by withdrawing into ourselves, not out of self-pity but out of humility, we create the space for another to be himself and to come to us on his own terms.”<sup>176</sup> Withdrawal as the precondition for hospitality is beautifully describes by Nouwen as: “human withdrawal is a very painful and lonely process, because it forces us to face directly our own condition in all it’s beauty as well as misery. When we are not afraid to enter into our own centre and to concentrate on the stirrings of our own soul, we come to know that being alive means being loved. This experience tells us that we can only love because we are born out of love, that we can only give because our life is a gift, and that we can only make others free because we are set free by Him whose heart is greater than ours. When we have found the anchor places for our lives in our own centre, we can be free to let others enter into the space created for them and allow them to dance their own dance, sing their own song and speak their own language without fear. Then our presence is no longer threatening and demanding but inviting and liberating.”<sup>177</sup>

#### 2.4.7.2.2. Community

A minister who offers hospitality does not take away the pain but gives the freedom to share the pains. At this deeper level of sharing “they soon see that their own wounds must be understood not as sources of despair and bitterness, but as signs that they have to travel on in obedience to the calling sounds of their own wounds.”<sup>178</sup> Ministry in this sense is leading others to accept their basic human condition which includes joys and sorrows, life and death, in which he himself shares. Ministry is a confronting service because although it cannot prevent suffering, the minister can prevent people from suffering for the wrong reasons. “It does not allow people to live with illusions of immortality and wholeness. It keeps reminding others that they are mortal and broken, but also that with the recognition of this condition, liberation starts.”<sup>179</sup> The ministry of the wounded healer leads to community, not necessarily physical togetherness, but a community based on God’s call which goes beyond human togetherness. “Hospitality becomes community as it creates a unity based on the shared confession of our basic brokenness and on a shared hope.”<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>175</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 90.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 91.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 91.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 92.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 93.

Thus we see that the wounds of loneliness can be converted into a source of healing. The wounds remind us that we have to wait in hope for the liberation to come. However the one who listens to God's voice knows that **today** is the day of salvation. The liberation begins today in our hearts when we realize that they begin in our wounds. Christian way of life is a call to follow Christ, the wounded healer, as authentically as possible. The minister with this authentic life motivates others to live their lives as authentic as possible. Ministry of this sort is not predetermined. It is creative and open-ended. The role of the minister is to give a forward thrust. "Every time a host allows himself to be influenced by his guest, he takes a risk not knowing how they will affect his life. But it is exactly in common searches and shared risks that new ideas are born, that new visions reveal themselves and that new roads become visible.[...] The minister is called to make this forward thrust credible to his many guests, so that they do not stay but have a growing desire to move on, in the conviction that the full liberation of man and his world is still to come."<sup>181</sup>

### Observations

Nouwen recognises the connection between the sufferings in the world and the suffering in one's own heart. This recognition leads one to the ministry of a wounded healing. The minister is called to lead the dislocated man, who is in search of his liberation, into the Christian way of action and contemplation. He is called to guide the rootless generation spiritually, lead them compassionately and confront them with a contemplative critic. His questions and answers come from a contemplative heart which does not react compulsively. He is expected to lead the hopeless man to tomorrow through personal presence, personal concern and through his own hope and faith in the value and meaning of life. The wounded healing consists of making his own loneliness and suffering as a hospitable space for those who are wounded and look for understanding and consolation. One's own woundedness enables the minister to enter into the painful situation of the affected, understand one another better and together enter into prayer which connects the suffering life situation with the horizon of God's promises<sup>182</sup>. This requires concentration and community. The theme hospitality plays a great role because only if the wounds can be accepted and expressed without fear or shame they can be healed. For Nouwen one of his greatest wounds was his loneliness. Here we can see the connection between the themes intimacy, hospitality and loneliness. Every human being is basically lonely and needs intimacy. Hospitality is the necessary free space which enables intimacy. In ministry hospitality means being personally present and being attentive. Nouwen's own woundedness made him extremely sensible for the life situation and its problems and show them great understanding with a spiritual and contemplative presence. In the wounds we also find the hidden gift of hoping in the promise of healing which dawns with the outbreak of God's Kingdom which is already in the process through the coming of the Messiah. What is important is not to hide the wounds. One need not exactly narrate the wounds, which Nouwen also did not do, but it is important to accept them and let God bind up our wounds.

Nouwen does not make a list of the paining wounds. They may exist in the form of our confusions or the unanswered questions about the goal and meaning of our life. They can be our personal or professional loneliness. Our lack of being wanted, loved and esteemed may cause mental injuries. Our disabilities, sicknesses or feelings of insufficiencies may cause us pain. Wounds may be also inflicted upon through war, violence and mishandling. Ruptures in relationships may also leave behind their scars. Only a minister clothed with compassion

---

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>182</sup> Here Nouwen comes close to Haslinger's view that the starting point of ministry is the life situation of the people *See Haslinger, Praktische Theology; Bands I and II.* . Haslinger does not come to this idea merely intellectually. His experiences with his own handicapped brother could be the source of inspiration.

and who places his own wounds under the healing hands of God can be instrumental in the healing of the wounds of others. This needs spiritual qualities like offering hospitality, personal presence, concern, concentration, attention and a communion of believers sharing not only the brokenness but also the hope. Sharing the experience of pain and loss and inviting the presence of the Lord in the midst of it is an Emmaus experience in which the wound becomes also the source of grace and healing. Nouwen's faith that it is not the minister who brings about changes, but the Lord who is present during our discussion and journey effects the purification and healing is a highly spiritual concept of ministry. Such an attitude and approach goes beyond professional help and needs the support of the communities.

Therefore another important aspect of the wounded healing is the role of supporting communities, which Nouwen discovered during the course of his life as a great source of spiritual living. Nouwen tried very much to combine individual freedom with community spirit and personal growth and credibility with common search and common witnessing. The concept of wounded healing is for Nouwen a confession of his own biography. Nouwen's great spiritual healing power came from his own woundedness which we have discussed especially in the first chapter. The further aspects of community and hospitality will be named in *Reaching Out* which also will be treated as the next book of this work. To some extent we can say that the book *Wounded healer* lays the foundation for a common search about the existential situation and identity of both the laity as well as the ministers. The coming books build up this spirituality. In the next book *Reaching out* we will be taken to the deep spiritual insights of Nouwen.

A final observation is that the book *Wounded Healer* contains no theoretical solutions, but only the existential problems of the humanity and the personal spirituality of the minister. Surprisingly Nouwen does not enter in the above book much into the realm of religion or prayer. He concentrates on the basic human condition and suggests that shared brokenness and shared hope are the springboard of healing which is ultimately the work of God. Here we experience Nouwen as a Springer who in his basic brokenness and woundedness tries to catch the ultimate with the help of prayer and contemplation. Later on Nouwen realized that being caught by God is easier than trying to catch God. This requires great trust in the catcher and the courage to leave the safe place and plunge into the unknown. Nouwen wanted to elaborate this point in a book on the trapeze spirituality which could not be materialised due to his sudden and unexpected death.

## **2.5. Reaching out: The three movements of the spiritual life (1975)**

Nouwen's first plan to write this book was developed in 1972 during a short seminar on Christian spirituality at the Yale Divinity School. The text was completed only two and a half years later during Nouwen's stay in the Trappist Monastery. Published in 1975, the book articulates the personal thoughts and feelings about being a Christian. This book is born out of Nouwen's own struggles in the spiritual life. In his effort to follow them closely he reached a level where he found it worth sharing with others. The book contains no answers or solutions but an invitation to find signs of hope, courage and confidence in the midst of the painful spiritual quest. *Reaching Out* presents a comprehensive understanding of the spiritual life in its three dimensional tension and interaction between the self, the others and God. The three movements referred to are the movement from loneliness to solitude, from hostility to hospitality and from illusion to prayer which are reaching out to the innermost self, reaching out to our fellow human beings and reaching out to God respectively. They are however not watertight compartments nor do they

exclude each other. Instead they “flow into one another as the different movements of a symphony”.<sup>183</sup>

### 2.5.1. Reaching out to our innermost self

An individual in his spiritual life moves between the poles of loneliness and solitude, hostility and hospitality, illusion and prayer. It is important to know that we do not have to deny or avoid our loneliness, hostilities and illusions. To the contrary when we have the courage to let these realities come to our full attention, understand and confess them, then they can slowly be converted into solitude, hospitality and prayer.

#### 2.5.1.1. Suffocative loneliness

In a competitive society togetherness is a way of avoiding loneliness. Loneliness is a suffocating experience. The root cause is often growing fear, uncertainty, lack of friends or a lack of experience of love, gentleness, tenderness and a joyful togetherness of spontaneous people. People often try to run away from loneliness by distracting themselves with some or other occupation or by looking for easy solutions like rushing into love relationship. But the fear or suspicion of a conditional love is still there. Many notice being used or exploited and end up in frustration. Avoiding the painful void, people cling to each other anxiously which forms the basis for a violent relationship. In an intimate relationship there is mutual openness but the inner mystery and uniqueness of every person is protected and instead of clinging to each other each person can move graciously in and out of each other's life circle.

#### 2.5.1.2. Receptive solitude

Nouwen suggested, “Instead of running away from our loneliness and trying to forget or deny it, we have to protect it and turn it into a fruitful solitude. To live a spiritual life we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude”.<sup>184</sup> Solitude requires being alone time and again with a receptive heart which listens to its deepest longings and tries to live them, maybe with a humble beginning.

#### 2.5.1.3. Creative response

Solitude is not basically withdrawal from the distracting world, but a solitude of the heart which “protects and respects the aloneness of the other and creates the free space where he can convert his loneliness into a solitude that can be shared”<sup>185</sup>, a quietude that brings us closer to the awareness of the presence of God who calls us to a communion beyond togetherness. Solitude is not passivism but a deeper engagement, converting fearful reactions into a loving response. It is a movement from impulsive, nervous, anxious reactions to acting from the centre of our being. Instead of shunning the problems it becomes alert to them, making them part of the contemplation inviting oneself and others to a free and fearless response. It is a creative response with alertness to the happenings around, which can convert the interruptions into opportunities for growth and which gives a heart of compassion showing solidarity with one another.

---

<sup>183</sup> Nouwen, Reaching out 20.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 44.

## 2.5.2. Reaching out to our fellow human being

Reaching out to others is to move from hostility (*hostie*) to hospitality (*hospie*). It is not merely receiving the strangers. It is a fundamental attitude towards our fellow human beings which can be expressed in a great variety of ways.

### 2.5.2.1. Creating space for strangers

Creating space is not an easy task when we are occupied and preoccupied with many things. Often we are hostile to others because we see them as potential threat. In schools and universities or in the professional field we often see others as threat to our intellectual or professional safety. In solitude we can come out of our fearful, defensive, aggressive and suspicious attitude to strangers and create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be fully formed and experienced. The biblical examples of Abraham Gen.18/1-15, Elijah 1Kgs17/9-24 and the Emmaus story Lk.24/13-35 show how, when we convert our hostility to hospitality, the guests reveal the promises they carry with them. Hospitality “offer(s) friendship without binding the guest and freedom without leaving him alone”.<sup>186</sup>

### 2.5.2.2. Forms of hospitality

Different forms of this hospitality can be exercised in the relationship between parents and children; teachers and students; healers(professionals) and patients. It is important to know that we are not only givers but also the receivers at other times. We move in and out of each other's worlds at different times in different ways. Hospitality is the gesture of practicing the love of our neighbour in different walks of our life.

### 2.5.2.3. The host

A good host must be at home in his own house who can through his life of integrity confront the stranger with his unambiguous presence. It is important not to hide behind neutrality but show one's own ideas, opinions and life style clearly. “We can enter into a communication with the other only when our own life choices, attitudes and viewpoints offer the boundaries that challenge strangers to become aware of their own position and to explore it critically”.<sup>187</sup> A truly hospitable heart is a heart which is poor in mind and heart. Poverty is defencelessness, openness and detachment. Defencelessness converts the stranger because “we have nothing to defend, since we have nothing to lose but all to give”<sup>188</sup> as a gift. The poverty of the mind is a growing willingness to recognise the incomprehensibility of the mystery of life, a ‘learned ignorance’. Poverty of the heart is the freedom from prejudices and prejudgement. It is accepting a large variety of human experiences and not limiting God to our concepts. Only by forgetting ourselves we can let the other person approach us without fear and let the mystery of his person unfold itself.

---

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.71.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 103.

### 2.5.3. Reaching out to our God

The third important movement is the movement from illusion to prayer, a reaching out to God. To reach out to God in prayer is the ultimate goal of solitude and hospitality.

#### 2.5.3.1. Prayer and mortality

There is a growing tendency to avoid the truth of our mortality and to live in an illusionary world of immortality. Prayer helps us to convert the illusion of immortality into the courage to accept our life and its limitations. “In order to convert our crying loneliness into a silent solitude and to create a fearless place where strangers can feel at home, we need the willingness and courage to reach out far beyond the limitations of our fragile and finite existence toward our loving God in whom all life is anchored”.<sup>189</sup> One of the obstacles to move to prayer is the illusion of immortality, which is subtly expressed in defending and protecting our life as an inalienable property, of which sentimentality- clinging to each other with a nearly suicidal seriousness and false expectations- and violence- valuing one’s own and others lives as properties to be defended- are the symptoms. The idolatry of our dreams of immortality is difficult to be kept away but by stretching out the hands in prayer we can move from the human shelter to the house of God. We have to make the hard decision in favour of prayer because “spiritual life without prayer is like the Gospel without Christ.”<sup>190</sup> The paradox of prayer is that we have to learn to pray although it is a gift of God. We cannot manipulate God but without a careful discipline we cannot receive him either. Prayer is entering into a new world beyond the boundaries of our mind and is “a great adventure because the God with whom we enter into a new relationship is greater than we are and defies all our calculations and predictions...[and] hard to make since it leads us from false certainties to true uncertainties, from an easy support system to a risky surrender, and from the many ‘safe’ Gods to the God whose love has no limits”.<sup>191</sup> In prayer it is difficult to distinguish God’s presence and absence. “His presence is so much beyond the human experience of being together that it quite easily is perceived as absence. His absence on the other hand, is often so deeply felt that it leads to a new sense of his presence”.<sup>192</sup> The best example of converting a protest into prayer is Jesus himself on the cross.

#### 2.5.3.2. Prayer of the heart

Everyone must search for his own suitable way to pray. Dwelling upon the word of God, experiencing its re-creative power in silence and seeking the help of a guide are some of the concrete steps. Our prayer becomes the prayer of the heart when we descend with the mind into the heart. Prayer will be then “like a murmuring stream that continues underneath the many waves of every day and opens the possibility of living in the world without being of it”.<sup>193</sup> When God becomes the centre of our being we are like being at home while still on the way.

#### 2.5.3.3. Community and prayer

While prayer is far from easy it is important that we are nourished by a community of faith in which prayer is the language of the community, a people fashioned by God whose hearts

---

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 147.

are filled with compassion. In prayer both joys and sorrows can exist and wait in patience for the last day.

## Observations

This book shows Nouwen's great enthusiasm and talent to plunge into the spiritual depths of Christian existence and to chart out a way for the spiritual life through the didactic of drawing a tensed wire between the triple poles of God, myself and others. Interestingly Nouwen starts with himself, the way to one's own self. The existential situation is the starting point of the spiritual search. The pain of loneliness is also the source of our ability to enter into solitude. Towards our fellow human beings we move between the poles of distance and hospitality. By overcoming fear and selfishness we can allow in ourselves the grace-filled and creative free-space for others. On our way to God we are confronted with our true nature. Prayer has the power to convert our loneliness and fear to a welcoming attitude. The spiritual experience is ultimately the experience of being welcomed by others and finally by God. The initial experience of pain is inseparable from the experience of peace and consolation and even compliments it because the hunger makes us to speak about the food and war about the peace. So also paradoxically the new life comes from the midst of the struggles of the past life. The book *Reaching out* is a source of encouragement and hope for those who embrace their life with their own personal experiences, the experiences of others and the experience with God.

In this book Nouwen treats some of the deep seated problems of human life like loneliness, the desire for communion with God and fellow human beings and the struggles to meet the longings of our hearts. The existential situation and the struggles to offer it to God in order to be transformed by God as described in the book *With open hands* is once again intensified in this book without any moralising. Nouwen's answers are again prayer and solitude. He sees the great chance of spiritual growth in the deeply biblical way of hospitality. Thus instead of bringing in new themes Nouwen deepens his favourite themes of solitude and prayer as the way to growth in spiritual life. These themes are further developed in his later books. Therefore our next attempt is to take a look at the books like *Genesee Diary* (1976) and *Here and Now* (1994).

### 2.6. Genesee Diary (1976)

Taking advantage of the sabbatical, by special arrangement with the Trappist monks of Genesee Abbey in upstate New York, Nouwen spent seven months in seclusion at the Abbey. Living the day-to-day monastic routine as a fully integrated, if temporary member of the community provides him with a unique opportunity to examine his own life as a busy lecturer and writer. Nouwen called it a report of the seven month stay here from June to December 1974. The final form was published in 1976. Throughout Nouwen's writings we come across his diagnosis of the present world. For Nouwen the contemplatives are a sign of hope in the midst of a troubled world. The decision to spend this time was a challenge necessitated by his 'restless self'<sup>194</sup>, his desire to speak with God rather than about God and to experience the 'reality of the Unseen'. Nouwen described the paradox of his inner conflicts as "while desiring to be alone, I was frightened of being left alone"<sup>195</sup>. Nouwen looked for a place and a person who would guide him on his spiritual journey. He decided to go to the Abbey of the Genesee in upstate New York where J.B.Eudes was the Abbot. Nouwen had met him for the first time in the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky and had

---

<sup>194</sup> Nouwen, *Genesee Diary* 13.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

since then several meetings with him for spiritual direction. Nouwen was admitted as a temporary monk to live with thirty other monks.

This diary reflects his critical honesty and shows how he moved during these months from restlessness to a calm waiting. The restlessness urged him to look for ‘the quiet stream, a still point where (my) life is anchored’<sup>196</sup> He was not satisfied with talking about God as his heart longed to talk to God and to live for the glory of God. “And still I know that living for the glory of God would make everything different. Even living for each other would then be living for the glory of God. It is God’s glory that becomes visible in a loving community.”<sup>197</sup>

### 2.6.1. Silence, solitude and prayer

Nouwen reflects here intensively on silence, solitude and prayer about which he wrote in the earlier works like *With open hands* and *Reaching out* - although the theme prayer comes almost in all the books. The time in the Abbey was also a time to really pray, to try to live that of which he was convinced. He knew that the wisdom of the desert fathers would help him to come to true prayer. Creating space for prayer demands a certain detachment, mental sobriety and attentiveness to God. That is the way to solitude, silence and inner peace<sup>198</sup>. Silence, solitude and prayer give the necessary Quietness to see the deep movements of the soul, just as only when the sea is calm the fishermen can see the movements below. “When we keep a diagnostic eye on our soul, then we can become familiar with the different, often complex stirrings of our inner life and travel with confidence on the paths that lead to the light.”<sup>199</sup> According to Nouwen prayer does not take away all our problems but gives us freedom from anxieties. “Instead of *excluding* I could *include* all my thoughts, ideas, plans, projects, worries and concerns and make them into prayer. Instead of directing my attention only to God, I might direct my attention to all my attachments and lead them into the all-embracing arms of God”<sup>200</sup>.

Nouwen repeated here the need of emptying oneself before God, enter into silence and grow into communion with each other. “While it is true that in order to pray you have to empty your heart and mind for God, you also have to empty your heart and mind of your feelings and ideas on prayer. Otherwise, prayer gets in the way of praying.”<sup>201</sup> Also prayer is intimately connected with silence. “Even in the most elevated discussion, something enters that seems to pollute the atmosphere. In some strange way speaking makes me less alert, less open, and more self-centred. [...] I realize that the more I speak, the more I will need silence to remain faithful to what I say.”<sup>202</sup> Prayer is a grace, a gift of God, the spirit of God flowing into us and strengthening our spirit. For Nouwen solitude is an inner quality, which does not exclude communion, but enables true communion. “The more you discover what a person is, and experience what a human relationship requires, in order to remain profound, fruitful and a source of growth and development, the more you discover that you are alone- and that the measure of your solitude is the measure of your capacity for communion. The measure of your awareness of God’s transcendent call to each person is the measure of your capacity for intimacy with others. If you do not realize that the persons to whom you are

---

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. 29

<sup>198</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 31.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. 133-134.

relating are each called to an eternal transcendent relationship that transcends everything else, how can you relate intimately to another at his centre from your centre?"<sup>203</sup>

In prayer we experience the unifying power. The unity of the heart attained through prayer helps to speak from the heart to the heart. Lack of single-mindedness leads to fatigue. The experience of God's unifying presence is an experience in which the distinction between joy and pain seems to be transcended and in which the beginning of a new life is intimated."<sup>204</sup> In mystical prayer both active protest and passive surrender are present, and man struggles with God as Jacob wrestled with the angel. It is a meeting with God and the rest of the humanity in compassion. "Compassion lies at the heart of our prayer for our fellow human beings. [...] In praying for others, I lose myself and become the other, only to be found by the divine love which holds the whole of humanity in a compassionate embrace."<sup>205</sup> It is also important to have a daily discipline. "Without a continuing rhythm of prayer, occasional or regular days of retreat would lose their connection with the rest of life."<sup>206</sup>

John Eudes helped Nouwen to realize that the reason for his aggressive, dominating and competitive spirit is due to the underdeveloped feminine qualities of receptivity and contemplation. As a psychologist Nouwen could sort out some of his conflicting and contradicting feelings and take them to the spiritual realm. He says that the 'twin Thomas', the believing and the doubting person, is present in every individual. It is the role of the community to help individuals to grow in faith. "In times of doubt or unbelief, the community can 'carry you along', so to speak; it can even offer you on your behalf what you yourself overlook, and can be the context in which you may recognize the Lord again."<sup>207</sup>

At several places Nouwen writes that anger stands on the way of prayer. "On a deeper level you might wonder how much of your anger has to do with ego inflation. Anger often reveals how you feel and think about yourself and how important you have made your own ideas and insight. When God becomes again the centre and when you can put yourself with all your weakness in front of him, you might be able to take some distance and allow your anger to ebb away and pray again."<sup>208</sup> Nouwen's restlessness and problem with loneliness is clear from his own vivid description of the state of his mind as he gave up his teaching in Holland and tried to live as a student in a rented house. "The irony was that I always wanted to be alone to work, but when I was finally left alone, I couldn't work and started to become morose, angry, sour, hateful, bitter, and complaining."<sup>209</sup> Nouwen located the reason for his anger and restlessness in the feeling of rejection to which his response was disproportionate and without nuances. His desire for the unconditional love made him very vulnerable as nobody can offer it and even if someone offered it, he would reject it as it might amount to an infantile dependency.<sup>210</sup>

## 2.6.2. Self and God

Nouwen confesses his own restlessness and his understanding of the spiritual life is very much influenced by the restlessness of the soul and the need for rest in God. The tension between peace and restlessness has to be accepted rather than avoided. "It almost seems as

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>205</sup> Cfr. Ibid 133-134.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. 68

<sup>210</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 52.

if there were two persons in me experiencing life quite differently, praying differently, and listening differently. I started to wonder how they both could live together in peace.”<sup>211</sup>

It was a giant spiritual leap for Nouwen to realize that it is “a great temptation to make even God the object of (his) passion and to search for him not for his glory but for the glory that can be derived from smart manipulation of godly ideas”<sup>212</sup> The great truth is that each person *is* the glory of God. To live for the glory of God is to live who we are and to make true our deepest self. “Spiritual life is nothing more or less than to allow that space to exist where God can dwell, to create the space where God can manifest itself.”<sup>213</sup> Even simple God-experiences take us a long way. “Just as a whole world of beauty can be discovered in one flower, so the great grace of God can be tasted in one small moment. Just as no great travels are necessary to see the beauty of creation, so no great ecstasies are needed to discover the love of God. But you have to be still and wait so that you can realize that God is not in the earthquake, the storm, or the lightning, but in the gentle breeze with which he touches your back.”<sup>214</sup>

Nouwen confesses that to respond to God’s love is an act of faith. “It requires a great act of faith to accept the love that is offered to us and to live, not with suspicion and distrust, but with the inner conviction that we are worth being loved[...]to really believe that God loves you, to really give yourself to God in trust, even while you are aware of your sinfulness, weakness and miseries.”<sup>215</sup>

### 2.6.3. Mysticism, a common call

Nouwen’s continued study of the spirituality brought him to the realization that Theology in the sense of ‘mystical experience of God’ is the crowning of all knowledge. “To be single-minded, to ‘will one thing’, that is my goal and desire. Then also I can let go of the many pains and confusions that are the result of a divided mind. By allowing the Lord to be in the centre, life becomes simpler, more unified and more focussed.”<sup>216</sup> Much pain is the result of manipulation and projection. “As long as I am plagued by doubts about my self-worth, I keep looking for gratification from people around me and yield quickly to any type of pain, mental or physical.”<sup>217</sup> Self-doubt, insecurity and guilt-feelings are weaknesses that are easily exploited by others. The way out is one’s identity in the Lord, making the Lord the centre of life. Having him as the centre we pray not in our terms but in his terms. “When I discover the Lord on his terms, I will be able to let go of my own worries and concerns and surrender to him without any fear of the pains and sufferings this might lead to.”<sup>218</sup> For Nouwen mysticism is the opposite of withdrawal from the world. “Intimate union with God leads to the most creative involvement in the contemporary world.”<sup>219</sup>

Evaluating his stay in the trappist monastery Nouwen confesses that he was not a new man after the retreat. His weakness kept confronting him. But the Tabor experience gave some hope and perspectives for the ongoing life. “I can say that I have a most precious memory which keeps unfolding itself in all that I do or plan to do. I no longer can live without being reminded of the glimpse of God’s graciousness that I saw in my solitude, of the ray of light

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 115.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. 161-162.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. 212.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. 180.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. 181.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. 177.

that broke through my darkness, of the gentle voice that spoke in my silence, and of the soft breeze that touched me in my stillest hour. This memory, however does more than bring to mind rich experiences of the past. It also continues to offer new perspectives on present events and guides in decisions for the years to come. In the midst of my ongoing compulsions, illusions and unrealities, this memory will always be there to dispel false dreams and point in right directions.”<sup>220</sup>

## Observations

The titles which Nouwen used for each month show the starting point and the final goal. In the silent atmosphere of the monastery Nouwen discovers: “You are the glory of God”. This is for Nouwen the reason and the moving spirit to “pray for the world”. The one who guides and fulfils our action or contemplation is the “one Lord”. Waiting “quietly and joyfully” with him and for him is also ministry. Nouwen is not a contemplative like Merton but his answer to spiritual and pastoral problems is however the contemplation. That is why the thrust of this book is silence, prayer and community as Nouwen experienced them in the monastery.

Nouwen's open confessions and sharing about the freedom as well as struggles make us feel one with him. It gives us hope and courage in spite of the fact that we experience again and again doubts, darkness, spiritual aridity and the fight with oneself. Nouwen puts it positively that they are the steps to experience 'Tabor' which renews us and strengthens us. The realization that growing and maturing in spiritual life is an ongoing process which needs care and discipline makes us sojourners through hills and valleys and even dark tunnels with light at the end of it. It is noticeable that the importance of caring for spiritual life and it's growth and the implications of it gain momentum in the following books. The themes prayer, solitude and community are once again the subject matter of the books *Clowning in Rome* and *The way of the heart* which we will be taking up.

In Nouwen's writings we see a cautioning against looking for unconditional love from others but he himself was very much dependent on affection and praise. The question is if they are to be seen at different levels or do they constitute the two poles between which the human being always sways?

It is a question whether Nouwen was consistent in his ideas or was more like Merton whose style he describes as “Merton never tried to be systematic and never worried about being consistent. He articulated skilfully and artfully the different stages of his own thoughts and experiences and moved on to new discoveries without worrying about what people made of his old ones.”<sup>221</sup> Nouwen also left many old fields to enter into new pastures. In spite of their affinity to each other both were two different persons.

Nouwen was more an active contemplative. The struggle with oneself amidst the longing for intimacy and the need for silence and solitude to reach out to God come out strongly in this journal. Thus what Nouwen wrote in the previous books about intimacy, community, prayer solitude etc he as tried to practice and live during his retreat from active ministry. The vocation of ministering to others does not fall away totally in this book because he refers often to the how of ministering to others. The focus is however on the pastor and not on the what and how of ministry or the pastoral situation outside. It is a ministering to oneself to be able to minister to others. In the following book *Living Reminder* Nouwen

---

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. 218.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. 183.

deepens his concept of Ministry which has to do with the personal disposition of the minister and the spirituality of the ministry and at the same time is an active participation in the ministry of Christ.

## 2.7. Living Reminder (1977)

This work which appeared in 1977 contains the three lectures at the international conference of the association for Clinical Pastoral Education and the Canadian Association for Pastoral Education. The pastoral framework is clear from the context but the first sentence of the book, “What are the spiritual sources of ministers?”<sup>222</sup> suggests the spiritual thrust. Nouwen continues his search into the problem of ministry which he terms as ministers becoming dull, sullen, lukewarm bureaucrats, people who have many projects, plans and appointments but who have lost their heart somewhere in the midst of their activities, and he presents his insights in the book *The living Reminder*<sup>223</sup>. This book emphasises very much the minister’s role of reminding.

The memory of Jesus Christ in service and prayer helps the ministers to stay at the source from where they can “preach and teach, counsel and celebrate with a continuing sense of wonder, joy, gratitude and praise.”<sup>224</sup> The role of a minister is that of a healing, sustaining and guiding reminder.<sup>225</sup>

### 2.7.1. Minister as a healing reminder

Remembering has a very positive role to play in our lives. The life journey through the rough and thorny way leaves many wounds in us. The sins and wounds of the past cannot be healed if they are forgotten. By remembering them we can heal them. Without healing them we are doomed to repeat them or commit worse things. The minister can heal the wounded past and open up a new future by reminding.

#### 2.7.1.1. The wounds

Memories depend not only on the events but also on the way they are placed into one’s personal history, the form they take in the totality of one’s history. Memories may be biting, accusing or joyful. They exercise great influence on us depending on how we have integrated the past events into our way of being in the world.<sup>226</sup> Many people approach the minister with ‘suffering memories’. These wounding memories which are hidden in the centre of our being, which are hard to reach, which escape healing and cause much harm are the objects of healing. Avoiding or trying to forget the past is harmful. “By not remembering them we allow the forgotten memories to become independent forces that can

---

<sup>222</sup> Nouwen, *Living Reminder* 11.

<sup>223</sup> Nouwen makes here another attempt to name the spiritual sources of ministers. In three parts the author presents the minister as healing reminder, sustaining reminder and a guiding reminder. Nouwen’s main concern is to bring about the connection between profession and personal life, between ministry and spirituality. Ministry is service in the name of the Lord and therefore the spirituality of ministry is paying attention to the life of the spirit in us. Prayer and service as different calls or vocations is a dangerous understanding according to Nouwen. Therefore by presenting ministry as remembrance and minister as reminder Nouwen tries to combine both prayer and service as the two arms of the same person.

<sup>224</sup> Nouwen, *The living Reminder* 11.

<sup>225</sup> Nouwen uses the same terminologies used by his teacher Seward Hiltner in his book *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, N.Y. 1954.

<sup>226</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 19.

exert a crippling effect on our functioning as human beings.”<sup>227</sup> Only by affirming one’s wounded condition, healing is possible and so enter into a new way of living.

### 2.7.1.2. The healing

As psychologist Nouwen was convinced that instead of suppressing the memories, allowing them to come to the surface, looking at the wounds in the face is the most powerful way of healing them. Healing takes place “by letting them be available, by leading them out of the corner of forgetfulness and by remembering them as part of our life stories.”<sup>228</sup> The task of the ministers as healers is “to offer the space in which the wounding memories of the past can be reached and brought back into the light without fear. [...]When our memories remain covered with fear, anxiety or suspicion the word of God cannot bear fruit.”<sup>229</sup> The minister as reminder requires “a dynamic understanding of the lives and behaviour of those who need to be reminded”.<sup>230</sup> Here the behavioural sciences can assist the minister. However it is dangerous when the minister is more interested in the receiver of the message than the message itself, or when he talks more about people than about God in whose name he approaches the people.

Another aspect of healing is leading to connection. “The vocation of the minister is to continuously make connections between the human story and the divine story. We have inherited a story which needs to be told in such a way that the many painful wounds about which we hear day after day can be liberated from their isolation and be revealed as part of God’s relationship with us. Healing means revealing that our human wounds are most intimately connected with the suffering of God himself. To be a living memory of Jesus Christ, therefore, means to reveal the connections between our small sufferings and the great story of God’s suffering in Jesus Christ, between our little and the great life of God with us.”<sup>231</sup> What is important is to know that healing is not taking away the pains. “To heal, then, does not primarily mean to take pains away but to reveal that our pains are part of a greater pain.”<sup>232</sup> Healing remembering is remembering everything. By hiding part of our story from our own consciousness and from God’s eye, we only judge our past and limit mercy to our own fears. But by seeing and experiencing them as part of God’s ongoing redemptive work, we convert the destructive memories into redemptive.

### 2.7.1.3. The healer

The temptation for many priests is to ask how can I heal. But the more radical question is: Who am I as a living memory of God? That means that the minister’s way of life is the most powerful reminding. This way of life includes walking in the presence of the Lord which means “to move forward in life in such a way that all our desires, thoughts, actions are constantly guided by Him.”<sup>233</sup> This is called a prayerful life, a life in which God is understood as the origin and purpose of our existence. By walking in his presence, we break through our most basic alienation and live a life of total connectedness. Such a person lives for God, loves and serves the neighbour as the natural consequence of his love for God and can distinguish service from the need to be liked, praised and respected. Seeing God in the

---

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. 25. (Nouwen points out that St. Luke reminds us that for Jesus the way to glory was to suffer and he reminded the two disciples going to Emmaus about it. Lk.24/26 )

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. 28.

neighbour and serving God in the neighbour is possible only because of God's 'first love'. Therefore intimacy with God is the basic spirituality of a reminder.

The practical consequences for the minister as healing reminder are: that the minister is called to a prayerful life, "a life lived in connection with Christ"<sup>234</sup> in which the needs of our neighbours and the nature of our service are disclosed. It demands that the training- which also derives insights from the behavioural sciences- should concentrate on service rooted in prayer. Thirdly prayer and action are not to be separated and finally that in ministry it is Christ who lives in us that matters and not our lives.

### 2.7.2. The minister as a sustaining reminder

Love sustains and therefore good memories sustain. Memories of good friends or memories of affectionate bonds have the power to nurture and sustain us amidst the agonies and struggles of life. Memory connects us to the past and keeps us alive in the present. The prophets told the Israelites to remember God's acts of love and great compassion to struggle through the dark moments of life. The loving memory of Jesus in the Eucharist is a true source of strength. The Eucharist not only nourishes but also fills with hope. Memory actualizes the past events and sustains us with hope for the future.

#### 2.7.2.1. Sustenance

Memory sustains and leads to a new intimacy. To enable the memory to sustain the absence of the minister is as important as his presence. True closeness grows in the continuous interplay between presence and absence. "There is little doubt that memory can distort, falsify and cause selective perception. But that is only one aspect of memory. Memory also clarifies, purifies, brings into focus, and calls to the foreground hidden gifts."<sup>235</sup> It is from the distance that we can see each other in a new way and understand each other's inner core. "When we remember each other with love we evoke each other's spirit and so enter into a new intimacy, a spiritual union with each other. At the same time, however, the loving memory always makes us desire to be in touch again, to see each other anew, to return to the shared life where the newly found spirit can become more concretely expressed and more deeply embedded in the mutuality of love. But a deeper presence always leads again to a more purifying absence. Thus the continuous interplay between presence and absence, linked by our creative memory, is the way in which our love for each other is purified, deepened and sustained."<sup>236</sup>

This was proved in the life of Jesus himself. It was after leaving the disciples and during his creative absence that Jesus sent his spirit who led them to the truth. The new communion with the loved one sustains. "It is a life giving memory, a memory which sustains and nurtures us here and now and so gives us a real sense of being rooted amidst the many crises of daily life"<sup>237</sup>.

#### 2.7.2.2. The sustaining

The sustaining ministry is a ministry of a careful balance between presence and absence. "It belongs to the essence of a creative ministry constantly to convert the pain of the Lord's

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. 43.

absence into a deeper understanding of his presence.”<sup>238</sup> It is not only the minister’s presence but also his absence should remind the people of the Lord. “There is a ministry in which our leaving creates space for God’s spirit and in which, by our absence, God can become present in a new way.”<sup>239</sup> The minister can practice it in the visitation and the celebration of the Eucharist. It is important that the minister uses the right words before leaving someone pointing to the hidden God. In the Eucharistic celebration the affirmation of God’s absence and our basic lack of fulfilment can help us to experience his sustaining presence. The minister at the Eucharistic table calls the people “to mourning as well as to feasting, to sadness as well as to joy, to longing as well as to satisfaction.”<sup>240</sup> Silence can foster the absence and lead us to a deeper experience of God’s presence.

The sustaining ministry, therefore, requires “the art of creative withdrawal so that in Remembering God’s spirit can manifest itself and lead to the full truth. Without this withdrawal we are in danger of no longer being the way, but *in* the way; of no longer speaking and acting in his name, but ours; of no longer pointing to the Lord who sustains, but only to our own distracting personalities. If we speak God’s word, we have to make it clear that it is indeed God’s word we speak and not our own. If we organize a service, we have to be aware that we cannot organize God but only offer boundaries within which God’s presence can be sensed. If we visit, we have to remember that we only come because we are sent. If we accept leadership it can only be honest if it takes the form of service. The more this creative withdrawal becomes a real part of our ministry the more we participate in the leaving of Christ, the good leaving that allows the sustaining spirit to come.”<sup>241</sup>

### 2.7. 2.3. The Sustainer

The implications of sustaining for the minister are a certain unavailability to others and intimacy with God. To be absent from the people in order to be present to God is a sustaining absence. Jesus too sought this absence to be able to pray. For him the father was the centre, beginning and end of his ministry and his communion with the father was the source of all words and actions. “It is in the intimacy with God that we develop a greater intimacy with people and it is in the silence and solitude of prayer that we indeed can touch the heart of the human suffering to which we want to minister.”<sup>242</sup> There is a useful ‘uselessness’ in withdrawing to a lonely place and remaining with God doing nothing other than wasting time. “Prayer is not a way of being busy with God instead of with people. In fact, it unmasks the illusion of busyness, usefulness, and indispensability. It is a way of being empty and useless in the presence of God and so of proclaiming our basic belief that all is grace and nothing is simply the result of hard work. Indeed wasting time for God is an act of ministry, because it reminds us and our people that God is free to touch anyone regardless of our well-meant efforts. Prayer as an articulate way of being useless in the face of God brings a smile to all we do and creates humour in the midst of our occupations and preoccupations. [...]Whenever I become a little useless I know that God is calling me to a new life far beyond the boundaries of my usefulness.”<sup>243</sup> Prayer is thus a call to a new usefulness.

So the minister as sustainer must keep the balance between presence and absence, create space for God through his creative absence and be in intimacy with God. The practical

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. 52.

implications are: exploring ways not only of being present but also of being absent, carefully showing the way without being in the way, making prayer the core of ministry and making it a subject of training and formation. It is important for the ministers to spend useless time with God reminding themselves of their ‘uselessness’ amidst so many ‘useful people’.

### 2.7.3. The minister as a guiding reminder

The minister not only heals and sustains through the memory of Jesus but also guides them into the future. “The memory that heals the wounds of our past and sustains us in the present also guides us to the future and makes our lives continuously new.”<sup>244</sup> The minister as reminders, as prophets point their people in a new direction and guide them into unknown territory.

#### 2.7.3.1. The guidance

Good memories give new confidence and hope. The prophets guide by reminding. By reminding their people of the misery of slavery and the liberating love of God, the prophets of Israel motivated them to move forward into the promised land, into a new future and challenged them to honour their memory by their behaviour. The memories are the blueprint of the future. “They help us to move forward faithful to the vision which made us leave the land of slavery, and obedient to the call which says that the promised land is still ahead of us.”<sup>245</sup>

#### 2.7.3.2. The guiding

Two ways in which the minister can guide are through confronting and inspiring. “A prophetic ministry which guides toward a new future requires the hard, painful unmasking of our illusions: the illusion that “we have arrived”, that we have found the final articulation of our faith, and that we have discovered the life-style which best gives shape to our ideals.”<sup>246</sup> Ministers as prophets challenge others to follow the great vision every time they are tempted to remain at a comfortable interpretation of the great vision.

The other important aspect of guiding is to inspire. Inspiring others is possible only by recapturing the original vision and stirring others to look up again with new courage and confidence. One easy method of confronting and inspiring is to tell a story. The life stories of great visionaries are very powerful means of confronting and inspiring. The advantage of a story is that “we can dwell in a story, walk around, find our own place. The story confronts but does not oppress; the story inspires but does not manipulate. The story invites us to an encounter, a dialogue, a mutual sharing.”<sup>247</sup>

#### 2.7.3.3. The guide

The spirituality of the guide can be summarized as being in touch with the source of inspiration. It is important to remember that it is the spirit who guides. “The great mystery of the ministry is that while we ourselves are overwhelmed by our own weaknesses and limitations, we can still be transparent that the spirit of God, the divine counsellor, can shine

---

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. 59.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. 66.

through us and bring light to others.”<sup>248</sup> The spirit becomes visible for others in the guide when he dwells on the Word of God and allows it to descend from mind into the heart filling him with the life-giving spirit. “If we really want to be living memories, offering guidance to a new land, the word of God must be engraved in our hearts; it must become our flesh and blood.”<sup>249</sup> This kind of prayer called ‘total meditation’ is the spiritual source of the minister. A few prayers by heart can help us to enter into the quietude of meditation. Prayer is a gift but prayer needs also some training, supervision and direction.

The consequences of guiding are: making individual and collective memories a source of guidance, knowing that guidance is a form of confronting and inspiring, using story telling as an effective method of confronting and inspiring, the Word of God and meditation on it as the centre of life, and that the ministers must undergo some training in prayer.

Finally ministry is a professing profession. Ministers must be trained in the expertise provided by the behavioural sciences. However his role is more than that of a professional. He is someone who professes his faith in Jesus and his kingdom. Profession in this sense is witnessing, proclaiming, announcing. In ministers “Profession as expertise and profession as proclamation can never be separated without harm.”<sup>250</sup>

### Observations

Nouwen shows in this book his psychological knowledge which he applies to the spiritual realm and which according to him serves the spiritual growth. Here we notice a parallel running of the ministry in its functional aspect and the required spirituality of the minister. In this book we see how the spirituality is gaining importance in his pastoral concerns. The minister is expected to have sufficient training and knowledge but above all lead a life of prayer. Here he goes beyond the trend of his time which insisted on a solid training.

In *Living Reminder* Nouwen presents in a compact way the pastoral fields mentioned in *Creative ministry*. He uses a biblically, theologically and psychologically significant term 'Remembrance', which is important in the Jewish spirituality too, and the role of the minister is to 'remind'. Joining the views of E. Wiesel, A. Malraux and M. Scheler, Nouwen describes that the Memory of the experienced and suffered personal life history and the history of our society help us to overcome these deep seated memories and to open our lives for the future. In remembering we look critically at the past from the angle of today and also gain the proper vision for the future. The Old Testament experience of the crisis of exile opened the eyes of the people to God's promises and his fidelity which gave them new hope in spite of their guilt feelings. Similarly by looking back on our life-path we can look at that situation from a distance and understand it as God's story with each one of us and place our present life into the horizon of God's promises in which our *Chronos* will be transformed to *Chairos*.

Nouwen explains this using Hiltner's key pastoral words, namely; healing, sustaining and guiding. Ministry involves healing, sustaining and guiding. The minister does not act on his own. He is only a reminder of God, a living memory of Jesus whose spirit heals. Healing is possible when the minister offers a fearless space to bring wounds back into the light and help people to accept them as part of life and connect it with the divine story. The 'useless

---

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. 76. (Nouwen shows the difference between ministry as expertise and ministry as proclamation which comes from the heart, from one's own experience. With varied functions the identity of the minister remains the same, namely he is a man of God, a man of prayer, a man in touch with God.)

time' spend in remembering which is possible in a liturgy or during a visit enables us to connect our story to God's story and experience the healing presence of God. The sustaining ministry involves a deep presence and a purifying absence. The sustaining ministry is a ministry of being present and also of withdrawing. Only a balanced presence and absence enables a fruitful meeting which can help others to take a look at their own life. Nouwen himself is an example. He placed great importance on the daily time for prayer and retreated himself to the Trappist monastery. The guiding ministry guides people into the future, into new directions and unknown territories. That means confronting the masked life and inspiring the people to recapture the original vision. It is far from enforcing our views and ideas. It is a prophetic role of reminding about God's promises which helps us to understand the past and the present from the point of view of his salvation history with humanity and shows thereby the way into the future and gives new hope. A guiding minister is a man of 'total meditation'. In the two important books prior to *Living Reminder* namely *Out of solitude* (1974) and *Reaching Out* (1975) Nouwen has shown the importance of the inner spiritual development of the minister rooted in solitude.

In the epilogue Nouwen confesses that it is a positive coincidence that finally he landed up in the traditional categories of pastor, priest and prophet - healer, sustainer and guide. His concern here is not the canonical understanding of the three offices of the priest. He uses them as metaphors for the anthropological and spiritual competence of the minister. Nouwen speaks about the spiritual meaning of the term profession - at a time in which most people of his time understood it only as training, skill, expertise and specialisation - referring to, witnessing, proclaiming, and announcing which is rooted in the biblical heritage. According to Nouwen profession as expertise and profession as proclamation can never be separated without harm.<sup>251</sup> Here we find the Nouwen who was more a proclaimer than teacher which inspired many and touched their lives. We also see the great motivation of Nouwen to speak about the deepening of the personal spirituality of the minister which is the basic condition for a fruitful ministry. For most of the pastoral deficits and problems Nouwen's simple solution is being a living reminder. Nouwen was convinced that people need more than ever the priests than the psychologists. The priests as living examples of the Gospel and as reminders of Jesus connect the earthly with the heavenly. Nouwen's focusing on the human limitations and God's real and powerful intervention in the life of every individual helps the ministers to take time for prayer with good conscience. The ministers 'useful uselessness' can become the curtain behind which God works his wonders.

When we compare the book *Living Reminder* to his previous works we see that Nouwen deepens the pastoral categories with spiritual inputs. An important aspect of the above book is that the attention is concentrated not on the minister but on Jesus and the memory of his incarnation, death and resurrection. Creating space for Jesus is also a way of practicing hospitality which involves being present and absent. This insight is of great relevance to our time, at least in the western context, in which the ministers are overloaded with more area and number of Catholics and themselves do not know where to be present and how much to be present. They suffer constantly under the pressure of being present everywhere and at any time.

In the 'wounded ministry' the existential situation of both pastor and the 'sheep' was the centre of attention. From his own life experience of not getting the unconditional love and the restlessness of his soul, Nouwen must have learned that only by connecting the earthly to the heavenly, the pastoral to the spiritual we can experience fulfilment. Jesus should become the focal point of ministry and prayer is the fire which radiates warmth and light for

---

<sup>251</sup>

Ibid. 76.

the ministry. For Nouwen it is important that the ministers do not stand on the way, instead pave the way for Jesus. This way means becoming 'weak' and 'irrelevant'. This involves also being absent to others in order to be present to oneself and to God. The professing or proclaiming minister is brought out once again cleverly in the next book which was originally meant for the 'professed' Christians but turns out to be the 'ought' spirituality of every Christian.

## 2.8. Clowning in Rome (1979)

Nouwen wrote the contents of this book during the five-month stay in Rome to give lectures to the English-speaking community of Sisters, Priests and Seminarians. Later they were published in 1979 under the title *Clowning in Rome* and contain reflections on solitude, celibacy, prayer and contemplation. These lectures had appeared as articles in the journals *UISG Bulletin*, *Pastoral Psychology*, *America* and *Sojourners*.

Nouwen was very fond of Circus and in the circus-events he could see deep spiritual insights too. He says that about the virtuosi we can only wonder but the clowns who stumble and fall remind us of our own weakness. The clown is a powerful image to help us understand the role of the minister in the contemporary society. Nouwen explores four 'clownlike', 'foolish' elements in the religious life which is applicable also to spiritual life: being alone, treasuring emptiness, standing naked in front of God, and simply seeing things for what they are.

Walking through the streets of Rome Nouwen soon realized that "the devout worshippers in Piazza San Pietro are as much a part of Roman life as the bohemians on Piazza Navona"<sup>252</sup>. He found that besides the imposing buildings, the large crowds and sensational events there were holy men and women offering their lives to others with a disarming generosity, a less visible but much more penetrating reality. For Nouwen it became clear that "in the great Circus of Rome, full of lion-tamers and trapeze artists whose dazzling feats claim our attention, the real and true story was told by the clowns.[...] We respond to them not with admiration but with sympathy, not with amazement but with understanding, not with tension but with a smile."<sup>253</sup> The clowns fail but make us smile. Those who experience them feel one with their weakness. The ministers carry in themselves the powerful image of a clown. The spiritual themes solitude, celibacy, prayer and contemplation look foolish and belong to the periphery of the modern life but are central to the life of the spirit. Nouwen shows skilfully how in each of these themes the evangelical councils of chastity, poverty and obedience are hidden.

### 2.8.1. Solitude and community

These terms seem to exclude each other. But Nouwen wants to show that in the community solitude is an indispensable factor. The state of our modern society is that of an emergency, "a world in which fear, suspicion, mutual distrust, hatred, physical and mental torture, and an increasing confusion will darken the hearts of millions of people".<sup>254</sup> The Christian communities are called to be faithful to the Lord and give hope to those who seek light and life. The life-giving forces of a witnessing community are intimacy, ministry and prayer which are closely connected with chastity, obedience and poverty which require a deep commitment to solitude.

---

<sup>252</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome* 1.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

### 2.8.1.1. Solitude and intimacy

Both in the community and outside intimacy is a basic longing of every person. On the other hand the powerful forces opposed to it, namely, fear and anger are very much part of the emergency oriented world. Intimacy is “a place that offers a sense of belonging, a place where frustrations can be expressed, disappointments shared, and pains healed”.<sup>255</sup> The communities which are supposed to foster intimacy can also become places of torture. The unsatisfied physical and emotional needs cause inner torments and restlessness because of which witnessing to God’s loving and caring presence is hardly possible. Nouwen proposes solitude as an important factor in the life of the community to enter into intimacy without fear and anxiety. “Solitude is the place where we can reach the profound bond that is deeper than the emergency bonds of fear and anger.”<sup>256</sup> In solitude others become brothers and sisters and community becomes “not a common ideology, but a response to a common call”.<sup>257</sup> Solitude leads therefore to a certain independence, a freedom from compulsions. “When we pray alone, study, read, write, or simply spend quiet time away from the places where we interact with each other directly, we enter into a deeper intimacy with each other. It is a fallacy to think that we grow closer to each other only when we talk, play or work together. Much growth certainly occurs in such human interactions, but these interactions derive their fruit from solitude because in solitude our intimacy with each other is deepened[...]. In solitude we become aware that we were together before we came together and that community life is not a creation of our will but an obedient response to the reality of our being united. Whenever we enter into solitude, we witness to a love that transcends our interpersonal communications and proclaims that we love each other because we have been loved first.”<sup>258</sup>

Solitude is, therefore, the basis of a chaste love. “Without solitude we begin to cling to each other; we begin to worry about what we think and feel about each other, we quickly become suspicious of one another or irritated with each other; and we begin, often in unconscious ways, to scrutinise each other with a tiring hypersensitivity.[...] With solitude (however) we learn to depend on God, by whom we are called together in love, in whom we can rest, and through whom we can enjoy and trust one another even when our ability to express ourselves to each other is limited.”<sup>259</sup> Solitude is the way to liberate the sexuality from its compulsive quality and accept it as a manifestation of God’s love. With this understanding to abstain from it becomes a real option. Chastity is, therefore, more than sexual abstinence. It is a life in the intimate knowledge of God’s effective love for us, a life free from worldly compulsions and a life in which one can enter into creative relationships.

### 2.8.1.2. Solitude and ministry

Ministry can be individual or common. There is a growing tendency towards individualised ministry. Nouwen feels that the common task of a community which is the response to a common vocation has a far more witnessing value than the individual ministry. As individual or community, ministry without solitude is like a house without foundation. “In solitude we take some distance from the many opinions and ideas of our fellow human beings and become vulnerable to God. There we can listen carefully to him and distinguish between our desires and our task, between our urges and our vocation, between the cravings

---

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. 15-16.

of our heart and the call of God.”<sup>260</sup> Instead of using the community to give shape to our individual religious aspirations, the individual can discover his own vocation as part of the common vocation of the community to which he belongs.<sup>261</sup> Only with the help of solitude a community can live as an obedient community. It is a “way of life in which, as members of a community, we keep returning to solitude in order to become more sensitive to the ways in which God calls us here and now”.<sup>262</sup> It is important for the community to practice silence, prayer and sharing of insights.

### 2.8.1.3. Solitude and prayer

Just as in a community intimacy and ministry must be rooted in solitude, so also solitude influences greatly our relationship to God. Religious communities must be praying communities without which it becomes difficult for them to witness unambiguously to the living God. Prayer, however, may not always bring the desired fruit if there is too much of hostile feelings preventing an experience of the living and loving God. Solitude, the place of great encounter gives a new quality to prayer. “Solitude is the place where God reveals himself as God-with-us, as the God who is our creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, as the God who is the source, the centre and purpose of our existence, as the God who wants to give himself to us with an unconditional, unlimited, and unrestrained love, and as the God who wants to be loved by us with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. Solitude indeed is the place of the great encounter, from which all other encounters derive their meaning. In solitude, we leave behind our many activities, concerns, plans and projects, opinions and convictions and enter into the presence of our loving God, naked, vulnerable, open and receptive<sup>263</sup>. And there we see that he alone is God, that he alone is love, that he alone is care, that he alone is forgiveness. In solitude we indeed can call God our Father, the loving Father of all people.”<sup>264</sup>

In solitude we are so totally poor that we can enter into solidarity with all human beings and allow our hearts to become the place of encounter not only with God, but, through God, with all human beings as well.”<sup>265</sup> Solitude bears its fruits of solidarity and compassion.

### 2.8.2. Celibacy and the holy

Celibacy is the empty space set apart to protect the holy like the empty domes in a busy city. “The churches of Rome are like beautiful frames around empty spaces witnessing to him who is the quiet, still centre of all human life.”<sup>266</sup> Celibacy is “a witness to the inner sanctum in our own lives and in the lives of others.”<sup>267</sup> Nouwen considers under this aspect the world in which celibacy can be lived as a witness.

#### 2.8.2.1. The world

---

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>261</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 22.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>263</sup> Nouwen confesses that solitude is hard as it is a withdrawal from the world of ‘relevance’ and as in solitude restlessness and compulsions will be deeply felt. Solitude is not a solution but a direction taught by Elijah and Jesus to hear the gentle voice of love, the voice of God. It is the moment of intimacy with God in which our true nature, our true self, our true identity will be revealed. Solitude is the place of liberation from fear and anger. It is the place of conversion, turning away from comparison and competition. It is the place of self-emptying and total dependence on God.

<sup>264</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome* 27.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. 38.

The world milieu in which we want to live celibacy is characterised by a growing desire for intimacy and interpersonal communication. Nouwen poses the question: “Can real intimacy be reached without a deep respect for that holy place within and between us, that space that should remain untouched by human hands?”<sup>268</sup> A constant threat to intimate relations is the demand for more intimacy than someone can give and the result is frustration or violent love. The limitedness of the human intimacy lies in the fact that “No human being can understand us fully, no human being can give us unconditional love, no human being can offer constant affection, no human being can enter into the core of our being and heal our deepest brokenness.”<sup>269</sup> Suffocating closeness can lead only to desperate and violent clinging to each other. Such a relationship, comparable to the interlocking fingers, lead only to stalemate and friction. It cannot heal. The image of a prayerful gesture points out towards a more healthy relationship. It points beyond the partners to a greater and earlier love and protects the free and empty space necessary for a mature relationship. Such a relationship is no longer “a clinging to each other but a free dance, allowing space in which we can move forward and backward, form constantly new patterns, and see each other as always new.”<sup>270</sup> Celibacy points out towards this empty space and witnesses to the greater intimacy with God.

#### 2.8.2.2. The witness

Celibacy is not to be considered as the privilege of a few who do not get entangled in the worldly affairs. It must be lived in married life and friendships as witnessing to a greater love. “Celibacy, in its deepest sense of creating and protecting emptiness for God, is an essential part of all forms of Christian life: marriage, friendship, single life, and community life.”<sup>271</sup> Celibates witness to a holy vacancy for God which is essential in the married life too. “Marriage is a relationship in which a man and a woman protect and nurture the inner sanctum within and between them and witness to that by the way in which they love each other. [...] The real mystery of marriage is not that husband and wife love each other so much that they can find God in each other’s lives, but that God loves them so much that they can discover each other more and more as living reminders of his living presence.”<sup>272</sup> The celibates are, therefore, living reminders.

Priests and religious as celibates remind others that God must be recognized as the source of all human thoughts and actions. “Especially by not marrying and by abstaining from the most intimate expression of human love, the celibate becomes a living sign of the limits of interpersonal relationships and of the centrality of the inner sanctum that no human being may violate. [...] The celibate reminds those who live together in marriage of their own celibate centre, which they need to protect and nurture in order to live a life that does not depend simply upon the stability of emotions and affections, but also on their common love for God, who called them together. On the other hand, married people also witness to those who have chosen the celibate life, reminding them that it is the love of God that indeed makes rich and creative human relationships possible and that the value of the celibate life becomes manifest in a generous, affectionate, and faithful care for those in need.”<sup>273</sup>

---

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. 49.

Thus both married life and celibate life are different ways of pointing out that God is the source of all human relationships and that we can only love each other because he has loved us first. “They both say in different ways that without giving God the rightful place in the midst of the city, we all die in the hopeless attempt to fabricate peace and love by ourselves.”<sup>274</sup>

### 2.8.2.3. The life style

Celibacy is more than sexual abstinence. Therefore the whole life-style of the celibate must reflect the essence of celibacy. “Celibacy is an openness to God of which sexual abstinence is only one of its manifestations. Celibacy is a life-style in which we try to witness to the priority of God in all relationships.”<sup>275</sup> Therefore it involves the whole of life, all that we do or say. The important aspects of a life as celibate are *contemplative prayer* and *voluntary poverty*. Both celibacy and contemplative prayer are expressions of being vacant for God. Contemplative prayer is “an attitude in which we recognize God’s ultimate priority by being useless in his presence, by standing in front of him without anything to show, prove, or to argue, and by allowing him to enter into our emptiness.”<sup>276</sup> Rooted in an intimate love with God the celibate lives the contemplative prayer as a radical form of criticism reminding others of greater things. Voluntary poverty too is a way of witnessing a greater love. It is a form of vacancy for God and solidarity with the world. It can be lived as a form of criticism against the growing inequalities between the rich and the poor. The specific form for each person must, however, be discerned in prayer.

### 2.8.3. Prayer and thought

Nouwen sees prayer as central to Christian life. Therefore he gives a beautiful discourse on prayer. Prayer is to be considered not as a part of life but as all of life. St. Paul urges us to pray unceasingly, without interruptions and that too both in times of joys and sorrows<sup>277</sup>. One of the important elements of prayer is thanking. Nouwen tries to explain how we can practice unceasing prayer in the context of the restlessness of our contemporary society. Unceasing prayer is the conversion of our unceasing thought process. Nouwen explains his proposition under the aspects of *unceasing thoughts, the conversion of these thoughts into conversation with God* and proposes the *discipline* that promotes it.

#### 2.8.3.1. Unceasing thought

Thinking is unique to the human being. The centre of thoughts is also the origin of joys and sorrows. There is reflective and pre-reflective thinking. The reflective thinking requiring the application of the will and costs a lot of attention and energy. The pre-reflective, on the other hand, is the flow of ideas, images and feelings which are not willed, but take place passively at all times. The thinking process is uninterrupted and unbridled. It is against this background that we have to understand prayer

#### 2.8.3.2. Unceasing prayer

---

<sup>274</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. 52.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. 53. (Instead of trying to dwell on the usefulness of celibacy Nouwen has chosen to throw light on the ‘uselessness’ of celibacy. Celibacy involves the characteristics of chastity, obedience and poverty because it is a witnessing to a single-minded union with God which is possible only through an obedient listening to him in prayer and the natural consequence of which is the practice of voluntary poverty)

<sup>277</sup> 1 Thess. 5,17; Eph. 6,18

To think only about God at all times is not possible. Unceasing prayer is, therefore, living always in his presence by converting all thoughts into prayer by moving from a self-centred monologue to a God-centred dialogue. “As soon as an embarrassing or exhilarating idea is taken out of its isolation and brought into a relationship with someone, something totally new happens. This obviously requires much courage and trust, precisely because we are not always sure how our thoughts will be received. But as soon as we have taken the risk and experience acceptance, our thoughts themselves receive a new quality.”<sup>278</sup> The source of Jesus strength was his oneness and constant dialogue with his father. Prayer is more than introspection. Introspection may lead to self-preoccupation. Prayer is “not a scrupulous, inward-looking analysis of our own thoughts and feelings but a careful attentiveness to him who invites us to an unceasing conversation.”<sup>279</sup> This form of prayer is far from easy. “There is a deep resistance to making ourselves so vulnerable, so naked, so totally unprotected. We indeed want to love God and worship him, but we also want to keep a little corner of our inner life for ourselves, where we can hide and think our own secret thoughts, dream our own dreams, and play with our own mental fabrications.”<sup>280</sup> True prayer is being fully open to God and obedient to his voice.

### 2.8.3.3. Disciplines

The resistance to unceasing prayer can be overcome with the discipline of prayer-exercises. Setting time aside for communal as well as individual prayer is essential to practicing unceasing prayer. All our thoughts become prayer only when there are times in which we make God our only thought. Therefore contemplation which is looking attentively at God is essential to the prayer life of every Christian. This discipline involves the willingness to “discipline our body, mind, and heart with a daily practice of entering directly, consciously, explicitly into the presence of our loving Father through his son, Jesus Christ.”<sup>281</sup>

### 2.8.4. Contemplation and ministry

There is a connection between contemplation and ministry. Contemplation is *seeing* and ministry is *making visible*<sup>282</sup> what one has seen. Contemplative life is a life of moving from opaqueness to transparency, from blindfolding to seeing the real nature of things. This needs specific disciplines such as *contemplative life* and *contemplative prayer*.

#### 2.8.4.1. The contemplative life

In a contemplative life we see the world as a window which points beyond itself. This can be experienced in *nature, time* and *people*. One who looks at nature as the abode of mysteries cannot see it as a property to be used. The contemplative eyes see the true nature of the nature. “Our difficult and very urgent task is to realize that nature is not primarily a property to be possessed, but a gift to be received with admiration and gratitude. Only when we make a deep bow to the rivers, oceans, hills and mountains that offer us a home, only

---

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. 82. (We can enter into contemplation only by looking at Jesus who is the image of the Father. Jesus must become the icon always present in our inner room. How and when this exercise can be practiced must be decided by each individual himself. One simple example is to read each day a bible passage and repeat the helpful words and let the message descend from the mind to the heart.)

<sup>282</sup> We have illustrated this point with the example of the sculptor in connection with contemplation in the chapter dealing with *Creative Ministry*. See also *Clowning in Rome* p. 87.

then can they become transparent and reveal to us their real meaning.”<sup>283</sup> Ministry includes drawing other’s attention to the nature to see the real nature of our lives.

The way we see time and use it depends on our inner disposition. Many people feel that they no longer have time, but that time has them. Such people experience time as ‘*chronos*’, as “a randomly collected series of incidents and accidents over which we have no control.”<sup>284</sup> These people are sooner or later victims of fatalism and boredom (not in the sense of doing nothing but in the sense of doing everything indifferently). In contemplative life we convert *chronos* into ‘*kairos*’, the opportunity with endless new possibilities for a change of heart and new life. In and through the many events we see the true image of God. In the centre of the present we can see the first manifestation of the Kingdom. Ministry is helping people to see the real nature of the things happening in their lives. It is affirming that our hour is the hour of God and that all time is *kairos*.

A contemplative moves from opaqueness to transparency in his relationship to the people. Our fellow human beings are more than interesting characters. They are *persons* who, literally meaning, ‘sound through’ to each other a greater reality. “Our great task is to prevent our fears from boxing our fellow human beings into characterizations and to see them as persons.[...]As persons we sound through a love greater than we ourselves can grasp, a truth deeper than we ourselves can articulate, and a beauty richer than we ourselves can contain.”<sup>285</sup> Ministry has an important role of receiving and affirming these qualities in others. “How beautiful, then, is the ministry through which we call forth the hidden gifts of people and celebrate with them the love, truth, and beauty they give us.”<sup>286</sup> This is possible only in contemplation.

#### 2.8.4.2. Contemplative prayer

Seeing God in nature, in the totality of events and in other people is not possible without certain disciplines. Only when we see God in our heart we can see him outside too. Therefore prayer is central to ministry. “Through the discipline of prayer we awaken ourselves to the God in us and let him enter into our heartbeat and our breathing, into our thoughts and emotions, our hearing, seeing, touching, and tasting. It is by being awake to this God in us that we can see him in the world around us.”<sup>287</sup> It is the God within us who recognizes the god in the world. Thus “all real ministry finds its source in a well-trained heart where God’s presence has been made known.”<sup>288</sup>

Contemplative prayer involves giving up mental defences and knowing God by-heart. The ministers of the Word cannot ignore prayer which is characterized by simplicity and obedience. In simple prayer we must descend from the mind to the heart. In obedient prayer we must listen to the voice of God. This is hard as it includes also allowing God to say what we don’t like to hear. But through long and deep listening we can hear the gentle and compassionate voice of God. Contemplation can lead also to a very high form of communion with God called *theologia*, the direct knowledge of God that leads to the contemplation of the Holy Trinity. “This *theologia* is the greatest gift of all, the grace of complete unity, rest, and peace. It is the highest level of spiritual life, in which the created

---

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. 92.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid. 103.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. 104.

world is transcended and we experience directly our being lifted up into God's inner life."<sup>289</sup> This is a grace which only a few people attain.

## Observations

Nouwen does not speak here directly about ministry, but about the essence of a religious life, namely the holy emptiness, the obedience of the heart and the total dedication of the holy place to the holy one. A closer look shows that the above treated themes are drawn again from the basic question of intimacy. These reflections have their unique relevance if they are looked at from his own personal background. He longed for an unconditional love and could not get it from his achievements in the world or from the fragile worldly relationships.

Nouwen feels that we have to go deeper into our true self. This is cultivated through solitude and prayer. Solitude helps us to treasure emptiness, stand naked before God and simply see things for what they are. It protects the holy in oneself and in others. Prayer helps true intimacy with God and with one another. Through intensive prayer one can grow into contemplation, converting unceasing thoughts into an unceasing dialogue with God. (Thess 5,17) Contemplative prayer is 'descending from the mind into the heart'<sup>290</sup> and listening obediently to the gentle and compassionate voice of love. This has to be practised and made visible in the small and big events day by day. The clowns teach the ministers to accept the weaknesses and limitations and still be worthy of love and acceptance. Ministers who are able to practice such a receptive attitude will discover the power of God in and through their weaknesses and the chances of discovering the outbreak of God's loving plan of salvation and his justice and peace. The converting of the thoughts - with its worries, doubts, joys, pains, fulfilment and frustrations - into a dialogical prayer with God and remaining open and receptive to God will slowly show its impact on the day to day pastoral life in which the Function and Identity can hardly be separated. Action and contemplation, Function and identity are the two sides of the same corner of the house.

Nouwen confesses that it is true that only some are called in a special way to witness to or make visible the greater reality of our lives through the evangelical councils of chastity, obedience and poverty rooted in contemplation.<sup>291</sup> But every Christian is called upon to live the spirit of these virtues as authentic as possible. Here also we see that Nouwen's advice to the priests and religious consists essentially of his search for a radical and authentic Christian spirituality. Nouwen's experiences teach that this spirituality is rooted in Contemplation. Therefore the contemplative attitude is the basis of the pastoral relationships too.

The positive power of the clowning ministry is that people can identify themselves with the clown who does not hide his weakness. It encourages them to accept their weakness and consider their lives as precious and worth living. Nouwen has already stressed at different

---

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>290</sup> This notion is corrected in the book *The way of the Heart* as 'descending with the mind into the heart'. P.158.

<sup>291</sup> In the treatise Nouwen connects solitude to chastity, poverty, and obedience in the context of community, intimacy with others, ministry and prayer. He connects celibacy to poverty and obedience as witness to the holy in oneself and in others and a total giving of oneself to God and to one another. Prayer comes out as a unit in itself which is the fundament of religious life, Christian life and ministry. In this book Nouwen uses the term community referring to religious communities but later this notion is used to mean all who are bound together by the love of God or those who live together as God's people.

times that only a contemplative can confess his weakness. In contemplation the *chronos* is converted to *cairos* in which we discover the many promises of God about the dawn of the Kingdom of God. It helps both the minister and the others to trust in a God who is greater than us in spite of our day to day tensions. Celibacy is the free room for God's presence in our own life and in our relationships. Faith in God's closeness to us and his work in us together with spending time in solitude in his presence make us authentic and free to render helpful intervention to others in need.

The question of intimacy and its importance in ministry runs through this book also. The celibacy which can be compared to the empty churches in the busy city of Rome, is the sacred and free space in oneself to witness the importance of God's presence in all the human relationships. Thus the themes intimacy, personal insufficiency, hospitality, contemplation and ministry are intertwined. Nouwen's style of encouraging and giving hope is very much present in this work too. The minister who discovers the clown in himself can go about with himself and his pastoral situation in a humorous and composed way. This is a very useful tip for today because the decline in the number of the priests and the growing load of work put the priests under great pressure.

Nouwen's close contact with the circus company gave him a deeper look into the turbulences in the lives of the clowns who appear to be happy and jolly. Similar situations were experienced in his own life and noticed in the life of other ministers. So Nouwen launches himself deeper into the spiritual solutions of the pastoral and personal problems. The book *Clowning in Rome* is a renewed effort to speak about spiritual life - this time from the point of view of religious life, concentrating on solitude, celibacy, prayer and contemplation. Chastity, poverty and obedience are ways of being authentic, creating space for God and one another and witnessing to the Kingdom of God. Nouwen's concern for intimacy, community and ministry are relevant also in the religious context. The focus of the book is not the special status of the religious but their commonness with the weak and the poor. Prayer is the identification mark of the religious and that is according to Nouwen, as we have seen in the previous books, the identification mark of ministers as well as all Christians.

Unlike in other books this book does not speak about the existential situation but exhorts everyone to a mystical life. Nouwen agrees that the highest form of mysticism is attained only by a few, but all are invited to enter into it or experience it to some degree or other. This is an experience of the heart. The heart is the centre of our being and the place where God dwells. Nouwen's appeal consists of speaking from the heart to the heart. In the coming book he concentrates on the heart. Nouwen's concept of ministry underlines the transformation of the heart and the way of the heart.

## **2.9. The Way of the Heart (1981)**

In a small but pregnant book *The way of the Heart*, written in 1981, Nouwen explores the importance of and relationship between solitude, silence and prayer. These reflections were mainly the responses which came up in a seminar on the spirituality of the desert. In the seminar Nouwen experienced how the hearts can come together rising above the many differences and backgrounds among the students. This prompted him to explore 'the way of the heart for the ministers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century'<sup>292</sup>. This work makes it possible for the ministers to have a look into the relevance of the desert spirituality for the contemporary

---

<sup>292</sup> Nouwen's concept of the heart-centred ministry is only a deeper understanding of the importance of solitude, silence and prayer in ministry which has already come up in his previous books.

ministry. Focusing on the threefold command to Abba Arsenius,<sup>293</sup> Flee! Be silent! Pray!, . Nouwen pursues the implications of the early Christian teachings on the three disciplines of solitude, silence and unceasing prayer for the contemporary ministers. Solitude helps us to shape our behaviour not by the compulsions of the world but by the mind of Christ. Silence helps us not to be suffocated by the wordy world and enables us to speak the Word of God. In the unceasing prayer we find the meaning of solitude and silence in our communion with God who embraces all of history with his eternally creative and re-creative love.

### 2.9.1. The World

Nouwen watches with concern the suicidal journey of the modern society with its increasing destructive potencies and evil tendencies. The minister of such a world is called to bring light into the darkness. However many ministers themselves grope in darkness. “Many of us have adapted ourselves too well to the general mood of lethargy. Others among us have become tired, exhausted, disappointed, bitter, resentful, or simply bored. Still others have remained active and involved -but have ended up living more in their own name than in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>294</sup> Nouwen’s concern in this book is how can the ministers remain creative, full of zeal for the Word of God and where can they find their nurture and strength. The desert fathers and mothers of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries offer us a very important perspective to bring light into the world that continues to love the darkness.

### 2.9.2. The spirituality of the minister

What kind of a minister can give hope to those who seek the light? How can the minister live in the world without being of the world? The minister needs a sound spirituality to stand up to the pressures of the world. The three ways proposed to prevent the world from shaping us in its image are: *solitude*, *silence* and *prayer*.

#### 2.9.2.1. Solitude

Solitude is the furnace in which we let our false, compulsive self be transformed into the new self of Jesus Christ. It is from this converted self that real ministry flows. Exploring the life of the desert father St. Anthony (251-356) Nouwen uncovers the problems as well as the opportunities in our ministry.

##### 2.9.2.1.1. The compulsive minister

One of the problems which the ministers have to face constantly is the compulsion to conform to the world. The minister lives and ministers in a seductive world. “Our society is not a community radiant with the love of Christ, but a dangerous network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul.”<sup>295</sup> The ministers too are compelled to live the many ‘musts’ and ‘oughts’ and are themselves victims of the dark, destructive forces. Our secular or false-self fabricated by the social compulsions is striving for success and rewards. The sour fruits of such a secular life are anger and greed. It may not be an open anger but “a frozen anger, an anger which settles into a biting resentment and slowly paralyses a generous heart”.<sup>296</sup>

<sup>293</sup> Nouwen, *The way of the heart* 4. ( “While still living in the Palace, Abba Arsenius prayed to God in these words, 'Lord, lead me in the way of salvation'. And a voice came saying to him, 'Arsenius, flee from the world and you will be saved'. Having sailed secretly from Rome to Alexandria and having withdrawn to the solitary life in the desert Arsenius prayed again: 'Lord, lead me in the way of salvation' and again he heard a voice saying, 'Arsenius, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the sources of sinlessness”.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

#### 2.9.2.1.2. Solitude, the furnace of transformation

Solitude is the furnace where one overcomes the temptations to be relevant, to be spectacular and to be powerful. Jesus himself was subjected to these temptations. In solitude we let the false self go and God offers himself as the substance of the new self. It is the holy place where ministry and spirituality embrace each other. It is a distortion of the meaning of solitude when we consider it as 'privacy' in order to be for oneself or as a 'recharging station' where we gather new strength to continue the ongoing competition in life. Transforming solitude is "the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born, the place where the emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs."<sup>297</sup> It is a descend into ourselves, into the desert of the individual heart where a conversation slowly takes place when we do not run away from ourselves. Solitude involves getting rid of scaffoldings. It is being oneself, with nothing to protect me. It is being "just me - naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful,, deprived, broken - nothing".<sup>298</sup> It is hard and painful to be nothing because of our natural desire to be worth something. Solitude can in the beginning unsettle us and breed in us anger and greed by way of dreaming of vain glory or desiring immediate consolation. My task is to "persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone".<sup>299</sup>

The aim of solitude should not be understood wrongly as fighting the false self. The real aim is meeting the Lord. "Our primary task in solitude, therefore, is not to pay undue attention to the many faces which assail us, but to keep the eyes of our mind and heart on him who is our divine saviour. Only in the context of grace can we face our sin; only in the place of healing do we dare to show our wounds; only with a single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature."<sup>300</sup> Only this way we can experience the freedom of the children of God.

Ministers of today can practice solitude in spite of many activities and without withdrawing to a desert. "We have, indeed, to fashion our own desert where we can withdraw everyday, shake off our compulsions, and dwell in the gentle healing presence of the Lord. Without such a desert we will lose our own soul while preaching the Gospel to others. But with such a spiritual abode, we will become increasingly conformed to him in whose name we minister."<sup>301</sup> This means setting aside every day some time for the encounter with the Lord.

#### 2.9.2.1.3. A compassionate ministry

The physical quality of solitude can slowly become a quality of the heart from which fruitful ministry flows. Solitude becomes the infinite space into which anyone can be invited. In solitude the minister learns to diagnose the hearts of the people and the mood of his time and, thus, is able to offer insight, comfort and consolation. Solitude leads to compassion which is the starting point of ministry. "The purification and transformation that take place in solitude manifest themselves in compassion."<sup>302</sup> Compassion needs the inner disposition to go with others to the place where they are weak, vulnerable, lonely, and broken. Ministers who are compelled to prove their worth or the relevance of their work by assessing successes or changes fail to enter into solidarity with those who suffer. "It is in solitude that (this) compassionate solidarity grows. In solitude we realize that nothing human is alien to us, that the roots of all conflict, war, injustice, cruelty, hatred, jealousy, and envy are deeply

---

<sup>297</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. 20.

anchored in our own heart. In solitude our heart of stone can be turned into a heart of flesh, a rebellious heart into a contrite heart, and a closed heart into a heart that can open itself to all suffering people in a gesture of solidarity.”<sup>303</sup>

Compassionate ministry makes us to die to our neighbour, in the sense of not measuring our work by what others think of us and we abstain from judging and evaluating others. In a compassionate ministry being is doing. Thomas Merton comparing our world to a shipwreck describes solitude as swimming for life in order to gather the power to pull others and the world to safety.<sup>304</sup> The ultimate aim of our life is, after all, not the people but the never-ending communion with God, in whom we are united with others.

### 2.9.2.2. Silence

Silence completes and intensifies solitude. It edifies others, it is a sign of God’s presence and a must for the ministers. “Silence is a discipline needed in many different situations: in teaching and learning, in preaching and worship, in visiting and counselling. [...] It can be seen as a portable cell taken with us from the solitary place into the midst of our ministry. Silence is solitude practiced in action.”<sup>305</sup> The true meaning of silence and the ways to practice it become clearer when we place them against the context of our wordy world.

#### 2.9.2.2.1. The wordy world

We live in a world “inundated by a torrent of words”<sup>306</sup> as a result of which words have lost their creative power. Words in and out of season result in the fact that “the word no longer communicates, no longer fosters communion, no longer creates community and therefore no longer gives life. The word no longer offers trustworthy ground on which people can meet each other and build society.”<sup>307</sup> Words have their power only when they come out of silence and are fruits of our encounter with the Word made flesh.

#### 2.9.2.2.2. Silence

“Silence is the home of the word. Silence gives strength and fruitfulness to the word. We can even say that words are meant to disclose the mystery of the silence from which they come.”<sup>308</sup> In silence we are filled with the power of God’s silence and that enables us to look into future world. In this sense *silence makes us pilgrims, silence guards the fire within and silence teaches us to speak.*<sup>309</sup>

##### 2.9.2.2.2.1. Silence makes us pilgrims

Too many words are more harmful than helpful. “Words can give us the feeling of having stopped too long at one of the little villages that we pass on our journey, of having been motivated more by curiosity than by service. Words often make us forget that we are pilgrims called to invite others to join us on the journey.”<sup>310</sup>

---

<sup>303</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>304</sup> Thoman Merton, *The wisdom of the desert* ; Quoted in Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* 9.

<sup>305</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* 30.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>309</sup> True silence is not a flight from the realities or an escapism from the responsibilities.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. 37.

#### 2.9.2.2.2. Silence guards the fire within

“Silence guards the inner heat of religious emotions. This inner heat is the life of the Holy Spirit within us. Thus silence is the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive.”<sup>311</sup> Silence keeps a valuable idea from confusion and fantasy, it shuns verbosity and is the mother of the wisest of thoughts.<sup>312</sup> This ascetic teaching of the desert fathers is not questioning the value of sharing but is cautioning that lavish ways of sharing may be more compulsive than virtuous. The danger of not guarding the fire within, the life of the Spirit in us, is very clear from the fact that “many ministers have become burnt-out cases, people who say many words and share many experiences, but in whom the fire of God’s spirit has died and from whom not much more comes forth than their own boring, petty ideas and feelings. Sometimes it seems that our many words are more an expression of our doubt than of our faith.”<sup>313</sup>

#### 2.9.2.2.3. Silence teaches us to speak

A word that is powerful, creative and fruitful comes from silence and returns to silence. When God speaks life into the world (creation and incarnation) he does not break the silence but “unfolds the immeasurable richness of his silence.”<sup>314</sup> Ministers who practice silence, participate in the divine silence and by speaking out of silence participates in the creative and re-creative power of the divine word.

#### 2.9.2.2.3. The ministry of silence

Practicing silence in ministry requires discipline and the best way is to learn the way of Jesus who always pointed away from himself to the father who had sent him. It is a challenge for the ministers to practice silence and lead others to silence because for many people the experience of silence gives a feeling of emptiness and hollow causing itchy and nervousness. “Isn’t the purpose of all ministry to reveal that God is not a God of fear but a God of love? And couldn’t this be accomplished by gently and carefully converting the empty silence into a full silence, the anxious silence into a peaceful silence, and the restless silence into a restful silence, so that in this converted silence a real encounter with the loving father could take place? What a power our word would have if it could enable people to befriend their silence!”<sup>315</sup> The minister can practice this leading to silence in preaching, counselling and organising.

##### 2.9.2.2.3.1. Silence and preaching

The preacher can stimulate others with a moving or an interesting sermon. There is another way of preaching too in which “the word of scripture is repeated quietly and regularly, with a short comment here and there, in order to let that word create an inner space where we can listen to our Lord.[...] The simple words ‘the Lord is my shepherd’ can be spoken quietly and persistently in such a way that they become like a hedge around a garden in which God’s shepherding can be sensed.”<sup>316</sup> Here the preacher directs the whole attention to God in whose presence the inner transformation takes place.

##### 2.9.2.2.3.2. Silence and counselling

Counselling is commonly understood as the pastor guiding someone. But there is a way in which the divine counsellor, the Holy Spirit who is present in each person is the healer. In this form of counselling the pastor and the counselee enter together into the loving silence of

---

<sup>311</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>312</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 38.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid. 44.

God and wait there for the healing word. “In this perspective, pastoral counselling is the attempt to lead fearful parishioners into the silence of God, and to help them feel at home there, trusting that they will slowly discover the healing presence of the spirit.”<sup>317</sup> In such a situation the words from the scripture spoken by the counsellor out of silence can shatter huge walls of fear.

#### 2.9.2.2.3.3. Silence and organising

As organiser the task of the minister does not consist of offering more exciting things to do but “help people concentrate on the real but often hidden event of God’s active presence in their lives. Hence the question that must guide all organising activity in a parish is not how to keep people busy, but how to keep them from being so busy that they can no longer hear the voice of God who speaks in silence.”<sup>318</sup> Calling people together must be aimed at creating space where people are called away from their fragmenting and distracting wordiness of the world so that they can discover themselves in silence and where communion becomes possible and community can be developed. An important point to be kept in mind is that the silence of the heart is more important than the silence of the mouth and that the purpose of spiritual life and ministry is nothing but charity.

#### 2.9.2.3. Prayer

Withdrawing oneself from the busy life or withdrawing from the noisy world does not serve its purpose if it does not lead to unceasing prayer. Solitude aimed at being alone with God and silence aimed at listening to God provide the context for prayer. The Greek literal translation for ‘Praying always’ means ‘to come to rest’ and, therefore, the unceasing prayer is a prayer of rest.<sup>319</sup> It does not suggest absence of struggle or pain but through vigilance and discipline the heart can rest in the midst of turbulence. To understand what it means and how to attain it we need to distinguish between the prayer of the mind and the prayer of the heart.

##### 2.9.2.3.1. The prayer of the mind

Many ministers support the idea of prayer but fail to support the practice of prayer. One of the obstacles to prayer is the prejudice that it is an activity of the mind involving speaking with God or thinking about God. The implicit dangers are that we become soon frustrated when our talking with God is not responded to or our thinking about God leads to fatigue. As a result many give up praying. Talking about God or thinking about God is more an intellectual activity than real prayer. The prayer that leads to God-experience is the prayer of the heart. Ministers cannot lead others to ‘God-experience’ without themselves having experienced God in their hearts.

##### 2.9.2.3.2. The prayer of the heart

Prayer that leads to that rest where the soul can dwell with God is the prayer of the heart which the desert fathers practiced. “To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all seeing, within you.[...] Prayer is standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart; that is, at that point of our being where there are no divisions or distinctions and where we are totally one. There God’s spirit dwells and there the great encounter takes place. There heart speaks to heart, because there we stand before the face of the Lord, all-seeing, within us.”<sup>320</sup>

---

<sup>317</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>319</sup> The desert spirituality *Hasychasm* comes from the Greek word ‘hesychia’ for rest.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. 59.

Here heart is not used in the sense of the place of emotions but as the source of all physical, emotional, intellectual, volitional and moral energies, as the centre of the person. “The prayer of the heart is a prayer that directs itself to God from the centre of the person and thus affects the whole of our humanness.”<sup>321</sup> The heart is not only the centre of the self but also the dwelling place of God. Therefore prayer is the great encounter between self and God leading to a transformation of the person. “The prayer of the heart is a prayer that does not allow us to limit our relationship with God to interesting words or pious emotions. By its very nature such prayer transforms our whole being into Christ precisely because it opens the eyes of our soul to the truth of ourselves as well as to the truth of God. In our heart we come to see ourselves as sinners embraced by the mercy of God.”<sup>322</sup> The prayer of the heart is a prayer of truth - the truth of ourselves and the truth of God - challenging us to an unconditional surrender to God. It is this truth that enables us to rest in God even in the midst of a restless existence.

#### 2.9.2.3.3. Prayer and ministry

The discipline which helps the ministers to practice the prayer of the heart has three characteristics. They are: *that the prayer of the heart is nurtured by short, simple prayers*, *that prayer of the heart is unceasing* and *that the prayer of the heart is all-inclusive*.

##### 2.9.2.3.3.1. Nurtured by short prayers

Prayer need not be long. Verbosity in prayer often subjects the mind to fantasy and dissipation. Quiet repetition of simple words or sentences are helpful to descend with the mind into the heart. It helps us to move to the centre, become still and listen to the voice of God. “Such a simple, easily repeated prayer can slowly empty out our crowded interior life and create the quiet space where we can dwell with God. It can be like a ladder along which we can descend into the heart and ascend to God.”<sup>323</sup>

##### 2.9.2.3.3.2. Unceasing

For those who are involved in daily works unceasing prayer appears to be impossible. But the wisdom of the desert fathers tells that one can pray while working too. Through constant praying a simple prayer can become one with the heart beat that by simply listening to the heart one can pray always. In such a person’s life it is the active presence of God’s spirit that guides the person through his life.

##### 2.9.2.3.3.3. All-inclusive

Prayer of the heart includes all our concerns, about ourselves as well as about others. “The power of the prayer of the heart is precisely that through it all that is in our mind becomes prayer.[...] Through prayer we can carry in our heart all human pain and sorrow, all conflicts and agonies, all torture and war, all hunger, loneliness, and misery, not because of some great psychological or emotional capacity, but because God’s heart has become one with ours.”<sup>324</sup> Ministry involves “The discipline of leading all our people with their struggles into the gentle and humble heart of God.”<sup>325</sup> For ministers prayer does not mean less involvement with people or their problems. Prayer helps us to discern the motive behind our ministry. “The prayer of the heart offers us a new sensitivity that enables us to separate the chaff from the wheat in our ministry and thus to become much less ambiguous witnesses of Jesus Christ.”<sup>326</sup> Through solitude, silence and prayer the minister can enter through his

---

<sup>321</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. 61.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid. 72.

heart into the heart of God, who embraces all of history with his eternally creative and re-creative love and be freed from anxiety. This union with God is the safe ground from where he can help others.

Thus solitude, silence and prayer guards the ministers from becoming victims of the compulsive, wordy and mind-oriented world. “The powers and principalities not only reveal their presence in the unsettling political and economic situation of our day but also they show their disruptive presence in the most intimate places of our lives. Our faithfulness in relationships is severely tested, and our inner sense of belonging is questioned again and again. Our anger and greed show their strength with added vehemence, and our desire to indulge ourselves in the despairing hedonism of the moment proves to be stronger than ever”<sup>327</sup> A minister with a sound spirituality ministers even by his very being. Those who come to him may not need many words but feel that seeing such a person is being ministered to.

### **Observations**

In a small and compact book Nouwen once again shows his concern as spiritual author and companion and highlights the implications of solitude, silence and prayer for ministry. As he himself says they are the three ways to life in the spirit. Nouwen warns us against undermining the destructive tendencies and powers of the world which continues to love darkness more than life. Solitude frees the minister from compulsive ministry, transforms him and empowers him for a compassionate ministry. In solitude he can feel himself one with the several people in the society who are alone and feel left alone with their limitations and sinful background and long for pastoral help. In the ministry of counselling a minister of solitude can show great compassion. Silence helps him to enter into himself and speak words out of silence which move others to enter into themselves.

In a world full of noise through countless media and non-stop advertisements, the exercise of silence helps us to learn to listen attentively to the voice of God, to the voice of his spirit in us. Silence is the door which prevents the warmth of the Spirit being lost from our innermost centre. The experience of the Spirit enables us to feel the hidden presence of the coming of the 'World to Come'. The ministers recognise also their pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God and invite others to join this journey. Finally, the prayer of the heart which comes from the centre of our being, as lived by the desert fathers, help us through its short but continuous life giving process - as in the case of our pulse- to reduce the sharpness of our frustration in the midst of our day to day pastoral activities. Nouwen does not see it as a way of escaping the hardships or responsibilities, nor as a spiritual luxury.

Nouwen's applying the silence to preaching, counselling and organising shows how he connects the pastoral fields with the spiritual realm. He draws a clear and direct parallel between the person and function of the minister. The circumstances in which ministry is exercised, and the situation of the world in which the minister lives are real concerns for Nouwen. He finds the cautioning of Jesus to be in the world but not to be shaped by the world very relevant for ministry. Nouwen has treated this theme in other books like *Creative ministry*, *In the name of Jesus*. In the book *The way of the heart* he suggests solitude, silence and prayer as helpful measures against the dangers in ministry. These themes are repetitions but contain further insights. The role of silence in preaching, counselling and organising is complementary to the five pastoral fields in *Creative ministry* and the need for presence as well as withdrawal is a recurring theme. Prayer is once again

---

<sup>327</sup> Ibid. 77.

crowned as the soul of spiritual life with the distinction between the prayer of the mind and the prayer of the heart. In prayer one is actively passive in order to avoid the danger of burn out. Solitude and prayer strengthen the heart.

It is important to notice how Nouwen slowly brings in the notion of the heart. Heart being the deepest and the most sacred place of the self where God dwells and also the deepest mysteries of the self are hidden, Nouwen urges and encourages everybody to make a downward journey which is in fact the true upward journey. Nouwen speaks about the downward mobility in different contexts. It is a climbing down the ladder instead of the worldly tendency of climbing up the ladder of career. In the context of the prayer also Nouwen feels that there is a great need to descend, to descend from the mind to the heart. Prayer and contemplation enable this being anchored at the heart. Ministry should be, therefore, heart-centred in the sense that the solitude, silence and prayer of the heart is the source of creative ministry. Nouwen pushes slowly the term 'Heart' into the centre of his thinking and praying. True living and ministering are heart-centred. Heart is the abode of God in whose name we minister. Nouwen's effort to point out to the spirituality that underlies ministry is continued in the following book which speaks about setting the heart on the Kingdom of God.

## **2.10. Making all things new: *An invitation to spiritual life* (1981)**

Nouwen has come across several people who asked about the meaning of spiritual life and he has written this book as a type of an introduction to spiritual life for people who ask the question about what spiritual life means and who desires to live it. The struggles of a spiritual life is great because the power of the forces that hinder the spiritual life in a secular and materialised society is tremendous whereas the presence of God is barely noticeable. Nouwen sums up that the essential elements of a spiritual life are solitude and community. The above book published in the year 1981, during his tenure in Yale, is written as a sign of gratitude to the students and faculty of Yale Divinity school with the hope that it was a worthwhile ministry.

The desire for spiritual life is the result of our search for an answer to the fundamental questions: what is my true vocation in life? Where to find the peace of mind to listen to the voice of God? Who can guide us through the inner labyrinth of our thoughts, emotions and feelings? etc.<sup>328</sup> Nouwen takes the text Mt 6/31-33: 'Do not worry...Your heavenly father knows...Set your hearts on his Kingdom first...and all these other things will be given you as well', as his basis to highlight the problem of living a spiritual life in a materialistic society and suggests a possible way. He presents his reflections in the reverse order and begins with "all these other things" followed by "his Kingdom first" and then "set your hearts".

### **2.10.1. Preoccupation with the 'other things'**

Today's man suffers from giving undue importance to "all these things". Spiritual life is possible only by breaking through our worries and preoccupation with the material needs and by letting God's Spirit to recreate us making all things new. Spiritual life is real when it is lived in the 'here and now', in its everyday existence. We have the desire for spiritual things but we are a worried people and often resigned. Our situation can be described as 'filled and unfulfilled'.<sup>329</sup> Too much of occupation and preoccupation is the cause of being filled externally and internally.

<sup>328</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Making all things new* 13.

<sup>329</sup> Cfr. *Ibid* 23-34.

A sense of being unfulfilled underlies the filled lives characterised by boredom, resentment and depression. Boredom is not not-doing anything but questioning the value of what we do. It is called the paradox of being busy and bored. Resentment is the sense of being used, manipulated and exploited. When it reaches a stage where we are no more required, we are depressed. The brokenness or disconnectedness leads to loneliness. Worrying forces us to be 'all over the place' and seldom at home. It is like having an address but cannot be found there.

### 2.10.2. The Kingdom of God

His Kingdom first does not mean a life without activity or a life without pains and struggles. It simply means relocating the centre of our attention and changing our priorities. It is "to follow Jesus on his obedient way, to enter with him into the community established by the demanding love of the father, and to live all of life from there. The Kingdom is the place where God's spirit guides us, heals us, challenges us and renews us continuously".<sup>330</sup> Setting the heart on the Kingdom means making the life of the spirit within and among us the centre of all we think, say or do. This spiritual life is manifested in the life of Jesus also. The account of Mk1/32-39 shows the centre of Jesus spiritual life, namely doing the will of his father. His obedience to his father was total, fearless listening to his loving father. The personal name of the all embracing love between the father and the son as lived by Jesus is called the spirit.<sup>331</sup> The spiritual life of Jesus is the life of uninterrupted attentiveness to the Father in the spirit of love.

From filled and unfulfilled life to a spiritual life needs a conversion, not running away from the world but being firmly rooted in the centre of all things without having to leave the many faceted world, a change of the heart in which in joys and sorrows we listen attentively to the spirit and go obediently to where we are being led. The useful exercise or discipline to arrive at this conversion is 'set the heart' which is the change from deafness to listening. This was for Nouwen in fact the same as prayer.

### 2.10.3. Setting the heart

The two disciplines of prayer are solitude and community. The essence of solitude lies in finding time for God and giving him a free space. Shutting the outer door involves opening the inner door which can make us uneasy. But even in the midst of distractions and 'useless' moments when we slowly experience the never failing spirit, we begin to pray. (Rom.5/4-6). The time of solitude is "the moment in which we want to be in the presence of our Lord with empty hands, naked, vulnerable, useless, without much to show, prove or defend"<sup>332</sup>, in which we listen to God's small voice. A scripture text or intercession for others help us to fight the distraction indirectly. The important thing is that our hearts become quiet cells where God can dwell, wherever we go and whatever we do. Solitude is related to community. It is "the effort to create a free and empty space among people where together we can practice true obedience".<sup>333</sup> This requires the constant recognition of the spirit of God in each other. The discipline of community transcends external differences and reveals to us who we are before God and for each other. "It makes us **persons**, that is, people who are sounding through to each other, a truth, a beauty and a love which is greater, fuller and

---

<sup>330</sup> Ibid. 59.

<sup>331</sup> "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed". Mk 1,35.

<sup>332</sup> Nouwen, Making all things new 76.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid. 80.

richer than we ourselves can grasp".<sup>334</sup> Community is a quality of the heart which stretches out beyond geographical boundaries, beyond decades and centuries and includes people near and far or those who live only in memory, leading to healing, sustaining and guiding.

## Observations

In the book mentioned above Nouwen concentrates on a single bible passage and shows how the Bible is the spiritual food for the spiritual life. Nouwen's outgoing statement of the danger of too much occupation and preoccupation with the things, can be a reflection of the state of his own mind. Naturally the same problem existed with other ministers too whom he knew well. In spite of his academic successes in Yale as a teacher and as Author Nouwen's heart searched for something else and he ended his career in Yale. The above book is like a send off message for the friends with the appeal that finally what matters is the Kingdom of God and setting the heart on it. It corresponds to his treatise on the *Way of the heart*. Nouwen's beloved themes like solitude and community are repeated. The discipline of a spiritual life is giving God the central place in our lives and following his divine will with the help of prayer and community. Ultimately the book is an invitation to spiritual life for all who are in ministry.

Here we have reached the end of the academic phase of Nouwen's life and writings. It is important to take a review at this juncture and put together the findings in statements.

## 2.11 Summarising remarks

2.11.1. The thematical development of Nouwen's books has mostly the existential life situation of the human beings as its starting point. The context of our world and the condition of the present day society is integrated very often. Nouwen can express very precisely and descriptively the internal crisis, the longings and helplessness of the ministers as well as those who seek help from them. The vivid description of the human situation made available to his listeners as well as readers shows the vastness and depth of the collection of information he gathered as contemporary. It also shows his experiences as therapist, who diagnoses the real problem and knows to name them. Nouwen's consultations with many people before a presentation or publication gives a final depth and precision to his talk or book. As I have already pointed out, for Nouwen the pastoral skills and knowledge are part of the prerequisites of this profession, but his concentration is on the spiritual identity of the minister. There is a growing tendency to stress this spirituality of the minister and the necessary ways and means to grow in it.

2.11.2. Nouwen's pastoral theological competence is more implicit than explicit. Only in *Creative ministry* he thinks in categories and speaks in terminologies. In spite of his pastoral and psychological knowledge he believes more in the rich Christian spiritual heritage. He diagnoses the problems with psychological eyes and allows the knowledge of the human sciences to intervene but they do not dominate his themes. Most of his ideas and insights are the fruit of his struggle with himself regarding his own vocation which he constantly discerned with the help of some of the great spiritual guides. This is something special and unique about Nouwen compared to many other pastoral theologians in other parts of the world. Nouwen's language is influenced by that of the mystics like T. Merton and J.

---

<sup>334</sup> Ibid. 87.

Bamberg and that of radical Christians like Gutierrez and Vanier. His special interest in the spirituality and his quest for mysticism is expressed in his book *Genese Diary*: “Ever since my studies for the priesthood I have felt especially attracted to what was then called, ‘Ascetical and Mystical Theology’ and all my other studies in psychology, sociology and similar fields never seemed fruitful for me unless they led me to a deeper understanding of the question of spiritual life. I have always moved from the psychological to the theological level and from clinical considerations to spiritual concerns.”<sup>335</sup>

Nouwen's method is that of presenting the themes which affect his own heart to his listeners and readers so that they themselves enter into his world and discover in their own lives for themselves ways and means to be transformed and guided by the spirit of Christ. There is a growing tendency in Nouwen to move from teacher to companion.

2.11.3. What is becoming very clear in the developments of his thoughts is that the basic Christian spirituality is also the spirituality of the minister. The ministers have the added responsibility to live a confessing, authentic and witnessing spirituality because that is what really attracts and restores the lives of others. Consequently the minister is more in need of God's empowering presence and strengthening closeness. Nouwen reduces the gap between the priests and laity and gives new dimensions to the commonness in the celebration of the Eucharist like hospitality which is the basis of our communion in the celebration.

2.11.4. Nouwen's didactical contribution is the description of the way to spiritual growth and maturity. With seriousness he speaks about the problems in spiritual life, but typical of him, the ways out of them are his real concern. He does not want us to look at our lives and stare at them, but go forward step by step. For example he exhorts us to move from loneliness to solitude. That opens up the horizon of hope and courage. He describes the way, the processes of changes, the necessary actions and the fruitful and creative ambivalences - as in *Reaching Out* - which all contribute a lively spiritual life. It is consoling that Nouwen narrates it as a process which is life long. Nouwen's imperatives are encouraging and motivating not only to read more but also to understand one's own spiritual life and to cultivate it. Nouwen's spirituality is a natural spirituality but the need of spiritual direction is often stressed in his books.

2.11.5. Looking at the books in the order of origin we see that there is a development in the thinking of Nouwen. He has started with the need and possibility of intimacy in the first book, the limitations and the woundedness caused through it (*Wounded healer*), turning to God's unconditional love (*With open hands*), growing and maturing in faith and in intimacy and witnessing to it in Christian life and in ministry (*books on spiritual life and ministry*) and finally the fruitfulness and fulfilment of life (*books on life and death*).

Priestly life and ministry are to some extent Nouwen's ultimate concern but the true pillars which hold them are the pillars of spiritual life. Therefore he writes extensively about the spiritual life. Spiritual life is a radical choice and in his own life it was a restless seeking. As an intellectual Nouwen attained a lot in the academic field during his upward mobility. But then he was all the more confronted with the question of being or doing? In the next chapter we see the downward mobility in which he chose 'to be' rather than to be successful and productive. It is a kenosis to be at the side of the weak. During this period Nouwen writes about the implications and consequences of this decision for the ministry.

---

<sup>335</sup> Nouwen, *Genese Diary* 207.

## **Chapter 3 : Downward Mobility - The post Academic phase (1981-1996)**

### **Introduction**

The Yale-years between 1971-1981 were highly productive in the academic career of Nouwen. In spite of his genuine search for the true vocation and occasional retreats from the work, the tension in Nouwen was growing. The move upwards did not satisfy him. He began thinking of a downward mobility as search for his true vocation. We have seen in the previous chapter that for Nouwen without the spiritual satisfaction there is also no real pastoral satisfaction. So Nouwen looks for new ways of ministering in new contexts for a renewed experience of himself. This new experiments or spiritual renewals led Nouwen through new crisis. Nouwen felt that till now his ministry was addressed to the 'strong ones'. His thoughts now turned to the 'weak'. In his desire to be at the side of the weak he decided to go to Latin America to discern his vocation. An account of his stay in Bolivia and Peru between Oct. 1981 to March 1982 is the content of the book *Gracias*. In the following chapter I am not treating all the books separately. I will be looking at some of them individually and others collectively under a suitable title or theme.

### **3.1. Gracias (1983)**

In Latin America Nouwen's reflections focused on the presence of God in the poor, the challenge of a persecuted church, the relation between justice and faith and his own call. The journal *Gracias* was published in 1983 in the hope of giving new strength and courage to the readers to live faithfully the task entrusted to them by God. This stay and search for his vocation was decisive for Nouwen's future. "It was in Lima, Peru that I came in touch with God's 'option for the poor' and grew in the conviction that somewhere, somehow, I too had to make that option. It was there that I heard the clear call to dedicate my future to a life of shepherding. It was there that I discovered for the first time that those who are marginalized by our society carry within them a great treasure for the church. It was in Lima that I learned that without prayer and community all my pastoral activities would end up in fruitless burnout."<sup>1</sup>

#### **3.1.1. Poverty, Prayer and ministry**

Nouwen saw a connection between prayer and poverty. "True prayer always includes becoming poor. When we pray we stand naked and vulnerable in front of Our Lord and show him our true condition. If one were to do this not just for oneself, but in the name of the thousands of surrounding poor people, wouldn't that be "mission" in the true sense of being sent into the world as Jesus himself was sent into the world? To lift up your hands to the Lord and show him the hungry children who play on the dusty streets, the tired women who carry their babies on their backs to the marketplace, the men who try to forget their misery by drinking too much beer on the weekends, the jobless teenagers and the homeless squatters, together with their laughter, friendly gestures, and gentle words- wouldn't that be true service? [...]Prayer is the ongoing cry of the incarnate Lord to the loving God. It is eternity in the midst of mortality, it is life among death, hope in the midst of despair, true promise surrounded by lies. Prayer brings love alive among us."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* IX.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 11-12.

Nouwen spoke about the material poverty but according to him the spiritual poverty needed more attention. He discovered a source of grace in the 'poverty' of the weak. It was important for him to recognize how God speaks through the weak. After experiencing the life of poverty and suffering in Latin America he also discovered something new in the weakness and poverty and wrote to his sister-in-law who had a disabled child: "We have never had a 'weak' person among us. We all are hardworking, ambitious and successful people who seldom have had to experience powerlessness. Now Laura enters and tells us a totally new story, a story of weakness, brokenness, vulnerability, and total dependency. Laura who always will be a child will teach us the way of Christ as no one will ever be able to do."<sup>3</sup> He also learned that, "When we become aware that our stuttering, failing, vulnerable selves are loved even when we hardly progress, we can let go of our compulsion to prove ourselves and be free to live with others in a fellowship of the weak."<sup>4</sup>

If poverty leads to prayer, prayer leads to ministry. "When we allow this image of the suffering Christ within us to grow into its full maturity, the ministry to the poor and the oppressed becomes a real possibility; because then we can indeed hear, see, and touch him within us as well as among us. Thus prayer becomes ministry and ministry becomes prayer."<sup>5</sup> Ministry can also be simply being there rather than doing many things. "That ministry means first of all searching for God where people are lost, confused, broken, and poor. Often I have gone to such people to bring them back to God, to the sacraments, and to the church. But that is acting and living as if God is where I am, and as if my first task is to bring others to my place. When, however, God is with the poor and marginal, then I have to dare to go there, live there, and find him there. I now realize that I can be with people without having to make them think my thoughts and say my words. I can be free to listen and slowly to discern where God shows his merciful face to me."<sup>6</sup>

### 3.1.2. Prayer, gratitude and ministry

At the end of the stay what Nouwen found, learned and heard is summarised as gratitude (*Gracias*). Poverty needs not be frightening but revealing and ministry is not only giving but receiving their gifts and being grateful for them. "Gratitude is one of the most sublime of human emotions. It is an emotion that reaches out far beyond our own self to God, to all creation, to the people who gave us life, love, and care. It is an emotion in which we experience our dependencies as a gift and realize that in the celebration of our dependencies we become most aware of who we truly are: a small but precious part of creation and above all of the human family."<sup>7</sup> Gratitude on the other hand leads to prayer. "The theological perspective on gratitude makes it clear why it is so crucial that we pray: through prayer we become aware of the life of God within us and it is this God within us who allows us to recognize the God among us. When we have met our Lord in the silent intimacy of our prayer, then we will also meet him in the *campo*, in the market, and in the town square. But when we have not met him in the centre of our own hearts, we cannot expect to meet him in the business of our daily lives. Gratitude is God receiving God in and through the human interaction of ministry. This viewpoint explains why true ministers, true missionaries, are always also contemplatives. Seeing God in the world and making him visible to each other

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 55.

is the core of ministry as well as the core of contemplative life.”<sup>8</sup>

### 3.1.3. Poverty, prayer and community

According to Nouwen God is present where we need him most. God with us is God becoming our companion, God who is close to us in our suffering and fight against the dark powers. He walks with us when we let him touch our places of guilt, shame and loneliness. Our communion with God and with each other leads to community. “Community develops where we experience that something significant is taking place *where we are*. It is the fruit of the intimate knowledge that we are together, not because of a common need-such as to learn a language- but because we are called together to help make God’s presence visible in the world. Only to the degree that we have this knowledge of God’s call can we transcend our own immediate needs and point together to him who is greater than these needs.”<sup>9</sup>

### Observations

Although Nouwen defines his pastoral mission with the poor and simple people in Latin America as that of simple presence, giving and receiving, being grateful and praying in communities his pastoral vision is not without the necessary scientific support. He continued to view the pastoral field and the pastoral activities with diagnostic eyes and was convinced that “the greatest need(..) was not for more pastoral workers but for people who could help articulate, evaluate, systematise, and communicate what is going on in the pastoral field. We need people who can conceptualise what they live and connect it with the larger tradition of the Church.”<sup>10</sup> In Latin America Nouwen was not very much taken up by the revolutionary attitude towards justice and peace. The theme of justice is close to his heart as we see in his taking part in the peace march of Martin Luther King. Nouwen's cause for justice and peace is rooted in peace, non-violence, the spirit of the Gospel and the spiritual tradition of the church. The real revolution for Nouwen is not to consider the poor as mere receivers. In their faces we see the face of God and they are as much givers of love and peace if we are willing to receive from them. Nouwen's idea of the reverse mission brought a lot of understanding in the North for the South.

It is interesting that Nouwen knew from Merton that being contemplative is also ministry and in spite of that wanted to be in the midst of life and be active in the poor context of Latin America. There he did not organise so much the people against poverty and injustice but learned more about the meaning of prayer. He found himself more wanted in the west to proclaim what he learned and experienced. He could not very much live his theory of simply being with the poor. We cannot term his stay in South America a wrong decision because Nouwen's return to the North made him only more effective and ardent to preach conversion or 'reverse mission'. Nouwen came back to teach at Harvard and kept contact with Latin America. His compassion for the poor and weak is thematised in the book *Compassion*.

### 3.2. Compassion (1982)

This book published in 1982 is a reflection on the Christian life. It is written together with Donald P. Mc Neill, and Douglas A. Morrison, priests and teachers in Pastoral Theology.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 163.

Nouwen dedicated this book to Joel Filartiga (a paraguayan doctor-artist whose drawings enriched the texts and who as Nouwen confesses helped them to understand the deeper meaning of compassion), to his wife Nadia and to Joelito, the 17 year old son who was tortured to death by a police squad. That shows his concern about the situation in Latin America and his compassion for the suffering. This book is the fruit of the 'nine Thursday meetings' of the authors in Washington DC to study and pray together. To their discussions they had also invited occasionally people from different walks of life to be enriched by their ideas and experiences.

The authors try to explore the full meaning of the virtue of compassion. Literally meaning 'to suffer with', "compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish... Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human".<sup>11</sup> It does not deal with a compassion of guilt and failure but a compassionate love rooted in the divine love that pervades our being. It is opposed to the principles of power and destructive control and guides a person as a force of prayer and action. The call of Jesus 'be compassionate as your heavenly father is compassionate' is a call to a radical conversion.

In a competitive world compassion is understood as an eraser to correct the mistakes. True compassion is not a remedial measure towards those who are hurt by the competitions of an incompassionate world. It is rather a virtue which forms the centre of Christian life and which is founded on the compassion of God. A compassionate life as followers of Christ is possible through the compassionate way of prayer and action. It is however not an end in itself, rather a pointer to the fullness of life promised by God.

### 3.2.1 The compassionate God

The first part of this discourse contains reflections on the compassionate God revealed to us in the God-with-us, in the Servant God and in the Obedient God. The simple presence of someone who cares is often more important than words or actions. God's solidarity is expressed in his presence. More than solving our problems, his solidarity consists "in the fact that he is willing to enter with us into our problems, confusions and questions".<sup>12</sup> The compassion of God is revealed in Jesus for whom compassion was not a passing feeling of sorrow or sympathy, rather it was being moved in the deepest and most mysterious centre of the passion<sup>13</sup>, the movement of the womb of God<sup>14</sup>, where the divine tenderness lies hidden. The divine compassion first shares the pain with us and then in his divine womb life is always born again. Competition and comparison stand in the way of compassion. The illusion that the distinctions are our true identity "makes us into competitive people who compulsively cling to our differences and defend them at all cost, even to the point of violence".<sup>15</sup> The compassionate life of Jesus is an invitation to leave the fearful clinging and enter into a new life. "This is the mystery of the Christian life: to receive a new self, a new identity, which depends not on what we can achieve, but on what we are willing to receive... a participation in the divine life in and through Christ".<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Nouwen, *Compassion* 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>13</sup> The greek verb *splangchnizomai* (=to be moved with compassion) refers to the entrails of the body or guts.

<sup>14</sup> from the Hebrew *rechamim*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

The servant God emptied himself (Ph.2:6-8) sharing the human condition of “powerlessness in which one feels victimised by uncontrollable events, anonymous influences, and capricious agents which surround and elude one’s understanding and control”.<sup>17</sup> In humility Jesus suffered the painful human condition in its concreteness and suffered the most despicable death. It was his self-emptying to be with us in compassion, the price God paid for his intimacy. In his downward movement the servant of God goes directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and builds a home there. This movement of Jesus is “not a movement away from God but a movement toward him as he really is”<sup>18</sup>, in fact God’s self-revelation. Against the worldly tendency of moving upward, following Jesus means participating in the ongoing self-revelation of God manifesting God’s compassionate presence in the world. Only a ‘second nature’ in and through Christ sets us free to live the servant hood in compassion. Radical servant hood is to be understood as an expression of the search for God rather than the fortunate helping the unfortunate and it must be a joyful service pointing to the resurrection.

### 3.2.2. The compassionate life

The second part dealing with the compassionate life calls for a displaced community of togetherness. Compassionate life is essentially a community life without individual stardom. It is a fellowship of people walking on the same path, a new way of being together in which the sufferings of the world can be addressed to and attended to. Evoking sympathy through massive exposure to the sufferings may make an individual numb, angry or indifferent. The community is a good mediator between the sufferings of the world and individuals response. “In the community gathered in Christ’s name, there is an ultimate space into which strangers from different places with very different stories can enter and experience God’s compassionate presence”.<sup>19</sup> The primary quality of a community is the deep sense of being gathered by God, united with the real faces of the people, real tears and real smiles of those with whom we come in contact with, a quality of the heart than mere physical togetherness. Compassion lived in a community is essential to our faith in God’s compassionate presence.

Coming together as a Christian community involves a voluntary displacement which sounds like a paradox but essential to follow the displaced Lord. It is moving from the ‘ordinary’, comfortable secure life to “unknown territories where people hurt and where we can experience with them our common human brokenness and our common need for healing”.<sup>20</sup> Through voluntary displacement we become compassionate to the many disrupted lives caused by violent displacements. In the life of community there is a movement from positions of distinctions to positions of sameness, from being the object of interest to disappearing in order to be everywhere by hiddenness and compassion. “It leads us to see with others what we could not see before, to feel with others what we could not feel before, to hear with others what we could not hear before”.<sup>21</sup> This hiding doesn’t mean escaping the responsibilities but gaining the necessary distance to grow in compassion. “Living in the world with hiddenness and compassion unites us with it because it allows us to discover the world in the centre of our being. [...] Thus , displacement makes it possible to be *in* the

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 67.

world without being *of it*".<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that the call to compassion is not for everyone a 'dramatic displacement' as for example in the case of St. Francis of Assisi. It can be recognized in the many small physical, mental and emotional displacement of our lives as indication of God's presence. God acts in everyone's life in a unique way and for him there are no 'ordinary citizens'. Seeing God in the small displacements of life is the great following in freedom.

The call to community is a call to the togetherness of the humanity. It should not separate the humanity into groups, especially into privileged and ordinary. The effectiveness of the displacement consists in the commonness. In the community the unique talents of every individual are shared as gifts. To recognize the unique talents in others requires the affirmation of the self-worth and self-emptying to make others the centre of our attention. A community is essentially gathered by 'vocation', God's call to one people fashioned in the image of Christ. Here the career does not divide but rather is an obedience to the vocation.

### 3.2.3. The compassionate way

The third part speaks of the compassionate way. The way of discipleship needs a way of discipline, not in the sense of efficiency and control but in the sense of unveiling. "It is like raking away the leaves that cover the pathway in the garden of our soul. Discipline enables the revelation of God's divine spirit in us...the effort to avoid deafness and to become sensitive to the voice that calls us by a new name and invites us to a new life in discipleship".<sup>23</sup> Patience, prayer and action are the ways of a compassionate life. Patience is not accepting the powerlessness, the inability to act or a general state of passivity and dependence but actively, attentively and fruitfully entering into "the thick of life and (to) fully bear the suffering within and around us".<sup>24</sup> In living the 'here and now' patience considers the time as the 'fullness of time' in which God acts and is not made restless by the clock-time. Living fullness leads to sharing it and celebrating life together.

The discipline of patience takes texture and shape in a life of prayer and action. In prayerful patience we suffer through the *here and now*, experiencing life in its fullness in the presence of the compassionate God who dwells in the centre of our being. Avoiding prayer is a sign that in doing good to others we ourselves stand in the centre. Prayer frees the spirit of God from entanglement in our impatient impulses. We cannot pray without the spirit of God, the divine life which makes us brothers and sisters of Jesus and children of God. Prayer is the work of the spirit, a radical form of inner displacement. In compassion entering into solidarity with others and living the fullness of life through prayer brings us to an all embracing intimacy with God and fellowmen. Thus praying for others means inviting them into the centre of our hearts, even those who have hurt us.

Speaking about prayer leads automatically to action. Prayer and action are not contradictory or exclusive. Patient actions "must be a manifestation of God's compassionate presence in the midst our world... actions through which the healing, consoling, comforting, reconciling and unifying love of God can touch the heart of humanity".<sup>25</sup> They are actions pointing to the fullness of time in which God's justice and peace reigns, actions proclaiming the good news of liberty, actions that remove fear, suspicion and power-hungry competition.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 90-91.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 117.

## Observations

Nouwen has written about compassion at several places in the previous books, especially while speaking about prayer and solitude. The virtue of compassion comes automatically in our loving relationship to fellow human beings. What is special about this book is that it points to the deeper meanings of compassion and aims at leading the compassionate to mysticism. We have seen that prayer forms the core of ministry and the spirituality of the minister with a compassionate heart is a mystical aspect of prayer, solitude and ministry. For Nouwen it is important that compassion forms the core of Christian life and spiritual life. It is primarily a grace but is born only out of the spiritual discipline of prayer and patience in which the implications of the incarnation and its demands are lived and made known to others. It is not a final goal in itself but a pointer to the new heaven and the new earth. Reaching out to the new heaven and new earth was Nouwen's constant attempt. In the next book we see how he went through the darkness of spiritual anguish and saw the light of the daybreak.

### 3.3. The Road to Daybreak

As we have seen in the biography Harvard was not the paradise which Nouwen was actually looking for. It was a place for the strong and the competitive. Nouwen's inclination was to be on the side of the weak. So Nouwen decided to spend time with the disabled in Trosly. The friendship with Vanier and his spiritual calibre must have also attracted Nouwen to this place.

The journal *The Road to Daybreak* contains Nouwen's inner movements during his stay in Trosly from August 1985 to July 1986 and his continued search for the real vocation. Nouwen discerned that Latin America was not the right place for him. "I had to face the fact that I wasn't capable of doing the work of a missionary in a Spanish-speaking country, that I needed more emotional support than my fellow missionaries could offer, that the hard struggle for justice often left me discouraged and dispirited, and that the great variety of tasks and obligations took away my inner composure."<sup>26</sup> Getting back to Harvard was not either the best thing for him. "Gradually I discovered that Harvard was not the place where I was called to follow Jesus in a more radical way; I was not really happy there, found myself somewhat sulky and complaining, and never felt fully accepted by the faculty or students."<sup>27</sup> His dominant feeling towards Harvard was, however, gratitude than indignation. "Harvard was the place where I met some of my most caring friends, where I became most acutely aware of my desire to love Jesus without compromise, and where I discovered my vocation to live and work with mentally handicapped people."<sup>28</sup>

During his anxious searching for the vocation Nouwen received the invitation from Jean Vanier for a silent retreat in Chicago. Through this he came to know L'Arche and had several visits to Trosly in France. For Nouwen it was a search for a home, a thirst for emotional support. "When I visited the L'Arche community in France I experienced a sense of at homeness I had not experienced in Yale, in Latin America, or at Harvard. The non-competitive life with mentally handicapped people, their gifts of welcoming me regardless of name or prestige, and the persistent invitation to 'waste some time' with them opened in

<sup>26</sup> Nouwen, *The road to Daybreak* 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

me a place that until then had remained unavailable to me, a place where I could hear the gentle invitation of Jesus to dwell with him.”<sup>29</sup>

For Nouwen the way was becoming clearer, although the struggle continued. “Many of the same pains I expressed in the *Genesee Diary* and *Gracias!* Can be found here. The difference is not only the context, but also the direction. In the past I wanted to know where to go. Now I knew where to go, but didn’t really want to. Living and working with mentally handicapped people seemed precisely the opposite of what I had been trained and qualified to do.”<sup>30</sup> The above book describes Nouwen’s struggle to say ‘yes’ to the invitation of Jesus to follow him, “a ‘yes’ emerging from the recognition of my own brokenness and need for radical healing”<sup>31</sup>.

### 3.3.1. Being seen by God

Nouwen realized that to be healed one has to be seen by God, and it is possible only when “I allow God to see me, all of me, even those parts I myself do not want to see”.<sup>32</sup> Living with the broken people helps us to become purer. Purity of the heart is essential to be able to see God. “Indeed, Jesus speaks through the broken hearts of the handicapped, who are considered marginal and useless. But God has chosen them to be the poor through whom he makes his presence known. This is hard to accept in a success- and production-oriented society.”<sup>33</sup>

What attracted Nouwen to Daybreak was the openness of the inmates and their spontaneous sharing of their joys and sorrows. “They did not hide anything from me. They allowed me to see their fears and their love. I feel deeply grateful for having been part of it call.”<sup>34</sup> A community of broken, but loving people enables one to be what one is without having to be defensive or wear masks. In a community of broken people healing is taking place easier. According to Nouwen a highly developed psychological consciousness can prevent us from reaching that place in us where the healing powers are hidden, the place called heart. Heart is the place of trust, a trust that can be called faith, hope or love, depending on how it is being manifested. The ability of the heart to trust makes us truly human. The conscience acts more at the moral level. “When the moral life gets all the attention, we are in danger of forgetting the primacy of the mystical life, which is the life of the heart.”<sup>35</sup> Here we see the reason why Nouwen always wanted to go beyond ‘issues’ into the realm of mysticism. Following the ideas of one of mentors, Pere Thomas- cofounder of L’Arche- Nouwen says that the mystical life lies at the beginning of our existence and not just at its end. “Our heart is that divine gift which allows us to trust not just God, but also our mother, our father, our family, ourselves and the world.”<sup>36</sup> That is the reason why children have a very deep, intuitive knowledge of God, a knowledge of the heart, that gets obscured and suffocated in the course of time. Thus the heart is seated beyond knowledge and is much wider and deeper than affections. “It is before and beyond the distinctions between sorrow and joy, anger and lust, fear and love. It is the place where all is one in God, the place where we truly

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 48.

belong, the place from which we come and to which we always yearn to return.”<sup>37</sup> This is closely connected to Nouwen’s favourite theme, the first love.

### 3.3.2. Being loved by God

An important aspect of Nouwen’s thinking is that nothing and nobody is excluded from the all embracing love of God. Our concern and compassion reaches out to every individual and being. Nouwen’s contacts with Aids-patients and his compassion for them shows how he sees the suffering God in a suffering person and how he is convinced of the unfathomable love of God. This loving God, according to Nouwen is closest to us in the person of Jesus and therefore only a Christ-centred life can calm our inner struggles. In a total surrender to Christ we are embraced by the unconditional love of God. Throughout his struggles Nouwen tried to be faithful to a Christ-centred life.

Being loved is also being known. There is no need for hiding anything from the heart. When we are known and yet loved there is no more fear of rejection. In the human relationships it is not possible to practice the unconditional love and the absolute fearlessness of being rejected. Only God can offer this generous and intimate love. When we encounter Jesus in prayer we are fully known and loved. It is like the experience of Mary of Magdala (Jn 20/16f), a healing moment, a truly religious moment. “What a joy to be fully known and fully loved at the same time! It is the joy of belonging through Jesus to God and being there, fully safe and fully free.”<sup>38</sup> Trusting in the first love leads to innocence, a second childhood. We are loved not because we deserve it or according to the measure of our efforts. The life with the handicapped people helped Nouwen to discover God’s first love. “Handicapped people have little, if anything, to show to the world. They have no degrees, no reputation, no influence, no connections with influential people; they do not create much, produce much or earn much. They have to trust that they can receive and give pure love. I have already received so many hugs and kisses here from people who have never heard of me and are not the least impressed by me that I have to start believing that the love they offer is freely given, to be freely received.”<sup>39</sup>

God’s unlimited love is expressed and experienced through the limited human love. “What I have learned is that God’s unlimited love often expresses itself through the limited love of God’s people. This means concretely that we broken, sinful people, need to confess and forgive day in and day out, and thus continue to reveal a love that we ourselves cannot make true.”<sup>40</sup>

### 3.3.3. Experiencing the Daybreak

Life with and among the handicapped people helped Nouwen to transform himself. “It was the affective wounds of the handicapped people in my own home that opened the door to my own wounded affectivity.[...] Care, compassion, love for neighbour, promise, commitment, and faithfulness...I turned and turned these concepts in my mind and heart, and sometimes it felt as though the spiritual life I had built up over the years was now proving to be made of cardboard and ready to go up in flames. The handicapped men and women and their assistants forced me to look at myself in ways that were very humbling.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 59.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 193.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 213.

Often I doubted whether there was any solid ground under my feet. [...] The most radical challenge came out of the question, Is Jesus truly enough for you, or do you keep looking for others to give you your sense of worth?"<sup>41</sup>

Nouwen decided for the downward mobility, for a life with the disabled which brought the light of the Daybreak to his spiritual life. The downward mobility involved struggles. "Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclination, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I am a part.[...] Wherever I turn I am confronted with my deep-seated resistance against following Jesus on his way to the cross and my countless ways of avoiding poverty, whether material, intellectual, or emotional."<sup>42</sup> Choosing poverty is choosing to make every part of one's journey with Jesus. "After all, it is not *my* poverty that has any value, but only God's poverty, which becomes visible through my life."<sup>43</sup> Becoming poor made Nouwen spiritually rich.

Describing his journey Nouwen wrote, "It is becoming increasingly clear to me that Jesus led me to where I never wanted to go, sustained me when I felt lost in the darkness of the night, and will guide me toward the day no longer followed by night. As I travel with Jesus, he continues to remind me that God's heart is, indeed, infinitely greater than my own."<sup>44</sup>

### Observations

The writing of this book was a pure response to his own search for spiritual clarity. Nouwen had written in the mean time a lot about opening our hands, reaching out to God, resting in God in prayer and solitude and the loving God and being loved by him. But he himself was still a thirsty wanderer. His longing for affection and love and the failure to experience simple and unconditional love kept drawing him to the unquestioning and unconditional love of God as in the case of the returned prodigal son. As a successful counsellor and spiritual director Nouwen knew how human beings longed for affection. His studies in psychology and his own longing for affection convinced him of its importance. Through his spiritual search Nouwen came to the conclusion that the ultimate longing is for the divine love and that we are led to it through human love. He sought this human love in the community of the disabled at Daybreak.

Nouwen's stay in Trosly was a time of reflection. Looking at the past he found that he was a 'failure'. Probably he could not put up with the less organised way of life in Latin America. Life at the universities was too sophisticated for him. He longed for a simple and secure place to live where his heart could be at rest. The stay in Trosly with the poor and broken people challenged him to confront his own brokenness and need for healing. Nouwen experienced very much the truth of what he wrote earlier that ministry involves making oneself vulnerable. The book *Road to daybreak* is a testament that it is possible to move from darkness to light. This is a pastoral truth also. Nouwen's radical choice taught him that joy is possible. It needs an external as well as internal conversion. It was a regaining of the spiritual life for Nouwen. Some of the important signs of spiritual life are narrated in the following book.

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 221-222.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 154.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 154.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 228.

### 3.4. Lifesigns: Intimacy, Fecundity and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective (1986)

Nouwen wrote this book during his stay in Trosly-Breuil, France during his stay from August 1985-86. He describes here the three vital signs of Christian spirituality namely Intimacy (communion with God and communion with others), Fecundity (growing and bearing fruit) and Ecstasy (joyful living). The qualification ‘in Christian perspective’ gives already a hint that the terms have a deeper meaning than we usually understand. Intimacy with God leading to intimacy with one another is the source from which the fruitfulness originates leading to the ultimate aim of living joyfully. This requires living in the spirit of the Gospel. His experiments with the community, spending ‘useless time’ with God and living with the ‘useless people’ helped him to come to this conclusion. To be spiritually alive we must move from the domain of fear to the house of love; from filled and unfulfilled to intimacy, fecundity and ecstasy. Explaining the three life-signs Nouwen showed what living in the house of love looks like and what creates the desire to live it. Growth in the spiritual life is a movement from the house of fear to the house of love.

#### 3.4.1. Intimacy

The invitation to live in the house of love comes from God in the words of Jesus: “make your home in me as I make mine in you”. Jn.15/4. Home is an intimate place where one is safe. People are homeless either because they are driven out of their houses or because of the inner anguish. In every person there is a deep desire for a lasting, intimate home.

According to Nouwen a huge network of anxious questions surround us and begin to guide many, if not most of our daily decisions. Fearful questions never lead to love-filled answers and underneath every fearful question many other fearful questions are hidden. The agenda of fear and power is a destructive power in our lives. Fear prevents intimacy from developing. Fear causes us to move away from each other or cling to each other. Both closeness and distance may prevent us from forming an intimate community in which we can grow together, everyone in his or her way. They are not safe places to confess to each other the sins, brokenness and wounds. “Distance allows us to ignore the others as having no significance in our lives, and closeness offers us an excuse for never expressing or confessing our feelings of being hurt”.<sup>45</sup> Intimacy is more than an interpersonal relationship of a happy medium between closeness and distance which are compelled by fear but a horizon beyond fear in which the tension between distance and closeness is dissolved. To Intimacy which is the home of perfect love and devoid of fear. It transcends all feelings, emotions and passions. It is the place of true belonging, not shaped by human hands but fashioned for us by God who lives among us and invites us to live in his house. To enter this house needs a conversion of coming home and through prayer seeking God’s house in us and making our home in God. Prayer which nurtures intimacy is “descending with the mind into the heart, in order to stand there in the presence of God”.<sup>46</sup> True intimacy is possible with God because he offers a fearless place and this divine covenant is the basis of all other bonds.

Solidarity is the other side of intimacy. The mission of Jesus was to gather us into one people and to form us into one family. An intimacy which excludes others is guided by rivalry and competition. The spirituality of the one who does not see the inner connection between intimacy and solidarity “will become either privatised or narrowly activist and will

---

<sup>45</sup> Nouwen, Lifesigns 32.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 40.

no longer reflect the full beauty of living in God's house."<sup>47</sup> Prayer leads us to our inner sanctuary and solidarity leads us to the world. The knowledge of the truth moves us to act truthfully; to work for reconciliation, unity and peace. Activism is a fearful, nervous and anxious attempt to work for a better world but "those acting within the house of God point through their action to the healing, restoring, redeeming, and re-creating presence of God".<sup>48</sup>

### 3.4.2. Fecundity

The natural result of remaining in God is to bear fruit. Nouwen uses thus the words of Jesus: "Those who remain in me, with me in them, bear fruit in plenty" (Jn. 15/5) to illustrate the second sign of life called fecundity. Fecundity is not possible in a fearful heart. Fear manifests itself either in sterility or productivity. Sterility is withdrawal from the 'other' and regressing oneself into self-created protective patterns. We close ourselves off when we feel surrounded by threats. "The experience of sterility is the experience of not being truly alive, and therefore of being unable to give life."<sup>49</sup> Productivity is the compulsive fear of being valued for what one 'makes' in a competitive world. Sterility and productivity are the signs of our doubt about being fruitful. Fruitfulness is a quality of love. "The great mystery of fecundity is that it becomes visible where we have given up our attempts to control life and take the risk to let life reveal it's own inner movements"<sup>50</sup>. In surrendering oneself to the beloved and letting him to lead to unknown and unpredictable places we let fruits come from the ground of intimate love as a gift. This quality of gift distinguishes fruits from products.

The signs of the fruitful life are vulnerability, gratitude and care. Living in vulnerability is not being afraid of each other, not building walls and defences. The life of Jesus bore the best of the fruits in the self-emptying and making himself vulnerable. The vulnerability of God is reflected in the vulnerability of his children. Gratitude is another aspect of a fruitful life. It is a "radical shift of vision, from looking at the loaves and fishes as scarce products which need to be hoarded, to seeing them as precious gifts from God which ask to be gratefully shared".<sup>51</sup> This shift from fear to love needs the recognition that all that is, is a divine gift born out of love and freely given to us so that we may offer thanks and share it with others. Finally fruitfulness needs care. Care avoids control and manipulation and offers a healthy environment which helps others to search for new directions and make new choices. Ministry is a caring attentiveness to vulnerable lives, and a grateful receiving of the variety of fruits by which they manifest their beauty.

Just as solidarity emerges out of intimacy, the global dimension of fecundity is mission. Our call to live a life in the spirit of Jesus implies being sent out to give and receive the gifts of God to and from all peoples and nations. Sharing the gifts without manipulation and violence is important but equally important is "to receive the fruits of the lives of the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering as gifts offered for the conversion of the rich".<sup>52</sup> Thus fecundity brings forth life, "new life, life that manifests itself in new, fresh, and unique ways: a child, a poem, a song, a kind word, a gentle embrace, a caring hand, or a new

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 77.

communion among the nations.”<sup>53</sup>

### 3.4.3 Ecstasy

Ecstasy in the spiritual sense is living joy to its fullness in love. It is the reward of intimate and fruitful life in the house of love as promised by Jesus: “I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete” (Jn. 15/11). Joy is essentially ecstatic since it moves out of the place of death, which is rigid and fixed, into the place of life which is new and surprising. Fear forces us into routinized behaviour or legalism and fails to look for reasons to rejoice. Rootlessness which is connected to goal-lessness is a kind of homelessness and cannot bring joy either. The ecstatic joy is a divine gift which is present in good and bad times and which invites us to celebrate life by lifting it up with its joys and sorrows. “Since ecstatic joy embraces *all* of life, it does not shy away from the painful moments of failure, departure and death...because in the face of death life can be proclaimed as victorious”.<sup>54</sup> Eucharist which creates community and expresses it is the best community to celebrate life. This celebration can be extended to the whole of the human community by visualising and working for a global ecstasy. It is “a movement from fear to love, from death to life, from stagnation to rebirth, from living as rivals to living as people who belong to one human community”<sup>55</sup>, a call to personal and global conversion. By claiming the personal and global dimensions of ecstasy we can live in the house of love and witness God’s presence. Only in such a world can love, care, reconciliation, healing and peace reign.

The above points can be summed up saying that fear is the cause of clinging to someone with a violent love or fleeing from others and that the way to life is to live in the house of love, an intimate communion with God and solidarity with others. Intimacy as a divine gift allows us to “transcend fearful distances as well as fearful closeness, and to experience a love before and beyond all human acceptance or rejection”<sup>56</sup> and to free our hands to work in solidarity especially with the suffering. Fear tends towards sterility or anxious productivity but the true sign of life is fecundity marked by the fruitfulness of living our lives as a gift in total surrender to God and sharing its vulnerability as life-giving for others. Another result of fear is static living or the other extreme called rootlessness. The sign of life is ecstasy or joy which is more than momentary happiness. It is the lifting up of life with its ups and downs in celebration and setting the signs of a global spirituality of peace and communion. As Nouwen confessed the stress in this book is not on fear, fruitlessness or joylessness, it is a message of love, care and hope.

### Observations

Here we experience a most wonderful contribution to the visible signs of spiritual life. Nouwen reworks upon his theme intimacy from the biblical and psychological point of fear. Our natural or inflicted upon fear and God's continued invitation, 'do not be afraid' are important aspects of spiritual life. As psychologist Nouwen knew how much the fear blocks and prevents intimacy, fruitfulness and ecstasy which are our true Christian vocation.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 52.

Vulnerability, Solidarity and community which are inseparable themes from Nouwen's thinking come up in this book too. The house of love is a very spiritual and therapeutical concept. His constant referring to the life and example of Jesus shows, that only he can truly lead us to this house of love. He himself is this house. So Nouwen speaks about the Jesus-centeredness of the spiritual life in his letters to Marc.

### 3.5. Letters to Marc about Jesus

This book originally written in Dutch in 1987, at the request of a publisher friend Herman Pijfers, is an attempt to put down his spiritual insights in his mother tongue. Nouwen was uncertain about the Dutch taste and finally decided to write with the co-operation of his 19 year old nephew Marc, in the form of letters. He invited the interested youth and the readers to the richness of the life as Christians, as he knew it, experienced it and continued to discover. Keeping at the centre the questions and interests of his Nephew and the youth of his age and milieu, Nouwen explained the important dimensions of a spiritual life in a material world. With freshness and immediacy he treats the need to respond to the interest of the youth looking for a spiritual living in an affluent society. The title of the book and the table of contents show clearly that for Nouwen an enduring spiritual journey is centred in Jesus. The world keeps pressing us with urgent things but the spiritual life points out towards what is essential. A solid spiritual life has Jesus as the heart of the existence; a God who sets us free, the compassionate God, the descending God, the loving God, the hidden God and all what we need to do is to listen to him.

#### 3.5.1. Jesus, the heart of our existence

For a spiritual life one has to go deep into that terrain where the meaning and goal of our human existence are hidden. This place called the *heart* of our existence is “that place where we are most ourselves, where we are most human, where we are most real.”<sup>57</sup> The essence and meaning of spiritual life consists of “living with Jesus at the centre”<sup>58</sup> and at the heart of the existence we can enter into a personal relationship with Jesus, the God who sets us free.

#### 3.5.2. Jesus, the God who sets us free

True freedom is beyond any specific social, political or economic freedom; it is the freedom to follow the Lord as the two disciples experienced on the way to Emmaus. Liberation which is a rebirth is the essential element of the Eucharistic celebration in which “owing up to our confusion, depression, despair and guilt; listening with an open heart to the word of God; gathering around the table to break the bread and so to acknowledge the presence of Jesus; and going out again into the world to make known to others what we have learned and experienced”<sup>59</sup>, we achieve a bit more spiritual freedom.

#### 3.5.3. Jesus, the compassionate God

A Jesus centred spirituality leads us to the compassion of God who suffers with the humanity and showed it in the sufferings and death of Jesus whose resurrection proclaims the radical liberation from the power of death, which empowers us to love fearlessly. The sign of Jesus suffering and death is an undiluted message that like Jonah we must fulfil our

---

<sup>57</sup> Nouwen, A letter to Marc about Jesus 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 19.

arduous tasks to the end and cannot run away from the reality. The spiritual freedom which we experience in the compassionate love of God is in turn visible in our compassion for others, taking part in the suffering of the other, being totally a fellow-human-being in suffering. The sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ which forms the kernel of the good tidings, is celebrated in the Eucharistic and helps us to make Christ's suffering and death our own and to enter into his passion to become compassionate.

#### 3.5.4. Jesus, the descending God

The way of Jesus was a descending way. The world with its compulsions and competitions suggests to us to climb the ladder and every fibre of our being rebels against it when we want to change the direction. In the descending way of the incarnation Christ emptied himself, suffered misery and a cruel death, not as a masochist, but as the way to know God. Through Jesus "the descending way of love, the way to the poor, the broken and oppressed becomes the ascending way of love, the way to joy, peace and new life. The cross is transformed from a sign of defeat into a sign of victory, from a sign of despair into a sign of hope, from a sign of death into a sign of life."<sup>60</sup> The descending way for each one is different. The way God wants us to tread is concealed in the heart, maybe overgrown with weed. In prayer we need to clear the way and walk with small steps of love. Participation in the Eucharistic bread which came down from heaven helps us to learn gradually to walk Christ's descending way.

#### 3.5.5. Jesus, the loving God

Jesus is the concrete expression of the all pervading but hidden love of God. It is important to distinguish between the non coercive, non-violent, unending and unconditional love of God from the extorting love. In spite of the fact that we are too weak to give the unlimited and unconditional love, when we are tempted towards extorting love, love becomes violent. "It is then that kisses become bites, caresses become blows, forgiving looks become suspicious glances, lending a sympathetic ear becomes eavesdropping, and heartfelt surrender becomes violation. The borderline between love and force is frequently transgressed, and in our anxiety-ridden times it doesn't take very much to let our desire for love lead us to violent behaviour."<sup>61</sup> The coercive love tries to enforce love by force and ends up in violence to others or to oneself. Jesus is the revelation of God's unending, unconditional love for the human beings as a pure gift, not based on our merit but because he is a God of love. The loving God is also a forgiving God and knowledge of and trust in this love can help us to grow in this love even to the extent of forgiving our enemies. Eucharist empowers one to take the way that Jesus has taken before.

#### 3.5.6. Jesus, the hidden God

Another aspect of the mystery of God's revelation in Jesus is that he is a hidden God. Jesus shows that unlike the world which insists on publicity, celebrity, popularity, and exposure, God prefers to work in secret. In a life of total surrender and mortification, that is, dying to old ways of being, God causes something new to grow. Just as the embryo in the womb, seed in the soil and egg in the nest, so also creativity and intimacy needs seclusion. To discover the hidden God we have to enter into our heart, the centre of our being. Often we are afraid to do it because what is most intimate is also what is most frightening. Jesus

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 57.

desires to meet us in the seclusion of our hearts to make him known, to free us from fear and to make our own deepest self known to us. Knowledge of God leads to self-knowledge and self-love which is a prerequisite for the wholehearted love of others. In acknowledging that our house is God's house too, we dare to be alone with him and in the deepest secrecy new life is born, the effect of which is far reaching. Experiencing God in ourselves and in the Eucharist, we receive new eyes capable of seeing the same presence in the hearts of others.

### 3.5.7 Listening to Jesus

A Jesus centred spirituality is possible only by listening to him. Nouwen proposes three simple ways of listening: listening to the Church which invites us to the mysteries through the liturgical life; listening to books like the Bible, about saints or spiritual readings that do not distract and finally listening to the heart, an active and attentive listening to the unassuming, whispering and gentle voice of love. To discover the hidden presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and in the life of the church; to let the word read the person instead of reading the text or letting the word own the person instead of owning the word seeks admission into the heart and listening to Jesus hidden in the heart.

To sum up we can say that the Christian spirituality is a heart centred spirituality of a loving and personal relationship with Jesus the liberator, the suffering and compassionate God who descended to us in humility and taught us the meaning of love to the extent of dying for others and forgiving even the enemies. He revealed God's ways through his hidden life in Nazareth. Nouwen moved from the Easter message to the incarnation to show that the resurrection is the core message.

### **Observatons**

It must have been Nouwen's style of writing, the simplicity of his expressions, and the gravity of the matter which prompted his friend to request Nouwen to write about the spiritual life for those who could not feel themselves at home with the traditional religiosity and spirituality of the then church. Interestingly Nouwen does not try to bring out new ideas for the modern man. He concentrated only on the core of Christianity, on Jesus Christ. By concentrating on the heart from where every human being seeks God and finds him, by speaking about the freedom which is a longing in every person - both pious and secular, by presenting God as compassionate and one who descends to show his love, by pointing to the hidden presence of God which make us experience his absence and the presence of darkness in and around us, Nouwen touches some of the important spiritual problems of the youth and even grown-ups. Nouwen has no ready made solution to offer. He invites us to listen to Jesus. That is the summary of what he wrote in books about prayer, solitude, contemplation etc. His affirming the love of God, God's suffering compassion and work of salvation, and the desire of our soul to reach out to him form the second group of thoughts presented in some of his books. The consequence of the above two realities is the ministry which is the dominating themes in other books. All of them put together is called spiritual life or the call to follow Jesus which is the vocation of Priests as well as laity. This book is a concrete example of shifting the attention to the laity. The following book is also Jesus-centred but is addressed more to the ministers.

### 3.6. In the name of Jesus

The book *In the name of Jesus* analyses some of the dangers<sup>62</sup> which can creep into ministry. Nouwen offers some provocative and stimulating insights in this book published in 1989. Nouwen presents here Christian leadership as following the call of Jesus with unceasing prayer and committed service. This work is the result of a self-examination of Nouwen's life as priest at Daybreak. The immediate reason to formulate these reflections was a request of a friend to give a speech about Christian Leadership in the 21st Century on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Centre for Human Development in Washington D.C.. The addressees were mainly priests engaged in ministry. What is, perhaps, remarkable is that Nouwen visualises the ministry of the 21st Century not with the eyes of the one who is anxious about the future, but more concerned about the present. "The more willing I was to look honestly at what I was thinking and saying and doing now, the more easily I would come into touch with the movement of God's spirit in me, leading me to the future. God is a God of the present and reveals to those who are willing to listen carefully to the movement in which they live the steps they are to take toward the future".<sup>63</sup>

Nouwen confirms from his own life that the spiritual death or 'burn-out' situation is a great danger for the ministers and the only way to keep themselves alive is to move from darkness to light, keep listening to God's voice in the depth of our being and follow his call who is always at work in us. The three chapters of this book: *from relevance to prayer, from popularity to ministry, from leading to being lead* are based on Jesus' temptations (Mathew 4/1-11) and the story of the call of Peter to be a shepherd (Jn 21/15-19).

#### 3.6.1. From relevance to prayer

The subtitle suggests the possible temptation in the life and ministry of a priest to strive for relevance and prayer as the only way to keep oneself protected against this danger.

##### 3.6.1.1. The temptation to be relevant

The temptation to make a difference in the lives of others with one's ministry can lead to low self-esteem when the ministry fails to have the desired impact. The ministers are exposed to this danger in our modern society which aspires for greater efficiency and control. Despite our greater efficiency we notice in our society a growing moral and spiritual poverty showing itself in "loneliness, isolation, lack of friendship and intimacy, broken relationships, boredom, feelings of emptiness and depression, and a deep sense of uselessness."<sup>64</sup> Ministers who misunderstand their call as a call to greater efficiency and control will be sooner or later frustrated. Christian leadership is more radical. "The leader of the future will be the one who dares to claim his irrelevance in the contemporary world as a divine vocation that allows him or her to enter into a deep solidarity with the anguish underlying all the glitter of success and to bring the light of Jesus there."<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> In the book Nouwen names them the possible temptations because he uses as background the three temptations of Jesus himself (Mt.4/1-11) and the threefold call of Peter to ministry (Jn. 21/15-19). Nouwen works out an interesting interplay between the temptations and the true call to ministry.

<sup>63</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 21.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

The Christian leader is called upon to become irrelevant and offer his or her vulnerable self as the source of ministry. In this vulnerability we discover a new strength that “ God has created and redeemed us in love and has chosen us to proclaim that love as the true source of all human life.”<sup>66</sup> When we strip ourselves of our desire to be relevant, we realize that we are loved for what we are and not for our accomplishments. The same helps us to see the loving presence of God even in the brokenness of other people who accomplish very little. Such people challenge us to be simple and authentic in our love<sup>67</sup>.

### 3.6.1.2. The question: Do you love me?

When this question addressed to Peter by Jesus is central to ministry, the minister’s main concern will be to know and experience the incarnate God and to proclaim the unconditional love of God. The Jesus-centred ministry makes the minister self-confident even at the face of irrelevance. The Christian leader must know the loving and forgiving heart of God, made flesh in Jesus, and knowing him means also proclaiming that God is love and only love. Fear, isolation and despair come from the dark forces opposed to God. Ministry is leading those who cannot trust in the unconditional and limitless love of God into the realization of the ‘first love’ (1Jn 4/19) of God. The second love experienced in human relationships has its shadow side too and carries within itself the wounds of abandonment, betrayal, rejection, rupture, loss, violence, hatred etc. The role of the minister is to bear witness to this shadowless first love<sup>68</sup>.

### 3.6.1.3. The discipline: Contemplative prayer

“To live a life that is not dominated by the desire to be relevant but is instead safely anchored in the knowledge of God’s first love, we have to be mystics.”<sup>69</sup> The contemplative does not allow himself to be swayed by compulsions but lives in the knowledge of his own and God’s heart. The spiritual freedom rooted in the knowledge of having found a safe home gives the strength to live in the midst of violence and distraction. The basic call of the ministers is to listen to God’s voice, look at his beauty, touch his incarnate Word and taste fully his infinite goodness.<sup>70</sup> Instead of dwelling too much on church issues the ministers must be in search of the truth. “Christian leaders cannot simply be persons who have well-informed opinions about the burning issues of our time. Their leadership must be rooted in the permanent, intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus, and they need to find there the source for their words, advice and guidance. Through the discipline of contemplative prayer, Christian leaders have to learn to listen again and again to the voice of love and to find there the wisdom and courage to address whatever issue presents itself to them.[...] When we are securely rooted in personal intimacy with the source of life, it will be possible to remain flexible without being relativistic, convinced without being rigid, willing to confront without being offensive, gentle and forgiving without being soft, and

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Life at Daybreak was for Nouwen a new beginning, a new school in which he had to start learning again. “These broken, wounded, and completely unpretentious people forced me to let go of my relevant-self- the self that can do things, show things, prove things, build things – and forced me to reclaim that unadorned self in which I am completely vulnerable, open to receive and give love regardless of my accomplishments.” *Nouwen, In the name of Jesus P.16.*

<sup>68</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *In the name of Jesus* 25-26.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>70</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 29.

true witnesses without being manipulative.”<sup>71</sup>

### 3.6.2. From popularity to ministry

Nouwen enjoyed a lot of popularity. May be the critical evaluation of his own life or the experience of the emptiness of the popularity led him to warn others against this danger.

#### 3.6.2.1. The temptation to be spectacular

One of the drawbacks of the formation of the ministers is, that it focuses on forming individual performers who are equipped with the necessary know-how. As a result many ministers are tempted to prove themselves and get applause for their good performance. The policy of do it alone and the tendency towards stardom and individual heroism is not alien to many ministers. Jesus calls the ministers to care for his sheep in his name.

#### 3.6.2.2. The task: Feed my sheep

Peter’s call to shepherding was not a mission of a lonely shepherd taking care of a large flock of obedient sheep. Ministry is a communal and mutual experience and there is a divine wisdom behind Jesus’ sending the disciples two by two or promising his presence where two or three are gathered in his name. (See Mk 6/7, Mt 18/19-20) “Whenever we minister together, it is easier for people to recognize that we do not come in our own name, but in the name of the Lord Jesus who sent us.”<sup>72</sup> Ministry involves a mutuality, a knowing and being known and laying down one’s life for others. (See Jn. 10/14-15) “Laying down your life means making your own faith and doubt, hope and despair, joy and sadness, courage and fear available to others as ways of getting in touch with the Lord of life.”<sup>73</sup> Mutuality is not a sign of weakness but a radical form of leadership, imitating the servant-leadership of Jesus, in which the leader becomes vulnerable to give life to others. The leader’s own need for love and care makes it necessary that he not only gives but also receives which needs personal relationships.

#### 3.6.2.3. The discipline: Confession and forgiveness

The ministers must be not only mystics but also “persons always willing to confess their own brokenness and ask for forgiveness from those to whom they minister.”<sup>74</sup> Acceptance of the brokenness of oneself and that of others in confession and forgiveness is the way to mutual knowledge and love. The ministers must not hide their inner world as they announce the good news. Sharing his own joys, sorrows, struggles, fears and doubts in the context of the Word of God can become a source of life for others. A minister is called to live the incarnation in his own body and in the corporate body of the community, making visible the presence of God’s spirit. The shared woundedness and mutual confession is a way of waiting together for God’s healing touch. Care, however, is to be taken not to misuse the pulpit for cheap popularity or spiritual exhibitionism. Showing solidarity with the brokenness of the individuals and the community and finding a safe place in which the minister also can share his feelings is important in ministry.

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 31-32.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 46. (Nouwen strongly recommends spiritual direction and confession for ministers. But here he is referring more to the minister’s openness and honesty in confessing his faith and life. Our work takes special notice of the confessing side of ministry.)

### 3.6.3. From leading to being led

The priest is traditionally the leader, the good shepherd. But without the willingness also to be led, he is in danger of going astray and misleading the people.

#### 3.6.3.1. The temptation to be powerful

For many ministers leadership means leading others and being in control. Many of them become victims of the evils of power. But there is another more radical leadership of following the poor and powerless Jesus, who chose love instead of power and cross instead of control. Jesus did not do his own will but was always led by the will of his Father.<sup>75</sup>

#### 3.6.3.2. The challenge: Somebody else will take you

Love is a much harder way than the ability to control. The proof of true love is the willingness to be led. "The servant-leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places. The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross."<sup>76</sup> This apparent passivity does not mean remaining a victim of the manipulative world but being "so deeply in love with Jesus that they (the ministers) are ready to follow him wherever he guides them, always trusting that, with him, they will find life and find it abundantly."<sup>77</sup> By becoming humble, poor and powerless the ministers stress a new dependency. "We will become dependant on the positive or negative responses of those to whom we go and thus be truly led to where the spirit of Jesus wants to lead us."<sup>78</sup>

#### 3.6.3.3. The discipline: Theological reflection

The discipline required of a leader who can live with outstretched hands is strenuous theological reflection which allows the minister to discern critically where he is being led. In essence this means thinking with the mind of Christ. "The Christian leader thinks, speaks and acts in the name of Jesus, who came to free humanity from the power of death and open the way to eternal life. To be such a leader it is essential to be able to discern from moment to moment how God acts in human history and how the personal, communal, national and international events that occur during our lives can make us more and more sensitive to the ways in which we are led to the cross and through the cross to the resurrection."<sup>79</sup> Thus the ministers are called to announce the salvific presence of God and lead people to the knowledge of God's gentle guidance. This is hard because the presence of God is often hidden. But in prayer one is led to the gentle voice of God and his loving guidance. To be able to lead powerlessly always pointing to the powerless servant of God, the minister must discern critically in prayer where God is leading him and his people.

---

<sup>75</sup> At Daybreak Nouwen realized how his self-confidence about his leadership qualities was proved wrong by his inability to respond to the unadorned outbursts of feelings by the handicapped inmates. They challenged him to give up the desire to control complex situations, confused emotions and anxious minds and learn the simple way of loving, being what one is and being sensible to others real needs. In this sense he was being led by the poor, broken people.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 66.

Nouwen was convinced that the future vision for the ministry is the rediscovery of the traditional vision of the Christian leader, a leader who resists the temptation to relevance, popularity and power and leads others to love, being anchored in the love of Christ. The image which Nouwen leaves for the future ministers is the image of “the leader with outstretched hands, who chooses a life of downward mobility. It is the image of the praying leader, the vulnerable leader, and the trusting leader.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Observations**

Here we strike at the radical concept of Nouwen, namely, the struggle in ministry to resist the temptations to be relevant, popular and powerful which is fuelled by the insufficient trust in the love of God. Nouwen's own experiences of being very productive, relevant and popular and at the same time internally only drained out and his downward movement giving up career to live with the marginalized is a first hand experience in the light of which he warns the ministers about the dangers in ministry. His radical views come from his new experience with the handicapped who opened his eyes to the truth of himself, to the truth of God and to true ministry. True ministry is emptying oneself and living the ‘irrelevance’, ‘foolishness’ or ‘powerlessness’ rooted in the knowledge of the unconditional love of God. This is possible only through a contemplative life. According to Nouwen leading involves also the willingness to be led<sup>81</sup>. This demands trust and theological reflection. What comes out very clearly in this book is the close connection between action and contemplation.

It is a paradox that Nouwen speaks to the future leaders about being irrelevant, spending useless time in prayer and being led by others. They must have expected professional help. But he showed them the spiritual path. He even took a core member along with him when he addressed people as witness to what he said. This is in accordance with his basic conviction of 'souling' the profession with the spirituality of profession.

The existential situation as starting point is again evident. The minister first has to confront his human nature. The tendency to be relevant, proud and powerful is in every human being. Nouwen knew that nobody is spared of the conflict with oneself. But we are not victims of ourselves. Prayer is the opposite weight which lifts us up and keeps us balanced. That gives us the power to move away from self-centredness and reach out to others in ministry. Finally every action reaches its climax in passion, every leading ends up by being led. The theology of weakness and being led comes up strongly in the late books of Nouwen.

Nouwen's focusing on the spiritual realm does not make him blind about the real challenges in the field of ministry. He takes the concrete dangers very seriously to which the ministers are exposed to and without cutting out a new picture of the pastor for the 21<sup>st</sup> century simply presents the following of Jesus as loved and demanded by Jesus in John's Gospel. In the being led and being taught we experience the real seriousness of ministry according to the mind of Jesus. Here we see the de-clericalising which Nouwen taught and practised also in his living with the Daybreak community. Here we notice his coming close to the pastoral concern of John XXIII and that of the pastoral constitution of Vat II without referring to it. The core of Nouwen's teaching, namely the spiritual strength nurtured by prayer and theological reflection runs through this book too. The integrity of the heart makes it

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>81</sup> Nouwen develops this point further in the later books as a theology of weakness.

possible that both action and contemplation come from the heart and that is the crowning of ministry. Nouwen tried to cement his position that the function and identity are the two sides of the same coin.

### 3.7. Belovedness

Belovedness is a term which was beloved to Nouwen and on which he repeatedly wrote. Belovedness was also a problem, a wound which Nouwen carried along a long time. He could not believe in his own true belovedness or in other words he was craving for love. It was his searching for a place where he was at home and where he was loved simply which brought him to Daybreak. Here he thought that he found his true home. But it was only a calm before a storm. Nouwen became depressive.

In 1998 Nouwen had the total breakdown as the result of the disruption of a friendship with Nathan Ball. It was a much cherished friendship which had “brought immense joy and peace. It seemed as if a door of my interior life had been opened, a door that had remained locked during my youth and most of my adult life”. But this door was also the way to anguish. “The enormous space that had been opened for me could not be filled by the one who had opened it. I became possessive, needy, and dependant, and when the friendship finally had to be interrupted, I fell apart. I felt abandoned, rejected, and betrayed. Indeed the extremes touched each other”<sup>82</sup> Nouwen had to undergo a therapy for six months in Winnipeg in Canada. Nouwen received, emotional, spiritual and psychological help. “The two guides who were given to me did not leave me alone and kept gently moving me from one day to the next, holding on to me as parents hold a wounded child. To my surprise, I never lost the ability to write. In fact, writing became part of my struggle for survival.[...] Very old places of pain that had been hidden to me were opened up, and fearful experiences from my early years were brought to consciousness. The interruption of friendship forced me to enter the basement of my soul and look directly at what was hidden there, to choose, in the face of it all, not death but life.”<sup>83</sup> It was a purification to enter into a new freedom. The way from Anguish to freedom is described in the 'secret journals' or spiritual imperatives which were published as book *The inner voice of love* in 1996 after much persuading by friends.

#### 3.7.1. The inner voice of love

Nouwen described his crisis during a depressive phase as the confrontation with his true identity. “I had come face to face with my own nothingness. It was as if all that had given my life meaning was pulled away and I could see nothing in front of me but a bottomless abyss.[...] Just when I had found a home, I felt absolutely homeless. Just when I was being praised for my spiritual insights; I felt devoid of faith. Just when people were thanking me for bringing them closer to God, I felt that God had abandoned me. It was as if the house I had finally found had no floors. The anguish completely paralysed me. I could no longer sleep. I cried uncontrollably for hours. I could not be reached by consoling words or arguments. I no longer had interest in other people’s problems. I lost all appetite for food and could not appreciate the beauty of music, art or even nature. All had become darkness. Within me there was one long scream coming from a place I didn’t know existed, a place full of demons. All of this was triggered by the sudden interruption of a friendship”<sup>84</sup>.

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. xv.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. xvi-xvii

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. xiii-xv.

Nouwen's guides helped him to see his woundedness and claim his true identity.

For Nouwen, throughout his life, not getting the desired love, the separation as a child (see biography) remained as a deep wound. As a grown up he longed for it. During his crisis he discovered that going into the pain and trusting that there is a place beyond it where you are being held in love is the way to a new life. "It is the experience of not receiving what you most need. It is a place of emptiness where you feel sharply the absence of the love you most desire. To go back to the place is hard, because you are confronted there with your wounds as well as with your powerlessness to heal yourself. You are so afraid of that place that you think of it as a place of death. Your instinct for survival makes you run away and go looking for something else that can give you a sense of at-homeness, even though you know full well that it can't be found out in the world. [...] You have to live through your pain gradually and thus deprive it of its power over you. Yes, you must go into the place of your pain, but only when you have gained some new ground. When you enter your pain simply to experience it in its rawness, it can pull you away from where you want to go."<sup>85</sup>

### 3.7.1.1. Split love and the need for unity

One of the main causes for the inner pains is the split between divinity and humanity. It is important to bring them together. "With your divinely endowed centre you know God's will, God's way, God's love. But your humanity is cut off from that. Your many human needs for affection, attention, and consolation are living apart from your divine sacred place. Your call is to let these two parts of yourself come together again. You have to move gradually from crying outward- crying out for people who you think can fulfil your needs-to crying inward to the place where you can let yourself be held and carried by God, who has become incarnate in the humanity of those who love you in community. No one person can fulfil all your needs. But the community can truly hold you. The community can let you experience the fact that, beyond your anguish, there are human hands that hold you and show you God's faithful love."<sup>86</sup>

Only from the place of unity we can act truthfully. This place is "the core of your being-your heart, where all human sentiments are held together in truth"<sup>87</sup> "It is quite understandable that you are afraid of this place. You have so little knowledge of it. You have caught glimpses of it, you have even been there at times, but for most of your life you have dwelt among your emotions, passions, and feelings and searched in them for inner peace and joy. Also, you have not fully acknowledged this new place as the place where God dwells and holds you. You fear that this truthful place is in fact a bottomless pit where you will lose all you have and are. Do not be afraid. Trust that the God of life wants to embrace you and give you true safety. You might consider this the place of unification, where you can become one. Right now you experience an inner duality; your emotions, passions, and feelings seem separate from your heart. The needs of your body seem separate from your deeper self. Your thoughts and dreams seem separate from your spiritual longing. You are called to unity. That is the good news of the Incarnation. The word becomes flesh, and thus a new place is made where all of you and all of God can dwell. When you have found that unity, you will be truly free."<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>86</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of love* 7.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 15.

The unity of the body and spirit is possible by claiming the body instead of denying it. “Increasingly, you have come to see your body as an enemy that has to be conquered. But God wants you to befriend your body so that it can be made ready for the resurrection.[...] Your body needs to be held and to hold, to be touched and to touch. None of these needs is to be despised, denied, or repressed. But you have to keep searching for your body’s deeper need, the need for genuine love. Every time you are able to go beyond the body’s superficial desires for love, you are bringing your body home and moving toward integration and unity.”<sup>89</sup>

### 3.7.1.2. Spiritual imperatives

Nouwen learned to come out of the darkness with the light of the spiritual imperatives. Affirming one’s gift from God and resisting those who would deny God’s gracious acts in our lives is a real challenge not only in the life of the minister but for everyone who wants to live a spiritual life. “When you discover in yourself something that is a gift from God, you have to claim it and not let it be taken away from you”<sup>90</sup>. It is important to see oneself truthfully, with one’s own goodness and beauty as well as incompleteness. “You have to acknowledge where you are and affirm that place. You have to be willing to live your loneliness, your incompleteness, your lack of total incarnation fearlessly, and trust that God will give you the people to keep showing you the truth of who you are.”<sup>91</sup>

According to Nouwen trusting in God’s unfailing love and coming back to it whenever we feel not being loved enough gives us a solid place from where we can live and act safely. “You must believe in the *yes* that comes back when you ask, Do you love me? You must *choose* this yes even when you do not experience it.[...] You have to trust the place that is solid, the place where you can say yes to God’s love even when you do not feel it. Right now you feel nothing except emptiness and the lack of strength to choose. But keep saying, God loves me, and God’s love is enough.”<sup>92</sup>

Discovering one’s identity as the child of God is a movement towards full incarnation. Instead of comparing oneself with others, claiming the truth of one’s being as a unique and beautiful self in whom God dwells is moving towards full incarnation. “You can look at your life as a large cone that becomes narrower the deeper you go. There are many doors in that cone that give you chances to leave the journey. But you have been closing these doors one after the other, making yourself go deeper and deeper into your centre. You know that Jesus is waiting for you at the end, just as you know that he is guiding you as you move in that direction. Every time you close another door- be it the door of immediate satisfaction, the door of distracting entertainment, the door of busyness, the door of guilt and worry, or the door of self-rejection- you commit yourself to go deeper into your heart and thus deeper into the heart of God.”<sup>93</sup>

The knowledge of our truth that God loves us and welcomes us and the feeling of being welcomed in the world gives us the power to choose life. “Not being welcome is your greatest fear. It connects with your birth fear, your fear of not being welcome in this life,

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>92</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of love* 8.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 51.

and your death fear, your fear of not being welcome in the life after this. It is the deep seated fear that it would have been better if you had not lived.”<sup>94</sup> It is important to keep choosing God’s voice telling us the truth of our belovedness rather than the voice of our doubting-self.

### 3.7.1.3. The journey towards the heart

Nouwen's way out was the way to the innermost place. He kept moving with patience and trust towards finding the peace of the heart. “You have to keep moving, as you are doing. Live a faithful, disciplined life, a life that gives you a sense of inner strength, a life in which you can receive more and more of the love that comes to you. Wherever there is real love for you, take it and be strengthened by it. As your body, heart, and mind come to know that you are loved, your weakest part will feel attracted to that love. What has remained separated and unreachable will let itself be drawn into the love you have been able to receive. One day you will discover that your anguish is gone. It will leave you because your weakest self let itself be embraced by your love.”<sup>95</sup>

### 3.7.1.4. Remain in the centre

The love for which the heart longs can be received only when the heart stays at home instead of running about. “There are two realities to which you must cling. First, God has promised that you will receive the love you have been searching for. And second, God is faithful to that promise.”<sup>96</sup> When others set boundaries to their love or draw back in order to survive emotionally, it is not necessarily a rejection. It is a call to return home and discover there one’s true belovedness.<sup>97</sup> The efforts to remain safe in God’s love by avoiding distractions and business can cause agonising pain and enormous loneliness in the beginning. But by being attentive to the best intuitions which tells what to do and what not to do, the heart will be led to a new freedom of trusting in God in spite of adverse experiences. “You also know that the fulfilment of your burning desire for intimate friendships, shared ministry, and creative work will not bring you what you really want. It is a new experience for you to feel both the desire and its unreality. You sense that nothing but God’s love can fulfil your deepest need while the pull to other people and things remains strong. It seems that peace and anguish exist side by side in you, that you desire both distraction and prayerful concentration.”<sup>98</sup>

Progress in spiritual life is not a straight line. It is important to keep returning to the road to freedom. “When you return to the road, you return to the place where you left it, not to where you started. It is important not to dwell on the small moments when you feel pulled away from your progress. Try to return home, to the solid place within you, immediately. Otherwise, these moments start connecting with similar moments, and together they become powerful enough to pull you away from the road. Try to remain alert to seemingly innocuous distractions. It is easier to return to the road when you are on the shoulder than when you are pulled all the way into a nearby swamp. In everything, keep trusting that God is with you, that God has given you companions on the journey. Keep returning to the road

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>97</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 13.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 16.

to freedom.”<sup>99</sup>

New people and new situations can cause new emotions and a new insecurity. The best way is to befriend the emotions instead of repressing them. “The way to ‘victory’ is not in trying to overcome your dispiriting emotions directly but in building a deeper sense of safety and at-homeness and a more incarnate knowledge that you are deeply loved. Then, little by little, you will stop giving so much power to strangers.”<sup>100</sup>

### Observations

Nouwen proved through his life and teachings that all Christians are wounded ministers. Confessing one’s own story and airing one’s own wounds in God’s presence through prayer, community and ministry helps healing oneself and the world. Confessing one’s own story reveals the divine at work, the ‘imago Dei’ imprinted in human experience.

The best way to go about with one’s own and others grief is to let it flow through the heart and the hands rather than trying to catch it. Understanding and guarding one another’s feeling is better than trying to guide it. Standing under and receiving without being in control is ‘superior’ knowledge. Talking about it, praying about it, writing about it and entering into a welcoming silence helps understanding the grief.

We have to move from our wounds and losses to seeing life as an opportunity to learn, heal and live. When our unhealed wounds determine the atmosphere around us, we become anxious. Facing our losses also means avoiding a temptation to see life as an exercise in having needs met.

Woundedness, forgiveness and peace are interconnected. By attending to the wounds of others, even the wounds of wounding us, we can stop the recycling of violence and pave way for peace. Forgiving implies ‘for giving up’ justifiable retribution.

The crisis was agonising but it was also purifying and strengthening. Nouwen was more convinced out of his own experience that we are beloved even when we are thrown into the depths of doubts, faithlessness, brokenness and desolation. It is only a period of God’s hidden presence. Thereafter Nouwen wrote a lot about our belovedness as our true identity, the spiritual truth of our lives. The first book which deserves our attention is *The life of the beloved* written in 1992.

#### 3.7.2. Life of the beloved: spiritual living in a secular world

The circumstances leading to the writing of this book was mentioned by Henri in the prologue. Henri’s Jewish friend Fred Bratman, a journalist-writer, requested him to write about the spiritual life for those who live in a secular milieu but want to hear a word of hope. “Speak to us about the deepest yearning of our hearts.. (about hope, trust and love). Speak to us about a vision larger than our changing perspectives and about a voice deeper than the clamoring of our mass media. Yes, speak to us about something or someone greater than ourselves. Speak to us about...God”<sup>101</sup>. Finding this request a pertinent and urgent one Nouwen tried to find a language for all who search for the spirit of God in a

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>101</sup> Nouwen, *Life of the beloved* 18.

secular world. The core of his thinking in this book is the ‘belovedness’ of every person and the wonders of the spiritual journey. Fred wanted Nouwen simply to speak from his heart about God. “Speak from that place in your heart where you are most yourself. Speak directly, simply, lovingly, gently and without any apologies”,<sup>102</sup>. Nouwen’s words were ‘personal and direct words’ coming from the heart to someone wanting to listen in, as fellow travellers in a spiritual search. As the title itself suggests the key word in these reflections is ‘belovedness’.

### 3.7.2.1. Being the beloved

Nouwen saw self-rejection as the biggest trap. Self-rejection and arrogance are the tendencies opposed to common human existence and community. Desiring for a mysterious moment of experiencing the much needed inner well-being can cause compulsiveness resulting in spiritual exhaustion and burn-out. Our being loved before we ever experienced the human life is the truth of our lives and we grasp this truth by listening to the inner voice<sup>103</sup>. The spiritual search is at the same time growth and maturing in spiritual life. It involves the claiming of our belovedness, becoming the beloved and living as the beloved. The first part deals with listening to the voice which is the origin and fulfilment of spiritual life, the second with the great spiritual journey responding to the movements of the spirit in the day to day life which is done in ‘the taking, the blessing, the breaking and the giving’ and the third with living in the world as being sent into the world.

### 3.7.2.2. Becoming the beloved

Becoming the beloved is a spiritual journey. The four Eucharistic words- taking, blessing, breaking and giving- “express the complexity of life and embrace it’s ever-unfolding mystery”<sup>104</sup>. They help us to distinguish between psychodynamics and spiritual movements.

#### 3.7.2.2.1. Taking

The state of being chosen has positive and negative effects. The life of a priest is an example. Being ‘taken’ and ‘chosen’ can result in admiration as well as persecution. Being set aside may prevent being ‘just me’. We are the chosen ones of God and his choice is radically different, not a competitive but a compassionate choice, not a choice which excludes or rejects others. The truth of one’s life is that he or she is the chose, beloved child of God, loved from all eternity with a first love before we ever knew love.

#### 3.7.2.2.2. Blessing

Blessing which literally means ‘speaking well’ or ‘saying good things’ is affirming the belovedness of the other. “The blessing we give to each other are expressions of the Blessing that rests on us from all eternity. It is the deepest affirmation of our true self”,<sup>105</sup>. In a manipulative world, claiming the blessedness is possible only through prayer and presence. Prayer is a way to listen to the blessing. In prayer instead of controlling the fear of our unworthiness, if we embrace solitude and befriend silence and listen to the gentle, soft, hidden voice of the heart, we will hear the blessing words: “you are my Beloved child, on you my favour rests”<sup>106</sup>.

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>103</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 28-30.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 59.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 53.

### 3.7.2.2.3. Breaking

The third element of the mystery of our life is that we are all broken, that we are all subject to loneliness, isolation, anxiety, discontentment, frustration, struggles, pains etc. The brokenness is experienced and lived as highly personal, unique and intimate. We are called to claim our unique brokenness, just as we have to claim our unique chosenness and our unique blessedness. This brokenness is severely experienced in our sexuality, the desire to be touched, embraced and held safe, the yearning for communion. In the competitive world there is an ever increasing isolation. To claim the brokenness we must befriend it and put it under the blessing. Embracing the brokenness is not masochistic. On the contrary only by knowing the pain, entering it and embracing it we can heal the brokenness. Suffering is not a hindrance to joy and peace but can become a means to it. True care is to help each other in making the brokenness the gateway to joy.

### 3.7.2.2.4. Giving

To be given, to live for others is the purpose of our being taken, blessed and broken. “Our humanity comes to it’s fullest bloom in giving. We become beautiful people when we give whatever we can give: a smile, a handshake, a kiss, an embrace, a word of love, a present, a part of our life [... ]all of our life.”<sup>107</sup> There are two directions in giving, giving oneself in life and giving oneself in death. Giving oneself in life does not mean sharing the talents or helping alone. A greater gift is our Being. “The greatest gift I have to offer is my own joy of living, my own inner peace, my own silence and solitude, my own sense of well-being”<sup>108</sup>. Giving oneself in death is the final gift of self. “The deaths of those whom we love and who love us, open up the possibility of a new, more radical communion, a new intimacy, a new belonging to each other.”<sup>109</sup> In living our life as a preparation for the death and dying in freedom without clinging to life, making peace with others, giving hope to those who live, death can become a final gift. So our lives become bread that multiply itself in giving.

### 3.7.2.3. Living as the beloved

Finally we have to live as the beloved. As chosen, blessed, broken and given people we are called to live our lives with a deep inner joy and peace. Our challenge consists of claiming our belovedness and living it in a world which tempts us to prove that we are worthy of being loved. To lead a spiritual life one need not leave the world or give up the career. “The great struggle facing [you] is not to leave the world , to reject your ambitions and aspirations or to despise money, prestige or success, but to claim your spiritual truth and live in the world as someone who does not belong to it.”<sup>110</sup> . Our call is to live the totality of our daily lives ‘from above’, as the beloved sent into the world.

Nouwen confessed that his efforts to speak to the secular mind did not work. Nouwen wrote from his faith and from his experiences which are foreign and “dreamlike”<sup>111</sup> for the secular mind. It is interesting that responding to the demand of speaking about God or confessing God, Nouwen simply treats spiritual life. The core of spiritual life is entering into ourselves and being embraced or caught by God's love. It is at the same time a process, a becoming. The moving from the house of fear to the house of love in *Lifesigns* is also a

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 90

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 104.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 116.

process. But Nouwen claims that we can live here and now as the beloved of God. The experience of the 'already and not yet' of the Kingdom of God is a common implication in Nouwen's understanding of spiritual life. The treatise on spiritual life in *Letter to Marc* is deepened in this book. The comparison of spiritual life to the Eucharist and the use of the Eucharistic words to speak about spiritual life is a moving away from the priestly function of these words to the spiritual life of every Christian. The use of the word 'Life' is again a confirmation of the "Lifesigns" mentioned in the book with the same title. In the above book Nouwen was answering to the yearnings of other people. At the same time a spiritual yearning was burning in his own heart. The following book describes this yearning and Nouwen's desire to come back to the loving father and live in his love.

### 3.7.3. The Return of the Prodigal Son (1992)

After an exhausting six week lecture tour across the U.S.A. in 1983, Nouwen sought rest in L'Arche in France. During his stay the painting of Rembrandt caught his attention. Reflecting attentively on it Nouwen felt the inner urge to be welcomed home and loved like the son. "I was, indeed, the son exhausted from long travels; I wanted to be embraced; I was looking for a home where I could feel safe."<sup>112</sup> Dwelling further on it Nouwen understood that he is more the elder son. With further spiritual maturing finally he heard the call to become the loving father. The painting had such an impact on Nouwen that the painter himself became a faithful companion and guide. Two years after being inspired by the painting Nouwen resigned from Harvard, spent a full year in Trosly to discern his vocation of living with the handicapped and in July 1986 joined a trip to Moscow and spent a day before the original painting in the hermitage in Saint Petersburg.

After the stay in Trosly Nouwen came to live at daybreak where the poster of the Return of the Prodigal Son found an important place. He observed the bystanders in the picture and regretted that he himself was only a bystander for long and not the son held by a forgiving God. Remaining outside gave a sense of control over an undefinable situation, "but giving up the somewhat safe position of the critical observer seemed like a great leap into totally unknown territory"<sup>113</sup>.

#### 3.7.3.1. The younger son

During his restless seeking for the true love Nouwen felt himself as the lost son. Leaving home means being deaf to the inner voice of love that calls me the beloved. It is rejecting the truth of my having been knitted together in my mother's womb and loved by an everlasting love. Nouwen's greatest spiritual struggle was to claim his belovedness. "As the beloved I can confront, console, admonish and encourage without fear of rejection or need of affirmation. As the beloved, I can suffer persecution without desire for revenge and receive praise without using it as a proof of my goodness. As the beloved I can be tortured and killed without ever having the doubt that the love that is given to me is stronger than death. As beloved I am free to live and give life, free also to die while giving life."<sup>114</sup> In his moving from the teaching career to Daybreak Nouwen saw one step forward towards the centre, "the place I will receive all I desire, all that I ever hoped for, all that I will ever need, but it is also the place where I have to let go of all I most want to hold on to".<sup>115</sup> What

---

<sup>112</sup> Nouwen, *The return of the prodigal son* 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 12.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 13. Here it is to be noted that Nouwen speaks convincingly about the great promises and possibilities.

helps most to return to the father is clinging to and claiming the sonship. The awareness of being lost is the prerequisite to let oneself be found. The complete lostness brought the prodigal son to the rediscovery of his deepest self.

### 3.7.3.2. The elder son

The second phase of the spiritual journey was the challenge to see the elder son in him. He was the dutiful but 'lost' son. "I saw my jealousy, my anger, my touchiness, doggedness and sullenness, and, most of all, my subtle self-righteousness. I saw how much of a complainer I was and how much of my thinking and feeling was ridden with resentment."<sup>116</sup> With a further challenge Nouwen finally realized his vocation to become the compassionate father who blesses and forgives.

### 3.7.3.3. The loving father

The final phase of becoming the father involves the deep inner seeing which Rembrandt himself expresses in his last works. There is a movement from vanity to inner seeing marked by a painful purifying. The shocking and painful experienced proved to have a purifying in Rembrandt's life who found a modicum of peace and began to regard man and nature with a more penetrating eye. "It is the movement from the glory that seduces one into an ever greater search for wealth and popularity to the glory that is hidden in the human soul and surpasses death."<sup>117</sup>

### 3.7.3.4. The fatherhood of spiritual maturity

This parable is open ended leaving us with the hardest spiritual choices. The virtuous self of the elder son and his lostness points out to our spiritual poverty and the truth that self-redemption is impossible. Only from above can we be born again. The coming home of the elder son, a conversion is possible. We have to trust in the unconditional love of the compassionate father which is beyond all reproach, judgement and evaluation; offered equally to both sons<sup>118</sup>. Resentful complaint is the result of comparison, rivalry and competition which engulf us in a darkness preventing communion and mutuality of love. Letting them go, we have to let ourselves be found by God and healed by his love through the concrete and daily practice of trust and gratitude. Trusting is the opposite of doubting and self-complaint and gratitude claims all of life as a pure gift which goes beyond 'mine' and 'thine'. To let trust and gratitude have a chance I must make a leap of faith, meaning: "loving without expecting to be loved in return, giving without wanting to receive, inviting without hoping to be invited, holding without asking to be held"<sup>119</sup>.

The immensity of the divine love of the father consists in allowing the freedom to reject this love and the authority of compassion. His grief is so great because his heart is so pure. "From the deep inner place where love embraces all human grief, the father reaches out to his children. The touch of his hands, radiating inner light, seeks only to heal."<sup>120</sup> His hands

---

Arriving at this ideal should not be taken for granted. Nouwen's own life was a search involving struggles and pains (p.14) and a journey towards this goal. What is important is to choose light instead of darkness and life instead of death and live in hope.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>118</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 80.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 95.

are blessing hands in which mercy becomes flesh; hands that welcome, hold, lead and protect. Rembrandt painted the hands of the 'loving father' differently, one of a father and the other of a mother. They symbolise the firm and holding, gentle and caressing love of God. Blessing one's own woundedness and blessing those who are wounded like the compassionate father blessing his wounded son, is a source of great healing and spiritual maturity and gives a taste of the eternal life.<sup>121</sup>

Spiritual adulthood is the readiness to welcome home those who are hurt and wounded on their life's journey, and loving them with a love neither asking nor expecting anything in return. "There is a dreadful emptiness in this spiritual fatherhood. No power, no success, no popularity, no easy satisfaction. But the same dreadful emptiness is also the place of true freedom. It is the place where there is 'nothing left to lose', where love has no strings attached, and where real spiritual strength is found."<sup>122</sup> This requires the 'discipline of being at home', forgiving the rebellious younger son and the resentful elder son in me and rediscovering the call to become the father.<sup>123</sup> According to Nouwen the call to become the father is best developed in a community because there one has to break through the defences and be open and sincere to give and receive the spiritual gifts. The joy of this fatherhood is beyond rejection and loneliness and partakes in God's divine solitude. Many are afraid to claim this fatherhood because of the too obvious pains and too hidden joys. It is a fatherhood of sharing the poverty of God's non-demanding love. It is a movement from being blessed to the place of blessing, the blessing which emerges from the immensity of God's love.

Nouwen confessed that this work is not so much intellectual but the fruit of love and friendship. For Nouwen the gradual unfolding of the spiritual mysteries and his own spiritual growth had a lot to do with the painting of Rembrandt. Nouwen identified himself with the younger son who wandered far and wide with his teaching, preaching and searching his vocation but feeling homeless and tired and longing for the compassionate love of the merciful father. Going to Daybreak was really going home. The story of the prodigal son is Nouwen's own story in the spiritual sense and the content of this book is a confession of his own life.

To understand the spiritual implication of being welcomed by God one must be able to understand the fatherly and motherly love. Many people have the problem of finding the belovedness or blessedness when we are the victims of brutality or life long disability. Nouwen claimed that even such people could become fathers through their readiness to forgive and bless with their love in spite of their brokenness. Love is not conditioned by our state of life or achievements in life. In the belovedness of Adam this theme comes out strongly.

#### 3.7.4. Adam, God's beloved (1996-97)

Nouwen completed this book only weeks before his death. It was his plan to write on the Apostle's Creed. But the death of Adam, a friend and severely handicapped core member of the Daybreak community inspired him to write about the person of Adam because in some

---

<sup>121</sup> Nouwen's emphasis is God's unconditional, compassionate first love. He concentrates on the good news of the great promises and hopeful waiting. He avoids moralising, judging and perpetuating fear of punishment.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibi.* 132.

<sup>123</sup> *Cfr. Ibid.* 133.

way the life of Adam summarised the faith which we confess. Adam was not only the helpless who was helped by Nouwen but also the mentor of Nouwen. From Adam Nouwen learned the meaning of spiritual poverty and the depth of the mystery of God's love. Nouwen saw a parallel between Jesus and Adam. Adam's mental handicap and epileptic seizures forced him to a hidden life. Jesus also came dressed in weakness. "Adam's hidden life, like that of Jesus in Nazareth, was an unseen preparation for the time of his ministry to many people, even though neither he nor his parents looked on it that way"<sup>124</sup>. His vulnerability had great spiritual significance. He was chosen to witness to God's love through his brokenness. His limitedness and suffering remaining a sad reality, Adam was an instrument of God's grace. He possessed an inner light that was radiant. "Like Jesus his belovedness, his likeness to God, his mission of peace could be acknowledged only by those who were willing to welcome him as one sent by God"<sup>125</sup>.

After the initial difficulties of nursing Adam they became friends. At first Nouwen was talking to Adam but slowly he started learning from Adam. "Adam was becoming my teacher, taking me by the hand, walking with me in my confusion through the wilderness of my life"<sup>126</sup>. Adam's being was communicating with Nouwen and teaching him about the profound meaning of love. "Adam was not able to reflect on love, on the heart as the centre of our being, the core of our humanity where we give and receive love. He could not talk with me about the movements of his heart or my heart or the heart of God. But his heart was there, totally alive, full of love which he could both give and receive"<sup>127</sup>. His heart was the gateway to his real self, his person, his soul and his spirit. Caring for Adam was at the same time receiving grace from him. Adam's ministry was a ministry of simply being present offering himself in peace and completely self emptied. He announced peace, courage, joy and freedom to those who often were hardly able to acknowledge their wounds. His message was; 'Do not be afraid, you don't have to run away from your pain. Look at me, be close to me, and you will discover that you are God's beloved child, just as I am'<sup>128</sup>. Adam helped Nouwen to believe in his belovedness.

In his book on *Adam*, Nouwen explains how the action is culminated in the passion and that for God the being is more important than the achievements of the person, that is to say, fruitfulness more important than productivity. He writes in not unclear terms about the necessity of social action. But our spiritual being is more important than our performances<sup>129</sup>. The final significance of Adam's passion is: "a radical call to accept the truth of our lives and to choose to give our love when we are strong and to receive the love of others when we are weak, always with tranquillity and generosity."<sup>130</sup>

In his final journal Nouwen wrote also about the meaning of Adam's life for his own life. He came to the conclusion that the worth of a person is his being, being born of God and being precious and beloved in his sight. This attitude of recognizing and receiving life as a precious gift is challenging because of the opposite current prevalent in the world telling us that we are worth what we accomplish and what we can show and prove to others. To trust in our belovedness and to live it is a profession of our faith as well as a life long mission. It

<sup>124</sup> Nouwen, Adam, God's beloved 30.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 31

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>128</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 65.

<sup>129</sup> On his lecture tours Nouwen took along with him one or two disabled members of the Daybreak-community to show God's work in and through the poor and the weak.

<sup>130</sup> Nouwen, Adam 90.

is a true sign of sanctity too. According to Nouwen Adam becomes a living presence of God only when he is welcomed as a person sent by God and received as a precious gift, an instrument of God's blessings. "Adam's light, Adam's personality, Adam's hiddenness, Adam's silence, Adam's disabilities, Adam's suffering, and Adam's healing presence- they all reveal the mystery of strength in weakness and power in vulnerability."<sup>131</sup>

For Nouwen Adam is the one who taught him some of the essentials of spiritual life and also of ministry. Jesus' way of healing was the way of self-emptying, becoming vulnerable and trusting in the truth of his belovedness. His greatest action of saving us was the entry into his passion. He moved from doing to being done to and from acting to being acted upon. This helps us to understand that the disabled, weak and the poor are not less blessed or saved and that compassion instead of competition is the Christian way<sup>132</sup>. Nouwen discovered in *passion* a new spiritual dimension. Passion is , as also in the case of Jesus, the culmination of action.

Nouwen's strong message is that we are all in some way or other broken and yet beloved. For Nouwen Adam became the living image of Christ and the image of the living Christ. Adam was Nouwen's friend, teacher, healer and guide; and his life, death and resurrection helped him to recognize God's story among us. Caring for Adam rooted Nouwen in the truth of his physical being, it anchored him in the community and gave him a deep experience of God's presence in their life together. It gave him the 'home' he had been yearning for; "not just a home wit good people but a home in my own body, in the body of my community, in the body of the church, yes, in the body of God".<sup>133</sup> Adam taught Nouwen new values. As written in the Charter of L'Arche; 'People with a mental handicap often possess qualities of welcome, wonderment, spontaneity and directness and they are a living reminder to the wider world of the essential values of the heart'<sup>134</sup>.

We find this book very emotional but it is at the same time an authentic confession. The message running through clearly is that we are beloved and our being is our belovedness. The early death of Nouwen makes this book a kind of his will and final message. With gratitude he could say that he has reached the bottom to which he was hurriedly moving, the bottom of his heart where he felt loved unconditionally by God for his very being. There he was at home with himself and with his God although the restlessness which was his part accompanied him till death.

If we take a close look at the books written by Nouwen we see that there is a gradual shift from doing to being.

## Observations

The above books are a clear indication that the theme love is intensive in Nouwen's writing. Most of the problems in our lives and in ministry are due to the lack of this love or insufficient response to this love. Or burn-out, frustration and depression are all the result of

<sup>131</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* 162. (Nouwen confesses that one of the ways in which broken people touch us and heal us is the self-confrontation which invites us to throw off defences and see one's own brokenness. Our hidden or inner handicaps are no less real than the physical handicaps of someone. ( *cfr. Nouwen, Adam*78.) From his own life experience of psychological breakdown Nouwen understood the significance of being cared for. )

<sup>132</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Adam* 83-90.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* 127.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

looking for this love at the wrong place. Although Nouwen wrote so much about love and belovedness, he himself never experienced the fullness of it. Most of the themes like prayer, ministry and growth in spiritual life are forerunners of the real theme, **love**. Towards the end Nouwen cherishes spiritual truths like being seen by God, being caught by him, being led, being in his presence etc. They are all inner processes and need true conversion. Even ministry needs a conversion and confession. This was evident in Nouwen's own life, in which he took a U-turn in the career-ladder and identified himself with the poor and the weak, ministered through being rather than doing, and being led instead of leading. All that taught him the importance of being loved rather than loving. Nouwen moved from the mind to the heart, from productivity to fruitfulness and from psychodynamics to spirituality. So being anchored in the centre and living from the centre makes life a sacrament of love and death a final act of love and surrender. Interestingly enough Nouwen wrote a lot about life and death, without the least intuition that he would die so early. We shall touch upon a few of his thoughts on death.

### 3.8. Death

Nouwen treated death not as an independent reality but as the summing up of life. The grace of aging, the virtue of caring, death as a final gift and sending the spirit after the death are consoling themes for the living as well as the dying.

#### 3.8.1. Ageing: The Fulfilment of Life

The book *Aging* written in 1974 together with Walter J. Gaffney explores the problems of aging and invites the readers to see aging as a way to light and to make the later years a source of hope and happiness rather than loneliness and fear. This book is the result of the presentation of their ideas on ageing during a conference at the University of Notre Dame.

The comparison of life with a wagon-wheel helps to understand the positive way of looking at aging. The “restful accomplishment”<sup>135</sup> of the old wheel with its painful story of growing old tells that life is worth living. Aging is a story of fulfilment in giving oneself. The older people make the younger aware of their aging and in many ways they are their teachers. It is important that the younger generation incorporate the aged into the fabric of their own lives – helping them to become teachers again and help repair the fragmented connections between generations. “Those who are old as well as those who care, will find each other in the common experience of aging, out of which healing and new life can come forth”.<sup>136</sup> The elderly people are prophets, reminders, visible signs of an important quarter of the life cycle and our teachers showing the dangers and possibilities.

The book is divided into two parts: the first one deals with the possibilities of aging as a way to darkness and aging as a way to the light. In the second part the book presents caring as a way to the self and caring as a way to the other.

##### 3.8.1.1. Aging as the way to light

Covering the cycle of our life carefully and gracefully, like a wagon wheel which even

---

<sup>135</sup> Nouwen, *Aging* 13.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

while remaining still has a great story to narrate, is the greatest vocation in life. Instead of hiding or denying ageing it must be understood and affirmed. The lives of the elderly people are full of warnings and hopes for us about the pains of living and the fulfilment of giving and receiving. Fear of aging is a way to darkness. This fear is kindled mostly due to the fear of rejection in old age and is worse than the fear of death itself.

Aging as a way to life is built on hope. We have to move from wishes to hope in which we are “willing to detach ourselves from many little and big things of the moment and open our arms to the future”.<sup>137</sup> Humour is a great gift on the hopeful way. It is a soft smile without cynicism, creating space without leaving alone. Aging is also a process of discovering a vision, a vision “that makes us not only detach ourselves from preoccupation with the past but also from the importance of the present... that invites us to a total, fearless surrender in which the distinction between life and death slowly loses its pain”.<sup>138</sup> Ageing is therefore a choice of the heart between darkness and light. It will become a happy experience if we try to take ourselves out of the dark feelings of rejection and with a bit of humour place hope in the centre of our being. Ageing brings in a new vision, a “looking far beyond the boundaries of human existence into a light that seems to embrace him or her with gentleness and kindness”.<sup>139</sup> Entry into light is entry into life

### 3.8.1.2 Aging and caring

Aging and caring go hand in hand. Caring which is ‘suffering with’ has two dimensions: caring for oneself and caring for others. Caring for oneself involves ‘painting a self portrait’ and ‘offering one’s own vulnerable self’ as source of healing for others.<sup>140</sup> It takes courage to open up oneself, to make a self portrait without fear and shame as Rembrandt did in his paintings. Caring for others is being attentive to and attending to the wounds of others. In opening up the wounds to each other there is mutual trust and the common desire for the healing. Ageing as a source of joy and fulfilment is possible only through inner healing brought about by caring. In caring hospitality is very important. Caring is more than offering something. What is important is willing and being able to be present to those we care for.

The book *In Memoriam* is the first book in which Nouwen expressed some thoughts on death. This book published in the year 1980 by Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, contains an account of his last days with his mother who suddenly took ill and died of cancer. The book catches the attention of the reader because of the profound reflection on life and death and a true consolation for the bereaved. The feelings of love and gratitude were too strong to be expressed in words but according to him “not writing is like not mourning, not feeling the pain, not tasting the bitterness of her farewell”<sup>141</sup>.

### 3.8.2. Death and the consoling spirit

The death of a person leaves behind a vacuum. By mourning the dead and gratefully remembering them we can wait for their consoling spirit. “There is so much darkness to be dispelled, so much deceit to be unmasked, and so many ambiguities to be resolved.

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>140</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 95,97.

<sup>141</sup> Nouwen, *In Memoriam* 8.

Mother's death is God's way of converting me, of letting his spirit set me free"<sup>142</sup> Death is not only a loss but also a gift because the spirit of the departed is closer to us and continues to bear fruit.

The second book on death *Letter of Consolation* is more reflective than emotional and stresses the aspect of not avoiding the grief. This book published in 1982 was originally a letter of consolation written to his father from Genesee some months after the death of his mother in October 1978. Consoling his father was at the same time consoling himself and the letter is published with the hope that it will be a source of hope and consolation to those who grieve and ask the same question about the mystery of life and death. The book is an invitation to face, enter into and explore the meaning of death. Nouwen's reflections on life and death contained in this small book is a pointer to the seriousness with which he applied his spiritual insights into his own life. His psychological perspective sharpened his biblical thoughts and the emotions welling up in his heart expressed in simple direct words make the reading attractive and serves as a healing gift to the bereaved.

### 3.8.3. Death and grief

Real grief continues through memory and the healthy way to confront it is to enter it "with an open mind and an open heart, and in the sincere belief that consolation and comfort are to be found where our wounds hurt most".<sup>143</sup> Nouwen did not want to console in a way that covers up real pain and avoids all wounds. Life and death are so inseparable that "in every arrival there is a leave taking; in every reunion there is a separation; in each one's growing up there is a growing old; in every smile there is a tear, and in every success there is a loss. All living is dying and all celebration is mortification too".<sup>144</sup>

### 3.8.4. Befriending death

Dying well is possible only by befriending death and considering it as an act of fulfilment, a great gift. The question is: do we prepare for our death just as our birth was also prepared for? Dying well enables us in a new way to send our and God's spirit to those whom we have loved and who have loved us. A death that bears fruit is the one which leaves peace and hope for the living. Befriending death leads to caring for others to help them befriend death and let it bear fruit. "I have a deep sense, hard to articulate, that if we could really befriend death we could be free people. So many of our doubts, and hesitations, ambivalences and insecurities are bound up with our deep seated fear of death."<sup>145</sup> This befriending means embracing the shadows of our experience as well as the light, giving a hospitable place simply to be held. Death can be befriended only in solitude. Only in solitude we can confront the fear of solitude. The preparedness to die consists of the willingness to let everything go and trust in the grace hidden in complete powerlessness.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 61. (Nouwen loved his mother deeply and her death was a moment of crisis but he sees in her death the seeds of hope. In life she belonged to a few but in death she is for all. Thus death itself can be a gift just as the death of Jesus is his precious gift and his taking leave was necessary to send the spirit of truth. Nouwen, aware of the danger of dependency, denies a simple dependency to his mother and terms his relationship as a bond of love which gave a sense of "belonging". *Nouwen, In Memoriam p. 34.*)

<sup>143</sup> Nouwen, A letter of consolation 17.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 30-31.

<sup>146</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, Our greatest gift 4.

### 3.8.5. Death and care

Dying well and caring for the dying, befriending death and helping others to befriend death are inseparable. Caring here means helping others to claim for themselves the spiritual truth that they are- as we are- children of God, brothers and sisters of each other and parents of generations to come. We have the freedom to choose between fate and faith. The first one considers the apparent failures, becoming weak, getting old, death etc. as the end of everything, a loss, a void. The choice of faith considers our own and other people's decreasing abilities as the gateway to God's amazing grace<sup>147</sup>. True faith is entering into a second childhood, becoming simple and dependant and hoping in a new life as the beloved of God.

Nouwen not only wrote on death but also experienced it face to face after an accident. The account of it and his reflections on death took new dimensions in the book *Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Death and Life*. The purpose of writing this book was to share with others his unique experience of coming face to face with death. Nouwen was hit by a Van(Truck) on a winter morning while hitchhiking. This interruption gave him a new knowledge of God which contrasted radically with what he had learned so far and he thought it appropriate to share this experience with others. This spiritual story written soon after the accident in 1989 was published in 1990. Writing helped Nouwen to discern the small guiding voice of God's spirit amidst the frightening and devastating interruptions, to take new steps into the unknown spiritual territory and share it with others and to bear witness to the glimpse of God's love which he experienced. The many interruptions which Nouwen suffered in his life pointed to something 'beyond' leading him to a glimpse of the God of Love. According to Nouwen, "Not writing about it would have been unfaithful to my vocation to proclaim the presence of God at all times and in all places."<sup>148</sup>

### 3.8.6. Death and freedom

A usually afraid and nervous Nouwen experienced at the critical hour in the hospital peace, joy and a sense of security. "Somewhere, deep in me, I sensed that my life was in real danger. And so I let myself enter into a place I had never been before: the portal of death [...] the first time I looked forward to what might be a new way of being [...] What I experienced then was something I had never experienced before: pure and unconditional love,"<sup>149</sup> a personal presence of God. He did not *see* anything but *felt* an intensive presence of Jesus in which the waves of life and the fear of death shrank away and he was surrounded

by love in an intimate way.<sup>150</sup> This moment calling him to let go all fears and experience his loving presence was something which no amount of studies or other efforts could give. This hour of having become child enough to be loved as a child was not without resistance, but it was a resistance from the unfinished task of reconciliation. It is unresolved anger which clings to life, not love because love sets one free to die.

---

<sup>147</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 56.

<sup>148</sup> Nouwen, *Beyond the mirror* 9.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 34-35.

<sup>150</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *The Path of freedom* 22. (For Nouwen love was not the barrier to death because the love which we have lived makes us only free to die. What can cause pain is the un-forgiven wounds. Nouwen felt a great relief (like throwing away the belt of the Army-chaplain) when he forgave everyone from his heart and begged for pardon from everyone he may have offended.)

Nouwen found his accident as an opportunity for conversion, from 'being in control' to becoming passive and dependant.<sup>151</sup> Life lived as a preparation to die in Christ involves a series of small deaths "in which we are asked to release many forms of clinging and to move increasingly from needing others to living for them."<sup>152</sup> Freeing oneself from judgement is a great experience of freedom.<sup>153</sup> By resolving the burden of guilt he felt safe in God's hand. The accident was for Nouwen a pointer towards the 'real', and a glimpse of what lies beyond the mirror.

The confrontation with death brought him closer to his vocation: "to live with a burning desire to be with God and to be asked to keep proclaiming his love while missing its fulfilment."<sup>154</sup> The essence of what Nouwen learned about life and death through the accident can be summed up as an experience of becoming a child of God, simply trusting and remaining in his presence. In this childlike dependence we experience the blessed moment of God's loving presence. Our vocation is to live in this house of love, be the beloved child of God and proclaim this love of God.

### 3.8.7. Death, our greatest gift

We find a more systematic treatment of the theme death in the book *Our greatest Gift: Dying and Caring*. The context of writing this book is interesting. In December 1992 Nouwen took a few months break to write in peace and went to Freiburg in Germany. Before he got settled down he received the news of the death of Maurice Gould, one of the members of Daybreak. Nouwen felt the need to fly back to Canada to be with Maurice's family and friends. During the flight he had ample time to reflect on dying. On his return it was clear to him that he would write on dying and caring. This book published in 1994 consists of two parts: dying well and caring well. Nouwen wanted to reflect on dying by remaining close to his heart because the words must come from the depth of his experiences. They are uniquely his and he sincerely confessed that many may not respond to what he says because they cannot see the connection between his life and theirs.

#### 3.8.7.1. Death and being caught

Nouwen beautifully connected the thoughts on dying with his Trapeze-spirituality. Dying well is simply flying trusting in the catcher<sup>155</sup>. To care for the dying means to "connect them

with the many who are dying or have died and let them discover the intimate bonds that reach far beyond the boundaries of our short lives."<sup>156</sup> It is a blessing to die into the communion of humanity. "We human beings belong together, whether we live now or lived long ago, whether we live close by or far away, whether we have biological ties or not. We

---

<sup>151</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 12.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>153</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 24-25

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>155</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Our greatest gift* 66.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 74. (Nouwen makes it clear that talking of all the miseries or bothering with the sufferings and death of others may not always be helpful. But it is also unwise to avoid the topic because the solidarity in suffering and death can prove helpful and healing. Only one who has befriended his own death can talk of death in such a way as to remind us of our communion with the rest of the humanity. The awareness that there is meaning not only in the activity but also in the passive waiting is a great source of consolation).

are brothers and sisters, and our dying is truly a dying in communion with each other.”<sup>157</sup> As brothers and sisters there is a solidarity in death also. Christ became God- with- us not only in his living but also in his dying. When we feel safe in God’s love and in the love of those around us we are no more afraid of death, “the real death- the passage from time to eternity, from the transient beauty of this world to the lasting beauty of the next, from darkness to light- has to be made now”.<sup>158</sup> We need not be afraid because in life and death we are not alone. We will be welcomed on the ‘other side’<sup>159</sup> and the loss of life becomes a gain.

### 3.8.7.2. Death and fruitfulness

The fruitfulness of our life lies beyond our life, its successes and productivity. A holy dependence and a conscious passivity are not signs of weakness but of spiritual adulthood.<sup>160</sup> (Jn.21/18). True maturity is being led to where you do not wish to go. “We, too, must move from action to ‘passion’, from being in control to being dependant, from taking initiatives to having to wait, from living to dying. Painful and nearly impossible as this move seems to be, it is in this movement that our true faithfulness is hidden. Our years of action are years of success and accomplishment. [...] But much of this success and many of this accomplishments will soon lie behind us. We might still point to them in the form of trophies, medals, or artistic products. But what is beyond our success and productivity? Fruitfulness lies beyond and that fruitfulness comes through passion or suffering. Just as the ground can only bear fruit if broken by the plough, our own lives can only be fruitful if opened through passion. Suffering is precisely ‘undergoing’ action by others, over which we have no control.”<sup>161</sup>

### 3.8.7.3. Death and resurrection

To talk of death without talking on the resurrection is incomplete. Our death is so closely connected with the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ and has its meaning in the liberating, life giving and fruit bearing death of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the wind that sails our living and dying. The resurrection is a hidden event<sup>162</sup>. It doesn’t answer all our questions nor does it solve all our problems but affirms that love is stronger than death, that faith is stronger than scepticism. The joy of the resurrection of Jesus affirms faith in our own resurrection. The resurrection faith affirms the love of God which transforms everything into a new heaven and a new earth. In the risen body of Christ everything is lifted up and the quietly but confidently whispered message of hope brings smile in the midst of hardships and struggles. Through Jesus the smile of God and the smile of God’s people become one in the undying light that shines in the darkness.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>158</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of love* 107.

<sup>159</sup> Nouwen does not write much about the eternal life. Here he speaks about the other side. But he also writes that this goal begins here and now. “Personally I do believe deeply in the eternal life, but not simply as a life after our physical death. It is only when we have claimed for ourselves the life of God’s spirit during the many moments of our ‘chronology’ that we expect death to be the door to the fullness of life. Eternal life is not some great surprise that comes unannounced at the end of our existence in time; it is rather, the full revelation of what we have been and have lived all along. Death is the portal to the fullness of life”  
*Nouwen, Life of the Beloved P.109.*

<sup>160</sup> Nouwen, *Our greatest gift* 92.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 92 f.

<sup>162</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Our greatest gift*. 106-107.

<sup>163</sup> Nouwen, *Walk with Jesus* 95

## Observations

The death of his mother brought Nouwen close to the theme death. Here also the tone is consoling rather than sadness. The hope of the resurrection and the sending of the spirit are encouraging and consoling for the bereaved. The book on aging sees life as a gift and suggests the possibility of aging gracefully and with gratitude. Nouwen beautifully connected to it the virtue of caring for the elderly. As a reward we can learn from their experiences and prepare ourselves for our own aging. What Nouwen wrote those days in the context of the American society is becoming a reality everywhere. Caring for the elderly people does not fit into the economic principles of today. Here we are really challenged by the Christian values. Jesus' upholding the value and dignity of life is a ministerial aspect for those who minister in his name. The ministers are called to befriend life and death and help others to do the same.

According to Nouwen death is a frightening theme for many because of the anxiety which grips the heart, because of its certainty and because of the uncertainty about the when and how of it. The question many ask is: is death a big hopeless black hole swallowing us up and what becomes then of the love we have lived. Nouwen wanted to give the inevitable death a religious place. He did not want to shun the theme, rather he tried to incorporate it into his spirituality. Aging is the first book on this theme in which he pleads for the integration of the aging people instead of segregation. Aging can be a way to light. Nouwen confirmed it once again by referring to Rembrand's painting of the father in which the exterior splendour of his life diminishes and he gets more in touch with the immense beauty of the interior life. (*Cfr Nouwen, The return of the Prodigal p.88.*) Death invites us to light, love, peace, happiness and eternity. We experience a foretaste of it in the daily or periodical Eucharistic celebration which affirms our belovedness and our process of transformation. Therefore as the last point we want to look at Nouwen's reflections on the Eucharist.

### 3.9. Eucharist

According to Nouwen Eucharist is not only a sacrament but also the centre of Christian life, of spiritual life. He himself was faithful to the celebration of the Eucharist till his death, as we see in the biography, and invited others to experience the power of prayer, communion and sacramental nourishing in our so weak and broken state of life. But he was not mechanical or rigid in his approach. He held intense celebration of the Eucharist not only for large gatherings but also in small groups in a farm house or in L'Arche. It is not only celebrating life as illustrated in the *Creative Ministry* but also life itself. His devotion, conviction and the power derived from the Eucharist led Nouwen to conceive the notion of the Eucharistic life. Eucharist is coming together in the Lord's Name and placing oneself under the grace and forgiveness of God. Nobody is excluded from this gift of God. The important elements of a Eucharistic life are contained in two books: *With burning Hearts (1994)* and *Can you drink the cup (1996)*. The theme Eucharist has a double importance for us as it speaks about the pastoral function of celebrating life and inviting others to celebrate and the identity of the minister himself whose life must be a 'eucharistic life'.

#### 3.9.1. With Burning Hearts

Nouwen loved quiet places but he was restless without his writing ministry. The book *With burning heart* was written as Nouwen himself said; „simply because I wanted to write.

Although nobody asked me, I had felt for a long time the urge to put down on paper thoughts and feelings about the Eucharist and the Eucharistic life that kept emerging in my mind and the heart. As I started to present these thoughts and feelings in lectures and conferences, I felt an increasing desire to put them in a small book to give to people in search of a spiritual life rooted in the Eucharist<sup>164</sup>

Nouwen is known for his great appreciation for and loyalty to the Holy Eucharist. In the above book he showed the intimate connection between ‘celebrating the Eucharist’ and ‘living a Eucharistic life’. The core of the Eucharistic celebration and of the Eucharistic life is God’s desire to enter into an intimate relationship with us. In the Eucharist God makes himself available for all people at all times. Basing his reflections on the Emmaus story (Lk. 24/13-35) Nouwen outlined the five steps that form the core of the Eucharistic celebration and the Eucharistic life, namely; the coming together in our brokenness before God and crying for mercy, the hearing of the word and experiencing God’s burning presence, inviting God to stay with us through the profession of faith, entering into a communion with him who gives himself completely in the meal that we can take and eat him and going on a mission to tell about him and to renew the face of the earth. Nouwen explored the ‘network of connections’<sup>165</sup> between the Eucharistic celebration and the Eucharistic way of life in a fast changing world. The five elements of the Emmaus story; loss, presence, invitation, communion and mission constitute the elements of the Eucharist also.<sup>166</sup> There is a movement hidden in these steps, the movement from resentment to gratitude.

#### 3.9.1.1. Mourning our Losses (Lord, have mercy)

The first step is to mourn our losses. Our life suffers a series of losses from birth to death. Some of us may be spared the loss of health, wealth or freedom. But all of us experience the loss of dreams, the loss of spirit which is more difficult to acknowledge. Beyond these losses there is the loss of faith, the loss of the conviction that our life has meaning. It is difficult to hold on to faith because as we grow older the familiar safeties fail us as we are exposed to the challenges of the world. The right approach to our losses is to grieve them instead of hiding them or blaming others for it. Mourning connects us to the suffering humanity and in the depth of the grieving we hear the voice; “blessed are those who grieve”<sup>167</sup>. The obvious response to loss is resentment. But in the mourning we learn to choose the alternative called gratitude. “Living eucharistically is living life as a gift, a gift for which one is grateful.”<sup>168</sup> Life as a beautiful and precious gift is intimately connected with its fragility and mortality. The cry of God’s people ‘Lord have mercy’ shows our share in human brokenness and our co-responsibility for the evil that surround us.

#### 3.9.1.2 Discerning the Presence (This is the word of the Lord)

We approach the Eucharist with a mixed feeling of despair and hope. To discover the healing grace hidden in the mourning and to move to gratitude, we need to be attentive to the presence of God in the Word. His Word which transforms the heart, lifts us up and places us in the context of a story much larger than our lives. The word confronts our naiveté, breaks through our defences inviting us to “move beyond the pains of the moment

---

<sup>164</sup> Nouwen, *With burning Hearts* 9-10

<sup>165</sup> Cfr. 12.

<sup>166</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>167</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 25-27.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

and see them as part of a much larger healing process.”<sup>169</sup> Jesus is present in the Word and in the breaking of the bread, a mysterious presence which walks with us in our sadness, a presence that lets our hearts burn. The Word of God is sacramental making present what it indicates. We have to discern this presence in the Eucharist and in the Eucharistic way of life. “The full power of the Word lies, not in how we apply it, but in its transforming power that does its divine work as we listen.”<sup>170</sup> The word of God must be differently listened to than the many ‘words’ that flood us with information. “The sacramental quality of the Word makes God present not only as an intimate personal presence, but also as a presence that gives us a place in the great story of salvation.”<sup>171</sup> The Eucharistic celebration calls us to a Eucharistic life in which “we are continuously aware of our role in the sacred story of God’s redemptive presence through all generations [...] It is this presence that encourages us to let go of our hardened hearts and become grateful. As grateful people we can invite into the intimacy of our home the one who has made our hearts burn.”<sup>172</sup>

### 3.9.1.3. Inviting the stranger (I believe)

The one, present in the midst of the Eucharistic celebration and in the midst of our lives, who helps us to see the glory beyond the sad events, desires to be invited by us. Without inviting the Lord to stay with us, the Word has no lasting effect. Inviting Jesus involves trusting oneself and entrusting oneself to Jesus, a willingness to know and to be known, making Jesus the companion of my journey and also the companion of my soul. Our profession of faith is an invitation to Jesus to enter our home, entrusting ourselves to his way. Faith is an act of trust and a deep ‘Yes’ to the one who spoke to us.<sup>173</sup>

### 3.9.1.4. Entering into communion (Take and eat)

Inviting Jesus and welcoming him as guest at our table, at the most intimate place of love and pain, will result in being invited as his guests to enter into a communion. God enters into communion with us by offering us his body and blood to eat and drink. This taking, blessing, breaking and giving of himself takes place continuously in our lives with all its light and dark sides wherever and whenever Jesus is invited to be our guest of honour. In the Eucharist we experience the most ordinary and most divine gesture. It reveals Jesus “so human, yet so divine; so familiar, yet so mysterious; so close, yet so revealing!...God-for-us, God- with- us, God-within- us. Jesus is God giving himself completely, pouring himself out for us without reserve. Jesus doesn’t hold back or cling to his own possessions. He gives all there is to give.”<sup>174</sup> He makes himself so close to us as food and drink. “As God becomes fully present for us in Jesus, so Jesus becomes fully present for to us in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist.”<sup>175</sup> The same mystery of the incarnation namely the divine self-giving that reaches out to all humanity in time and space, is expressed in the sacrifice at the table. In the Eucharist we recognize our desire and God’s desire for communion. “It is this intense desire of God to enter into the most intimate relationship with us that forms the core of the Eucharistic celebration and the Eucharistic life. [...]If we have mourned our losses, listened to him on the road, and invited him into our innermost being, we will know

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 42

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>173</sup> Cfr. Ibid 58-59.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 67.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 68.

that the communion we have been waiting to receive is the same communion he has been waiting to give.”<sup>176</sup> God’s presence implies his absence and his absence his presence. The deepest communion with Jesus happens in his apparent absence. “The loneliness of the spiritual life, the loneliness of knowing that he is closer to us than we ever can be to ourselves. It’s a loneliness of faith.”<sup>177</sup> This communion is so deep, so sacred, so intimate that our corporal senses can no longer reach it. It touches that place where love, pain and trust are inseparable. Communion leads to community.

### 3.9.1.5 Mission (Go and tell)

Communion and Community empower us for the mission to proclaim. This mission is not without its price but “the risen Lord present in their innermost being, has filled them with a love stronger than death.”<sup>178</sup> It is a greater challenge to start our mission with those who are no strangers to us, the family, friends and those who are an intimate part of our lives. It is difficult because those who know us will test the authenticity of our experience in our lives. Another important aspect of the mission is to realize that God touches people in different ways and therefore we have to listen to their experiences before telling ours. Discovering the many ways in which Jesus and his spirit work among his people is possible when “we keep listening attentively to the spirit manifesting itself through many people, in words as well as in silence, through confrontation as well as invitation, in gentleness as well as in firmness, with tears as well as smiles- then we can gradually discern that we belong together , as one body knitted together by the spirit of Jesus.”<sup>179</sup> In the Eucharist we discover our unity as brothers and sisters of Jesus. The movement flowing from the Eucharist moves us to community and to ministry. “The mystery of God’s love is that our burning hearts and our receptive years and eyes will be able to discover that the One we met in the intimacy of our homes continues to reveal himself to us among the poor, the sick, the hungry, the prisoners , the refugees, and people who love in fear.”<sup>180</sup>

The Eucharistic celebration invites us to a life in which we come together in brokenness, mourn them and cry for mercy; in which we listen to the Word which transforms our lives and listen to others as a companion; in which we invite God and others into our lives; in which we enter into a communion with Jesus and live its consequences in the community and finally go out together, joyfully and with gratitude to tell about him who longs for communion with us and who makes everything new.

What we can draw out from the above considerations is that it belongs to the essential task of the minister to help them not only celebrate the Eucharist but also live it. It leads to communion with God and community with one another. This community is the basis of Christian mission. It becomes inevitable for the Minister that he himself lives a Eucharistic life to be able to help others to live in a Eucharistic way. For our research it has a great meaning as it deals with the two aspects of our research, namely the function and identity of the minister.

The relevance of exploring the Eucharistic aspect of Pastoral life for the pastoral work is based on the fact that the Eucharistic event is intensely human revealing the deepest of

---

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 70-71.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 74.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 88.

human experiences: sadness and loss, attentiveness and invitation, intimacy and engagement. In the Eucharistic moment our lives that are laden with loss and failures will burn at the recognition of his presence and break forth in gratitude with new life. In the Eucharistic life we move from mourning to discernment, from invitation to intimacy and from community to witnessing. The minister who lives a Eucharistic life is able to lead the faithful to the mystery of the Eucharist and enable them to lead a Eucharistic way of life.

Nouwen's thoughts are concentrated around the truth of the Eucharist being the centre of our Christian existence and pastoral life. The application of Eucharist to life enables us to be grateful and hopeful in our relationships to God and our fellow human beings. Our personal life with all its day to day ups and downs can be transformed through the power of the Eucharist and the effort to lead a Eucharistic way of life.

### 3.9.2. Can you drink the cup

Nouwen wrote this book during the Sabbatical year, „a year that the L'Arche Daybreak community gave me for my writing“<sup>181</sup>. Nouwen using the cup as a symbol of life presented the question of Jesus to the sons of Zebedee, “Can you drink the cup?” (Mt. 20, 20-23) as a challenge to spiritual life.

According to Nouwen holding the cup of joys and sorrows, lifting it up for others to see and drinking it to the bottom form the basis of spiritual life. Just as we talk about wine before drinking it so also we have to reflect on life and talk about it to know what we are living. “Half of living is reflecting on what is being lived.”<sup>182</sup>

#### 3.9.2.1. Holding

Each one holds a unique cup of sorrow. Our personal sufferings are but only a part of the universal suffering. Jesus also held his cup of sorrow. He doubted his ability to drink it but his deep trust and communion with God enabled him to say yes. The hour of sorrow can be so overwhelming that it is difficult to hear the voice of love and we may cry out. Luke teaches a great mystery by mentioning that an Angel appeared from heaven to strengthen Jesus.(Lk.22/43) “In the midst of the sorrows is consolation, in the midst of the darkness is light, in the midst of the despair is hope, in the midst of Babylon is a glimpse of Jerusalem, and in the midst of the army of demons is the consoling angel. The cup of sorrow, inconceivable as it is, is also the cup of Joy. Only when we discover this in our own life we can consider drinking it.”<sup>183</sup>

In this sense Priestly ministry is together discovering the hidden joy in the midst of sorrows. The ministry of ‘compassionate-being-with’<sup>184</sup> brings immense joy, the joy of belonging, the joy of being part of, of not being different. The cross is as much a symbol of joy, victory and power as is a symbol of suffering, defeat and weakness. The knowledge that he was doing the will of his father gave Jesus the strength to enter actively and with freedom and dignity into his passion. When we don’t let ourselves be overwhelmed by our own darkness, we realize that the cup of life is not only a cup of sorrow but also a cup of joy.

---

<sup>181</sup> Nouwen, Can you drink the cup 7.

<sup>182</sup> Nouwen, Can you drink the cup 26.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>184</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 45.

### 3.9.2.2. Lifting

Like the cup we can lift up our lives too, showing it to others with its joys and sorrows and looking in each other's eyes saying: do not be anxious or afraid. By lifting up the cup of life we affirm it and celebrate it as a gift from God. Thereby we help others to see it and encourage them to live their lives as well. This leads to creating a community as well. A life that is lifted up is a life that is lived for others, a life shared with others. To grow into a community we have to tell about our lives without shame and guilt feelings. The cup of sorrows and joys lifted up for others becomes a cup of blessings. "To celebrate life is to raise up life, make it visible to each other, affirm it in its concreteness, and be grateful for it."<sup>185</sup>

Through his suffering and death as acts of love, Jesus had turned the cup of life filled with illness, losses, handicaps and misfortunes into a cup of blessing through his hidden presence in the midst of it all. Lifting up the joys and sorrows of the past, **all** of our past and being grateful for it erases bitterness and resentment and wounded feelings. "It transforms our past into a fruitful gift for the future, and makes our life, all of it, into a life that gives life."<sup>186</sup> Lifting up the cup is also making oneself vulnerable. In the shared vulnerability we find new strength and hope.

### 3.9.2.3. Drinking

Drinking the cup of life is living our own unique life, "fully appropriating and internalising our own unique existence, with all its sorrows and joys"<sup>187</sup>. It also involves befriending that which we don't like in us, moving "beyond our protest, put the cup of our life to our lips and drink it, slowly, carefully but fully"<sup>188</sup>. It is not 'making the best out of it' or adapting ourselves to a bad situation but rather "a hopeful, courageous and self-confident way of living. It is standing in the world with head erect, solidly rooted in the knowledge of who we are, facing the reality that surrounds us and responding to it from our hearts."<sup>189</sup> Again it is not trying to be greater than others but "being as great as each of us can be"<sup>190</sup>. Each one is called to drink his own unique cup as the way to freedom. Drinking the cup of joys and sorrows is also the cup of salvation. In our lives many of our needs and desires remain unfulfilled. It shows that full freedom lies beyond the structures of this world. Drinking the cup that is never pure sorrow or pure joy as the cup of salvation is a mission "that makes us move far beyond our human limitations and reach out to total freedom, complete redemption, ultimate salvation"<sup>191</sup>.

The second way is to speak about what is in our cup. We can do so only with trustworthy, loving and caring friends who can offer us a safe place, but who can also confront us in love to a greater spiritual maturity. The third way is action. It is not doing what we want to do but doing what we are called to do, following our vocation. "The most prestigious position in society can be an expression of obedience to our call as well as a sign of our refusal to hear that call, and the least prestigious position, too, can be a response to our

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. 88.

vocation as well as a way to avoid it".<sup>192</sup>

Commitment to doing God's will frees us from compelling actions and helps us to do that which brings us true joy and peace. Drinking the cup and emptying it, is necessary to let it be filled with eternal life. Drinking the cup is not aimed at getting a reward. "It is an act of selfless love, an act of immense trust, an act of surrender to a God who will give what we need when we need it."<sup>193</sup> It is a life of intimacy with God, a life in and with the spirit of Jesus who gives us the strength and courage to say 'yes' to the fundamental question: can you drink the cup?, the answer of which changes our lives radically. An intensive Eucharistic life helps us to hold, lift and drink the cup of our lives. "The cup of Jesus, filled with his life, poured out for us and all people, and our cup, filled with our own blood, have become one cup. Together when we drink that cup as Jesus drank it we are transformed into the one body of the living Christ, always dying and always rising for the salvation of the world."<sup>194</sup>

### Observations

Nouwen's Eucharistic theology is not for the head but for the heart. He connected it to life and the true celebration of it sanctifies our day and our activities. It is this conviction which kept him loyal to the Eucharistic celebration. Nouwen sought solutions to the problems not outside but in the mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a real challenge for the celebrant as well as participant to make the Eucharistic celebration go deep into ourselves and touch every fibre of our life.

Drinking the cup of life is not a private thing but has very much to do with our approach to others and consequently is an important pastoral point. Especially the aspect of 'lifting' which is a sharing of one's life and making oneself vulnerable has a deep pastoral sense in Nouwen's terms. In this connection it is important to note that the 'precious golden chalice' from which only the priests could drink was later replaced by a glass cups "in which the wine can be seen and from which many can drink. These glass cups speak about a new way of being a priest and a new way of being human".<sup>195</sup> This is an example of the changes in Nouwen's thoughts and his maturing. We see clearly that Nouwen's treatment of the Eucharist is more existential than theological. It deals with the human experiences and shows the necessity of connecting the human story to the divine. This book once again shows that the ministerial function is not to be separated from the identity of the minister. Nouwen's own biography is very much reflected in this book. He has a different understanding of the Eucharist and a different approach to it than what he thought and felt forty years before, the movement from the ontological to the existential.

Nouwen's life was a cup which he lifted up and drank to the bottom. In many books he has written about the need for sharing the life and laying down the life for others. This is inseparable from the minister's spirituality. It is true that Nouwen did not live all that he wrote. He spoke a lot about not overworking but he himself was a victim of exhaustion. But his sincerity to live all to the best of his ability makes him an authentic minister in word and deed. The coincidence that Nouwen died in the same year makes this book an impressive

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>195</sup> Nouwen, Can you drink the cup 17. (Nouwen inherited this Chalice from his Uncle-priest Anton on the day of his ordination with the advice of passing it on to the next priest ordained in the family)

last witness to his life and writing ministry. Nouwen's own life was not an easy cup. But holding it as a gift with thankfulness and the cry for help not to lose it, lifting it up for others as help, encouragement and healing, and drinking it faithfully to the last makes Nouwen authentic and deeply spiritual. Nouwen's liturgies were lively because he believed in a lively relationship between God and man - choosing and being chosen, loving and being loved, coming home and being received, emptying and being filled, reaching out and being caught. All that is also the secret of creative ministry.

### 3.10. The summing up

Nouwen was a man on move - physically and spiritually. We have noticed his spiritual quest in his books. The year 1996 was set apart as sabbatical year to pray and to care for friends. This was also his final year before he journeyed to his final goal to rest in God and in him alone without the shadow which followed him always and everywhere and even haunted him. The journal *Sabbatical journey* is the diary of his final year, a summing up of his life and his writings, completed only three weeks before his death on September 21, 1996.

Besides the running theme, friendship and prayer- both needing continuous tending, Nouwen deals with a number of other topics here. The sabbatical year was an opportunity, a gift to relax, pray, write and meet friends. The withdrawal anxiety caused uneasiness but Nouwen was also happy to be “free to deepen friendships and explore new ways of loving”<sup>196</sup>.

#### 3.10.1. Prayer

Nouwen wrote a lot about prayer and slowly he felt that he had to spend a lot of time in prayer. “Prayer is the bridge between my unconscious and conscious life. Prayer connects my mind with my heart, my will with my passion, my brain with my belly. Prayer is the way to let the life-giving spirit of God penetrate all the corners of my being. Prayer is the divine instrument of my wholeness, unity and inner peace.”<sup>197</sup> The darkness and dryness in prayer life is not the absence of God, but rather signs of a presence deeper and wider than the senses can contain. It is not the end of one’s intimacy with God but the beginning of a new communion beyond words, emotions and bodily sensations<sup>198</sup>.

#### 3.10.2. Friendship

During this free year Nouwen wanted to reflect a lot on friendship. “My need for friendship is great, greater than seems ‘normal’. When I think about the pains and joys of my life, they have little to do with success, money, career, country, or church, but everything to do with friendships.”<sup>199</sup> Like prayer friendship is a real discipline. Both need purification. “They need to become less dependant on fleeting emotions, and more rooted in lasting commitments.”<sup>200</sup> The spectrum of friendship has two ends, presence and absence, and both lead to a deepening of the bond of friendship. “Friendship requires trust, patience, attentiveness, courage, repentance, forgiveness, celebration, and most of all faithfulness.”<sup>201</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* 3.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>198</sup> *Cfr. Ibid.* 6.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

Only in this book Nouwen writes openly and with much emotion and gratitude about the friendship with Nathan Ball. “Tomorrow Nathan is coming, and that makes me happy. [...] What a joy it will be to welcome him, show him my new home, and celebrate our friendship in prayer, meals, trips, and good conversation.[...]It is a joy for me to be able to have a friend who offers me trust, love, and safety and from whom I have no secrets. [...] Our friendship began in France and grew strong over the first year. Later, at Daybreak there were many stresses, and because I became too dependant, the friendship finally broke. This breakage triggered many things in me, and the pain of our separation was so deep that I had to leave the community for six months to try to rediscover trust and re-find hope. Without any doubt those were some of the hardest and most agonising months of my life. During that time I wondered if I would ever return to Daybreak and live in the same community with Nathan. When the time was right I did return and ever-so-gradually the friendship was restored, and even deepened. Today we are committed friends, as people of faith, as co-leaders of Daybreak, and as men committed to share with and support each other.[...] During our supper Nathan challenged me to be less complaining and more affirmative. ‘When you say yes to an invitation, don’t complain that you are too busy, and when things go well for you, don’t make ambivalent statements about it as if you still need some special sympathy’. I thought I was beyond my complaining attitude but he was pointing out that they keep creeping up and preventing me from fully claiming the joy and peace that is mine.”<sup>202</sup>

### 3.10.3. Woundedness, healing and spiritual maturing

Nouwen himself was a wounded healer. This was to some extent the force behind his spiritual quest and ministerial enthusiasm. Nouwen’s greatness was that he did not hide his own woundedness. “The feeling of being abandoned is always around the corner. I keep being surprised at how quickly it rears its ugly head. Yesterday I experienced that nasty feeling in my innermost being. Just raw anxiety, seemingly disconnected from anything.[...] Talking lessened my anxiety and I felt peaceful again. No one can ever heal this wound, but when I can talk about it with a good friend I feel better.[...] It is such a familiar wound. It has been with me for many years. I don’t think this wound- this immense need for affection, and this immense fear of rejection- will ever go away. It is there to stay, but may be for a good reason. Perhaps it is a gateway to my salvation, a door to glory, and a passage to freedom! I am aware that this wound of mine is a gift in disguise. These many short but intense experiences of abandonment lead me to the place where I am learning to let go off fear and surrender my spirit into the hands of the One whose acceptance has no limits.”<sup>203</sup> For Nouwen there is a mutuality in healing: “I am touched by this mutuality between the healer and the person who needs healing. Healers must be in communion with the source of all life and healing so that they can be true mediators of the healing power, which is larger than themselves. People who seek healing must surrender themselves, trusting that the healer can indeed mediate that healing power to them. The humility of the healer and the faith of the sick person are both central to the work of healing.”<sup>204</sup>

Nouwen could live better with his homosexual tendency as he grew spiritually. “My own thoughts and emotions around this subject are very conflicted. Years of Catholic education and seminary training have caused me to internalize the Catholic Church’s position. Still,

---

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. 132-135.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. 24-25.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. 111.

my emotional development and my friendship with many homosexual people, as well as the recent literature on the subject, have raised many questions for me. There is a huge gap between my internalised homophobia and my increasing conviction that homosexuality is not a curse but a blessing for our society.”<sup>205</sup>

With the sabbatical year Nouwen wanted to end a phase of his life and begin a new one. “Deep within myself I feel that something new wants to be born: a book with stories, a novel, a spiritual journal- something quite different from what I have done in the past. There is a sense of conclusion and new beginnings. This sabbatical year seems to be the year of transition from an active travelling life to a life of contemplation and writing. I realize, though, that it will require a lot of discipline to refocus my life. But without such a refocusing I will end up busy, restless and always looking for human affirmation. It’s time to make a radical choice for solitude, prayer, and quiet writing.”<sup>206</sup>

Nouwen’s inner transformation is visible in the changing priorities. “My Week in Boston, New York, and Richmond Hill informs me that my inner priorities are quietly shifting. Instead of yearning to be among many people, I yearn for intimate friendships. Instead of wanting to lecture to large groups, I desire to speak to a few people. Instead of being excited about huge celebrations and liturgies, I feel inspired by small prayer gatherings, and instead of enjoying travelling and moving around a lot, I feel most happy in my little room writing for long hours. I know that these shifts are taking place within me, but my old self keeps acting as if they are not happening and I am still planning much more than is good for me. It will probably be a few years before my new self is fully in control.”<sup>207</sup> He even wanted to change his writing style. “I am pondering new writing, new thinking and a new way of living after this sabbatical is over.[...] But whether it is a book about Adam or one about the Rodleights, it is always going to be a book about me. It is my experience of Adam and the Rodleights that finally makes a book about them possible.”<sup>208</sup> For Nouwen there is a spiritual secret in the performance of the flying Rodleights. “It is hard to describe, but it is the emotion coming from the experience of an enfleshed spirituality. Body and spirit are fully united. The body in its beauty and elegance expresses the spirit of love, friendship, family, and community, and the spirit never leaves the here and now of the body.”<sup>209</sup> Nouwen confessed the reason why he was so taken up by the flying Rodleights (trapeze artists). It provides us a key to Nouwen’s loneliness and longing for affection which often led to frustration or depression. “They brought back in a vivid way the longings I had had as a seventeen-year-old boy for communion, community, and intimacy. Many of these longings went underground during my time at the seminary and the university and my years of teaching. They only manifested themselves in occasional mental wanderings, curiosities, and feelings of anguish. When I went to L’Arche I allowed all these feelings and emotions and passions to re-emerge. But seeing the Rodleights catapulted me into a new consciousness. There in the air I saw the artistic realization of my deepest yearnings. It was so intense that even today I do not dare to write about it because it requires a radical new step not only in my writing but also in my life.”<sup>210</sup>

Nouwen did not hide his restless and tiredness. „The constant going from place to place

---

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 144.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 171.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 121.

somehow makes me lose my sense of belonging and gives me a feeling of alienation. I deeply crave tomes of prayer but never feel quiet enough to just sit down and pray. My mind is not very creative. The constant fatigue makes me always look for an opportunity to sleep.”<sup>211</sup> Nouwen must have been physically exhausted but spiritually he was never tired. The energy came from a rich source, his heart which he allowed to be God's dwelling place.

Nouwen sums up the basic Christian spirituality and the spirituality of the ministry as confessing Jesus as the messiah and confessing our need for salvation is the solid foundation of faith on which Jesus wants to build his church. In Peter's confession and Jesus' choosing him as the 'rock' there is a mutuality of confession and a mutuality of truth. Confessing the need for salvation and accepting the solid centre is applicable not to Peter alone but to all of us who are builders of the church. “When indeed the body of Christ, formed by believers, makes decisions about its members, these are Kingdom decisions. That is what Jesus refers to when he says, ‘Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven’. Mt. 16/19. [...] More than ever it is important to realize that the church is not simply ‘over there’, where the Bishops are or where the Pope is, but ‘right here’, where we are around the table of the Lord.”<sup>212</sup> Answering to a question about the most important thing in his life Nouwen says, “Well, three things: living a vision inspired by the Gospel of Jesus; being close to the poor, the handicapped, the sick, and the dying; and finding a way to satisfy my deep yearning for intimacy and affection.”<sup>213</sup>

Nouwen gifted a lot of affection and received a lot, too. But the truly satisfying affection was yet to come from the one whom he loved most, his God revealed in Jesus Christ. According to Nathan Henri lived and died well and entered into his dream home. “Although he was fully expecting to live for many more years, Henri was not afraid to die. He had many struggles and had shared them openly with his friends and through his numerous writings. But this I know: Henri died at peace with himself, his family, his own faith community of L'Arche, his friends, his vocation as a priest, and the God whose everlasting love had been Henri's beacon for sixty-four years.”<sup>214</sup>

### **An Interim Balance**

We have touched several points dealt with by Nouwen, for example, The need for intimacy, our vulnerability, Jesus-centeredness, self emptying, hospitality, downward mobility, trusting in God, ministering from the heart, being led by the spirit and communion with God. For Nouwen Eucharist is the source of our spiritual strength and the most concrete way of exercising union with Jesus in whose name we minister and whose memory heals and sustains. The ministers is nurtured in a special way through the Eucharist. The Eucharist reflects God's intimacy with us and our communion with each other. It has got a healing sustaining and guiding power. So it is apt that we included Nouwen's books on Eucharist in our treatise.

We have taken only a few selected themes which were close to the heart of Nouwen. They point to some of the important aspects of the identity of the minister. They also speak about the essentials of Christian spirituality. The basic question of intimacy which led to further themes like self- acceptance, prayer, solitude and spiritual disciplines are ultimately aimed

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 183.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 226.

at living our belovedness in God's love who is close to us in Jesus and whose ministry we are continuing in his name. Death is the gateway to affirming our being and entering the fruitfulness of our lives. We can notice that a certain development runs through these themes which has to do with Nouwen's life and the life of every minister too. Nouwen's restless search led him to solitude and prayer. Belovedness was the problem fuelling conflicts in Nouwen. He found the spiritual answers in compassion, community, Jesus-centredness etc. Death finally was the fulfilment of his life. In the above treated themes we also find that the whole of Nouwen's writings and life were a genuine confession. That paves me the way to move to the part which analyses the above material to point out the connection between function and confession.

All the pastoral works try to lift up the pastoral care from mere doing things. Simultaneously Nouwen is concerned about the lifting up of the person of minister too. Without forgetting the basic needs of the minister, his vulnerability, insufficiency and powerlessness Nouwen moves ahead to discover the spiritual realm which helps the maturing of the person. *Creative Ministry* written in 1971 and *Living Reminder* written after a lapse of six years have common themes. Both of them speak about the need for a new approach to ministry - creative, hospitable, interactive and mutual. This requires a personal and wholehearted approach which is the summary of the books *Creative ministry* and *Living Reminder*. The minister's role as the reminder of the memory of Jesus is one of the key concepts in the books on Eucharist too. In the Eucharist we celebrate what is deeply divine as well as all that is fully human. We come together in the Lord's name and in his presence with all that is natural and human. Therefore the celebration of the Eucharist is closely connected with living a eucharistic life. The structure of the eucharistic celebration is also the structure of our life, namely, loss and sadness, attentiveness and invitation of the Lord in our midst, intimacy and engagement. For Nouwen the Eucharist does not begin and end at the church door but continues to affect the daily life. All these books stress the aspect of shepherding in the sense of giving oneself fully and even to the extent of laying down one's life and the need for a sound spirituality nurtured through prayer. Here and there Nouwen shifts the emphasis but there is a basic development in the thinking.

Nouwen becomes more and more introspective and realizes that the suffering of wounded memories is a common problem. The minister's function of reminding which heals, sustains and guides as envisaged in the book *Living Reminder* has something to do with Nouwen's own life if we connect it to his book *Return of the Prodigal Son* where he thinks that he is more the 'virtuous' elder son who stays at home and is still lost. Minister is not only the dispenser of grace but also the recipient of grace for which he has to call to mind his own failures and inadequacies.

At this juncture it is useful to note that Nouwen's first book, *Intimacy* was addressed to those undergoing training for ministry and to those giving the training. *Creative ministry* deals with the next step, the ministry concretely exercised in teaching, preaching, individual care, organising and celebrating. Here he unmaskes the weaknesses of the traditional approach and proposes changes. In the later books it is noticeable that Nouwen slowly moves from emphasising the function to placing more stress on the identity of the person. He moves from outside to inside, into the heart from where we can act into the world again. Nouwen's conviction that the desire for unconditional love sought in power and popularity breeding jealousy is the wrong way and that the spiritual way is growing in communion with God and living the cup of joys and sorrows, draws a clear parallel to his own life. His life was a true spiritual journey of ups and downs, of curves and going off road, but at the

same time keeping and following the right direction and slowly growing in faith. The Eucharist keeps the minister close to the heart of Jesus who is the actual minister.

It is interesting to note how in Nouwen's writings the question of the Function is never so clearly separated from the identity of the minister. In almost all the books these two aspects are explicitly or at least implicitly mentioned side by side. Before we move on to the fourth part concentrating on the identity of the minister we shall treat briefly the dominant themes appearing in the spiritual works. What characterizes Nouwen's spirituality is the dialogue between his mind and his heart's lived reality.

Towards the end of his life he was swayed between the desire for solitude and prayer and the desire for active ministry. He also longed for a new freedom beyond his identity as catholic priest and beyond the expectations of family and friends. In the final chapter it is my attempt to dig out a few underlying thoughts and to show the direction to which his life and thoughts moved. It is interesting to see the points of convergences and divergences, departure from a particular idea and emphasis on a new idea. In the final observation I will try to bind together the observations I have made earlier. It is my intention to evaluate the findings to justify my outgoing thesis that there is an inner coherence and development in the different books written by Nouwen and seen in his own life. Therefore we move into the final analysis and the final conclusion in the upcoming chapter.

## Chapter 4 : A Final Analysis

### Introduction

In this chapter we want to make an analyse of the biography and writings of Nouwen to find out the different threads connecting the thinking of Nouwen and bind together the scattered thoughts to reach the underlying thinking. In the beginning of this work I have mentioned that the thrust of my work is to arrive at Nouwen's unique contribution tot the spirituality of the contemporary pastoral work. We have examined the biography and the books depicting the pastoral function and the identity of the minister. To understand the connection between the ministerial function and the ministerial disposition we look at the context in which Nouwen lived and wrote first.

### 4.1. Nouwen's context

Having looked at his biography and works we want to place Nouwen in the context in which he lived and wrote. That gives us a greater clarity of the person and his thinking. We limit ourselves only to the spiritual context of the world, Nouwen's observations about the church and Nouwen's understanding of God which determine his pastoral perspectives. Nouwen has made a thought provoking evaluation of the situation of the world. He has not written any treatise on it but we find that very often the human situation of the world context is the starting point of his reflections.

#### 4.1.1. Ministry and its World-context

For Nouwen the creation is the reflection of God's heart. He was an admirer of the beauty of the Nature and the wonder of the earth on which we live. He once wrote that seeing our home planet as a precious little gem that needs care and protection is a deeply mystical experience that can only be captured by words such as *grace* and *responsibility*<sup>1</sup>. The nature and art were for Nouwen the windows to experience the transcendent and they are very spiritual. Nouwen speaks about obedience to the nature which helps us to truly celebrate life.<sup>2</sup> He loved nature especially the flowers and was generous in making others happy with flowers.

But there is also a sad side to this reality. We are becoming deaf to the nature and our blue planet is thoughtlessly being exploited. A similar tendency prevails in the human situation too. Nouwen is in no way a pessimist but he does not mince words to speak about the brokenness of the people, in the form of emptyness or wounds. Ours is a fast changing society in which many people feel themselves lost and many are the victims of injustice, oppression and exploitation. Although Nouwen is not a moralist he is quick to point out to the hidden hazards which negatively influence the soul and choke our spiritual life. He uses

---

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* 22.

<sup>2</sup> .Cfr. Nouwen, *Creative ministry* 103f.

the term 'sensual' to describe this situation of the modern world. Nouwen was strict with his own body although he had to suffer for it. He believes that the sensual desires for the worldly things endanger the soul which is destined to rest in God. This is a classical view and is very actual and relevant for our time which is plagued by materialism, consumerism and running after sensual pleasures which is a substitute for the lack of true love. There is a great danger of misusing the body and intimacy for selfish gains or temporary satisfaction. Nouwen's maxim was to be in the world without belonging to the world. However most of Nouwen's struggles were not against the world but with himself.<sup>3</sup> Nouwen feels that being open and alert to what moulds the contemporary society is more important than wasting precious energy discussing on issues and fighting each other<sup>4</sup>.

According to Nouwen the world despite all its progress and developments, has failed to answer sufficiently to man's deep seated longing for intimacy. Loneliness is a widespread problem in the modern society. An honest confession reveals that behind the masked faces of several people there is a deep rooted fear, anxiety and loneliness. He draws our attention to the phenomena of the taking love which is violent, destructive and manipulative.<sup>5</sup> This causes the desperate clinging to each other of the friends or partners. The *dislocation*, *rootlessness* and *hopelessness* mentioned in the book *Wounded Healer* gives us a general picture of the sad situation of the society.<sup>6</sup> The wounded memories plague a number of people and many are victims of the compulsive, wordy and rational world needing healing, sustaining and guiding.<sup>7</sup>

The context in which the ministers are to exercise their ministry is one in which the event makers put up the show and the ministers are pushed to the edge<sup>8</sup>. The temptation of the world to go after relevance, popularity and power and the pressure to conform oneself to the world make many people slaves of their own desires and a minister is also exposed to these dangers<sup>9</sup>. It is against this background that the minister has to offer his life and service as source of healing. The ministers are also driven to confusion and embarrassment. To live a balanced life and to set priorities is a real challenge. According to Nouwen many ministers make the mistake of ignoring an important aspect which is the source of every action, namely solitude and prayer.

#### 4.1.2. Ministry and its Church-context

Nouwen has written only sparingly about the church but his thoughts are those of love, respect, faithfulness as well as criticism. "I always have experienced a deep inner resistance to writing about the church because it seemed like a field full of thorn bushes. I guess I fear that I will become entrapped, and for that reason I have been avoiding it until today. After writing several reflections about the baptism and the Eucharist, I spontaneously started to write about the church as the community of people fashioned by these two sacraments. Once I entered the subject that way, I discovered there was a lot to think about and reflect upon. I love the church. I do not want to write about the church as a problem, a source of conflict, a

---

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *The road to Daybreak* 66-67.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 124.

<sup>5</sup> *See, Intimacy*

<sup>6</sup> *See, Wounded Healer*

<sup>7</sup> *See Living Reminder*

<sup>8</sup> *See, Clowning in Rome*

<sup>9</sup> *See, In the name of Jesus*

pace of controversies, but as the body of Christ for us here and now.”<sup>10</sup> The Eucharist stays as central to the church. “The Eucharist indeed makes us church- *ecclesia*- which means people called away from slavery to freedom. Yes, we are family, we are friends, we are business associates. But more than that we are people of God journeying together to our home, the place where Jesus went to prepare a place for us.”<sup>11</sup> Nouwen remained true to his catholic tradition but he was unconventional. He taught in the famous protestant Universities like Yale and Harvard and lived Ecumenism more than writing or talking about it.

Nouwen’s attitude towards the suffering people places compassion, forgiveness and the unconditional love of God in the first place rather than moral judgements. This gives a tip to another element of his ecclesiological vision. “More than ever the church has to live out Christ’s love for the poor, the sinners, the publicans, the rejected, the possessed, and all who desperately need to be loved. As I saw the countless gay men on the streets, I kept thinking about the great consolation that Jesus came to offer. He revealed the total and unlimited love of God for humanity. This is the love that the Church is called to make visible, not by judging, condemning or segregating, but by serving everyone in need. I often wonder if the many heated debates about the morality of homosexuality do not prevent the Christian community from reaching out fearlessly to its suffering fellow humans.”<sup>12</sup> “Much church discussion focuses on the morality of human behavior: premarital sex, divorce, homosexuality, birth control, abortion and so on...But when the moral life gets all the attention, we are in danger of forgetting the primacy of the mystical life, which is the life of the heart.”<sup>13</sup> Nouwen does not disregard moral questions or social action for justice, but draws our attention to the spiritual life which is the foundation of everything. “The reformer, who is convinced that things have to become different, is out to convert the world but is tempted at the same time to think that he himself does not need conversion”<sup>14</sup>.

Nouwen can be very subtle and sarcastic in expressing some bitter truths. His narration of an incident in a Cathedral is thought provoking. During a guided tour of the Cathedral in Freiburg the guide spotted a young man with a cap on his head. He was asked to remove the cap or leave the place, whereupon the man preferred to leave. “His way of guiding reveals both its (*Cathedral’s*) greatness and its medieval, clerical, and authoritarian qualities. [...] He also makes me ask some painful questions about ministry to those who can no longer relate to the powerful God of the Middle Ages but are searching for a tender, compassionate God, who can heal their wounded hearts.”<sup>15</sup>

Nouwen's life and writings point out that he placed the person before the institution. “The Catholic Church, wherever I have seen it operate, from the Vatican to the parishes in the *barrios* of Peru tends to make the personal subservient to the institution. [...] And thus the paradox becomes that those who preach love and defend the values of family life, friendship, and mutual support find themselves often living lonely lives in busy rectories”.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* 54-55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 200.

<sup>13</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 47-48. (According to Chris Glaser Henri kept a safe distance from politics and church issues. The realization of his later life according to Chris was that “the church becomes for us the network of friends who welcome you, pray with you, prompt you to think, challenge you, share charitable efforts, and work with you for justice”. See *Chris R. Glaser, Henri's Mantel* 76.

<sup>14</sup> Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* 75.

<sup>15</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 131.

<sup>16</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* 150-151.

There is no simple way out for this problem. “May be all of this is the other side of the deep mystery, the mystery that we have no lasting dwelling place on this earth and that only God loves us the way we desire to be loved.”<sup>17</sup> However intimate contacts and conversations leading to personal relations are of great support in our ministerial journey.

Nouwen wanted to be in the church without being caught in many complicated structures. For him the Church must be the Church of the poor. For him poverty, powerlessness, and weakness have a special significance in the context of incarnation. “Where is God? God is where we are weak, vulnerable, small, and dependant. God is where the poor are, the hungry, the handicapped, the mentally ill, the elderly, the powerless.[...] If the church has a future it is a future with the poor in whatever form.”<sup>18</sup> More than ever it is important to realize that “the church is not simply ‘over there’, where the Bishops are or where the Pope is, but ‘right here’, where we are around the table of the Lord.”<sup>19</sup>

The Church must be in the world without being of the world. “To be in the world without being of the world, to use the tactics of the world in the service of the Kingdom, to respond to people with wealth in a fearless way, convinced that you have more to offer than to receive, to plead for the poor in ways that the rich can understand, to carry the Gospel in one hand and a stick in the other...all of that is Paul’s militant servant-hood. It is also part of our common journey home.”<sup>20</sup>

Several scattered thoughts on the church are found in Nouwen's Daily: solidarity of the poor and with the poor in the context of the Beatitudes *See Nouwen, Bread for the Journey(BJ) November 1,2,3,and 4*; The mission of witnessing Christ by working for peace and reconciliation *BJ, Nov.5*; People of God nourished by Baptism and Eucharist *BJ Oct.5.*; Body of people called out of slavery into freedom, a place where God becomes God with us, a garden of saints whose life-centre is Jesus, a place where the weak, broken and the poor form the center. *Cfr. BJ, Oct. 16,17,18,19,20,21,22.*

After travelling with a circus group for two weeks Nouwen wrote that there is a connection between the circus and the church. “Aren’t they both trying to lift up the human spirit and help people look beyond the boundaries of their daily lives? Aren’t they both, at the same time, in constant peril of becoming places for lifeless routines that have lost their vitality and transcending power? [...] There is no reason to idealise the circus. Much that goes on there is quite unspectacular, inside as well as outside the tent. Nor is there any reason to romanticize the church. Much that goes on there is quite unspiritual. And still the human heart searches for something larger, something greater than it’s own pettiness, and everyone who enters the circus or the church is looking for something that reaches out to the stars, or beyond!”<sup>21</sup> An important character of the church is that of community. Community is automatically formed where poor<sup>22</sup>, broken and weak people come together to share their brokenness and experience God’s strength and his hidden presence in their midst.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 151.

<sup>18</sup> Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey 71.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>21</sup> From the Internetpage: nouwen.net. (Nouwen wanted to write a book about the flying Rodeighs of the circus Barum but could not realize it in his life time).

<sup>22</sup> For Nouwen the words: Blessed are the poor apply equally to the materially, physically and spiritually poor. God’s grace is richly present where we recognize our spiritual poverty.

#### 4.1.2.1. Church as a community

Nouwen's understanding of the church is intimately connected with the notion of community. The theme community appears repeatedly in Nouwen's writings. For him community is a quality of the heart rather than physical togetherness. "It grows from the spiritual knowledge that we are alive not for ourselves but for one another. Community is the fruit of our capacity to make the interests of others more important than our own."<sup>23</sup> It is, therefore, made possible by the giving of the hearts. Community is built on love, a love that goes beyond the ups and downs of everyday life. Loving deeply with its moments of joys and pains lets our hearts grow wider and deeper and create a community<sup>24</sup>. Community is no goal in itself. It is prophetic and missionary in its character. Community develops where we experience that something significant is taking place *where we are*. The divine fire of the Holy Spirit is the binding factor of this loving communion.

#### 4.1. 2.2. Community as a safe centre

Community is a safe home not in the physical sense but for the spiritual life. It keeps you in the light and helps you to show that light to others without being overcome by the darkness. "It is important to remain as much in touch as possible with those who know you, love you, and protect your vocation. If you visit people with great needs and deep struggles that you can easily recognize in your own heart, remain anchored in your home community. Think about your community as holding a long line that girds your waist. Wherever you are, it holds that line. Thus you can be very close to people in need of your healing without losing touch with those who protect your vocation. Your community can pull you back when its members see that you are forgetting why you were sent out."<sup>25</sup>

Nouwen's own experience showed that it is important to remain deeply connected with the larger community of the faithful to which you belong. Community not only protects but also challenges one another. "Think about Jesus. He made his journey and asked his disciples to follow him even where they would rather not go. The journey you are choosing is Jesus' journey, and whether or not you are fully aware of it, you are also asking your brothers and sisters to follow you. Somewhere you already know that what you are living now will not leave the other members of the community untouched. Your choices also call your friends to make new choices."<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.1.3. Nouwen's picture of God

Nouwen's picture of God is very decisive in determining his pastoral approach. His picture of God is that of a loving, compassionate and merciful God. An important aspect of

---

<sup>23</sup> Nouwen, *Bread for the journey* Jan.23.

<sup>24</sup> Through the pains Nouwen learned to choose love and community instead of self pity and seclusion. "Instead of the pain that comes from deep love makes your love ever more fruitful. It is like a plough that breaks the ground to allow the seed to take root and grow into a strong plant.[...] Those who are alive within you will recognize those who are alive around you. The wider the community of your heart, the wider the community around you. Thus the pain of rejection, absence, and death can become fruitful." See Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*59.

<sup>25</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of love* 45.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

Nouwen's thinking is that nothing and nobody is excluded from the all embracing love of God. Our concern and compassion reaches out to every individual and being. Nouwen's contacts with Aids-patients and his compassion for them shows how he sees the suffering God in a suffering person and how he is convinced of the unfathomable love of God.<sup>27</sup> "He is mother as well as father. He touches the son with a masculine hand and a feminine hand. He holds, and she caresses. He confirms and she consoles. He is, indeed, God, in whom both manhood and womanhood, fatherhood and motherhood, are fully present"<sup>28</sup>. Nouwen's reflections on the Holy Trinity in *Behold the beauty of the Lord* uses the expressions 'entering the circle of love and remaining in the circle of love'. To be safe in the circle of love as the beloved of God is a touching and consoling picture of God. God's compassionate and forgiving love depicted in the *Return of the prodigal son*, God's suffering with those who are suffering, his solidarity with those who are weak and poor present an image of God whose thoughts are not that of ours, whose ways are different from ours and whose generosity goes beyond our calculations. God's first love and his love manifested in Jesus is for Nouwen the cause and fulfilment of our lives. God's vulnerability in Jesus is an invitation for us to become vulnerable in prayer, in trust, in hope, in love and in ministry.

God's eyes, revealed in Jesus, are 'seeing' eyes. His healing eyes are "so severe yet so loving, so unmasking yet so protecting, so penetrating yet so caressing, so profound yet so intimate, so distant yet so inviting"<sup>29</sup>. Being found by God and seeing with the eyes of God are favourite themes of Nouwen and show the active passivity in prayer. The image of our flying and being caught by God speaks about the simple trust we may place in God who does not let us down.

## 4. 2. Consequences for the ministry and the minister

Nouwen's picture of God, his experience of the world and the church, his spiritual search and pastoral ministry have their consequences which are invitations and exhortations for the ministers as well as those who take their Christian life seriously.

### 4.2.1. Ministry and divine sensitivity

True ministry underlies the divine sensitivity to the spirit of God. "It is the Spirit of God in us who gives us eyes to see and ears to hear, who allows us to see and hear God in every person we serve. God is thus not only the gift, but also the receiver. Just as it is not we who pray, but the spirit in us, so it is not we who receive but the spirit in us."<sup>30</sup> The divine sensitivity makes the minister a mystic. "All the saints are saints precisely because for them the order of being was turned around and they saw, felt, and –above all- knew with their heart that outside God nothing is, nothing breathes, nothing moves, and nothing lives. This makes me aware that the basis of all ministry rests not in the moral life but in the mystical life. The issue is not to live as well as we can, but to let our life be one that finds its source in the Divine Life."<sup>31</sup> In this sense ministry is more than accomplishing good works. It is more a vocation in an obedient response to God's will. "For me it is not a question of how we can most influence others. What matters is our vocation. To what or whom are we

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 53.

<sup>28</sup> Nouwen, *The return of the Prodigal son* 94.

<sup>29</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 56.

<sup>30</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 49.

called? When we make the effect of our work the criterion of our sense of self, we end up very vulnerable. Both the political and ministerial life can be responses to a call. Both too can be ways to acquire power. The final issue is not the result of our work but the obedience to God's will, as long as we realize that God's will is the expression of God's love."<sup>32</sup> Such a ministry requires my own conversion and a reformation of the heart. It is more than a profession, more than executing a function.

#### 4.2. 2. Ministry, prayer and mysticism

Nouwen connects contemplation with active ministry. Two ways of contemplation are necessary for the minister: The contemplative life in which he sees the world as a window pointing beyond nature, time and people and secondly the contemplative prayer in which he descends with the mind into the heart and comes to know God 'by-heart'. "I even have a feeling that those who want to be active in the struggle for freedom for a lifetime will need an increasingly strong and personal experience of the presence of the spirit of God in their lives. I would not be surprised, within a few years, a search for new disciplines of prayer were to occupy the minds of many Christians who struggle with the poor for liberation."<sup>33</sup> According to Nouwen when we allow the image of the suffering Christ within us to grow into its full maturity, the ministry to the poor and the oppressed becomes a real possibility; because then we can indeed hear, see, and touch him within us as well as among us.

For Nouwen the ministry of social change is not to be separated from the change of one's own heart <sup>34</sup>. Those who are marginalized by our society carry within them a great treasure for the church. "Without prayer and community pastoral activities would end up in fruitless burnout."<sup>35</sup> A radical response to poverty is not just serving the poor but *being* poor. Nouwen's option for the poor does not exclude those who are rich.<sup>36</sup> Our search for God leads us to 'littleness' because in that place misery and mercy meet and it is there that we encounter God. Jesus' life was not a success story and his way of moving towards the places the world wants to move away from is a spiritual challenge. This way can be walked successfully only with Jesus and therefore prayer underlies action.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.2.3. The minister

Ministers are according to Nouwen confessors than functionaries. They are more shepherds than professionals. "Ministers are not individuals who can tell you exactly who God is, where good and evil are, and how to travel from this world to the next, but people whose

---

<sup>32</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* 205.

<sup>33</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* 137. (Nouwen noticed two directions of the church in Peru- struggling for the poor without reference to the divine mysteries and the church which speaks about God with little reference to the daily reality. An integrated approach is according to Nouwen truly pastoral. *cfr. Nouwen, Gracias* 170.)

<sup>34</sup> *Cfr. Nouwen, Wounded Healer* 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Cfr. Nouwen, Gracias* IX.

<sup>36</sup> Nouwen's contact with the high society helped him to see the poverty of the rich. To be able to show them the riches of God one has to be poor himself-not curious, not ambitious, not pretentious, not proud. "It is so easy to be swept off one's own feet by the glitter of the world, seduced by its apparent splendour. And yet the only place I can really be is the place of poverty, the place where there is loneliness, anger, confusion, depression, and pain. I have to go there in the name of Jesus, staying close to his name and offering his love." *See Nouwen, Road to Daybreak* 186.

<sup>37</sup> *Cfr. Nouwen, Road to Daybreak* 88-89.

articulate not-knowing makes them free to listen to the voice of God in the words of the people, in the events of the day, and in the books containing the life experience of men and women from other places and other times”<sup>38</sup>. They are not constructors of spiritual events. “Many people flock to places and persons who promise intensive experiences of togetherness, cathartic emotions of exhilaration and sweetness, and liberating sensations of rapture and ecstasy. In our desperate need for fulfillment and our restless search for the experience of divine intimacy, we are all too prone to construct our own spiritual events”<sup>39</sup>. They are inspirers to intimacy with God and with one another. By telling one’s own stories and listening to others’ stories and connecting them to the story of Jesus we have the complete theology.

Nouwen avoided giving tips for ministry and kept pointing to the basis of all life and work. Ministry requires the simple presence spent in the ultimate presence<sup>40</sup>. In Nouwen’s sight some of the basic qualities of a minister are:

#### 4.2.3.1. The minister must mature in intimacy

In the book *Intimacy*<sup>41</sup> Nouwen confronts the problem of immaturity, inefficiency and inadequate spiritual foundation of the minister. He is of the opinion that the religious maturity of the minister reflected in faith, creative love and communion with God is essential for the ministry. Nouwen considers both the personal and the professional identity of the minister as important elements of efficiency and sound mental health of the minister. The essence of the spirituality of the ministry consists of being available to God in silence, a healthy balance between presence and absence, and a deeper insight through study and reflection.

#### 4.2.3.2. A man of solitude, silence and prayer

Nouwen again and again falls back on the themes *solitude*, *silence* and *prayer* because he feels that they are very vital to ministry and the identity of the minister. He distinguished between loneliness which is a source of suffering and the roots of which are too deep and cannot be answered by peripheral solutions. Solitude is a garden of beauty, a place where we meet God in our nakedness, openness and vulnerability, a gift which we can share with others in solidarity and compassion. All human beings experience aloneness which can

---

<sup>38</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out* 74-75.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 92.

<sup>40</sup> Nouwen tries to emphasize in his books the need for a single source. Frontline ministry is rooted in prayer. The ministry of praying with small groups and celebrating joyful or sorrowful occasions, mostly with a Eucharistic celebration, was part of Nouwen’s life. He always took the initiative to pray with students, friends, or the family members. It was simple and nurturing and reminded of “what St. Paul and the apostles lived during the early years of Christianity- intimate celebrations in people’s homes, prayers, conversations, and mutual support.” See *Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey* 145.

<sup>41</sup> The book *Intimacy* is a witness to Nouwen’s great commitment to teaching and his great concern for those training themselves for ministry. Henri as a teacher was deeply committed to forming ministers for their role as Jesus’ presence to a suffering world. His writings and lectures revolve around the themes- faith, solitude, silence, prayer, woundedness, and God’s love. He wanted to teach spirituality in a spiritual way. For him the word must become alive in the class room, church or in the counselling. The incarnation theology was very dear to him. For Nouwen ministry is not solving problems but holding out the promise of salvation.

become loneliness or can be converted into solitude.

Solitude enables the minister to exercise compassionate ministry instead of a compulsive ministry. Silence teaches us and empowers us to speak. He explained how this can be

practised even in preaching, counselling as well as organising. Prayer which is descending with the mind into the heart helps the minister to act from the centre, from the heart, and act in the name of the one who is at the centre<sup>42</sup>

#### 4.2.3.3. The minister is a wounded healer

In the well structured book *Wounded Healer* on which we have already dealt with in Chapter II, Nouwen presented a profound and new approach to ministry and the term 'wounded healer' has already found a place in the dictionary of pastoral theology.

The minister himself is wounded through his personal and professional loneliness and at the same time he is a healer when he concentrates on the other person rather than on himself by offering his shared brokenness as the place where God can start his work of healing which is the beginning of true communities. In the modern world the challenge of the minister is to minister to the dislocated man, to the rootless generation and to the hopeless man. The dislocated man must be helped to follow the Christian way of combining action and contemplation. Three factors mentioned by Nouwen for the ministry to the rootless generation are spiritual guidance, compassion and contemplation. The minister's approach to the hopeless man is marked by personal presence, waiting in life and waiting in death. True Christian leadership is based on personal concern, founded on faith in the meaning and value of life and hope.

#### 4.2.3.4. Weak among the weak

Through the book *Clowning in Rome* Nouwen presented ministry as being weak among the weak. This idea confronts the practice of exercising ministry as helping the weak. Those who value solitude, celibacy and prayer are also ministers through their very presence. Nouwen sensed that within the very vulnerability of a clown lay secrets about discipleship. Ministers are not performers but clowns pointing to the basic brokenness of the humanity. They point to our dependence on God and our need for care and support<sup>43</sup>.

---

<sup>42</sup> A testimony of the power of speaking out of silence, out of prayer, is given by Luci Shaw who organised a conference before which Nouwen not only discussed with her about the theme but also prayed with her. "He kept coming back for my approval and even asked me to pray with him about an idea he wanted to present. In the empty chapel we sat there in the pew, and God was present in an almost tangible way as this appealing, unassuming servant of God asked humbly for help, for clarity of thought, for integrity, for the power of the spirit. And when the time came for him to speak, he was ignited with that power. Love and wisdom streamed from him, and we were powerfully affected for good." See *Christopher Vinck, Nouwen Then 52*.

<sup>43</sup> Even though the book *Clowning in Rome* is addressed to the religious and priests, the focus is not on celibacy but on the importance of solitude, silence and prayer in the life of the celibates. The clowning theology is an example of how Nouwen was not interested in presenting theology as a system, rather he tried to present it as an art. For him what mattered was the experience of God and that required a movement, from... to. He avoided extremes in order to find somewhere in the middle the Eternal one. The whole purpose of

#### 4.2.3.5. Minister speaks and acts in the name of Jesus

Nouwen saw it a great danger in ministry to show or prove what one can. So he dedicated a book *In the name of Jesus* to explain the possible temptations. This book cautions against the temptations to be relevant, popular and powerful. There is a shift of emphasis from efficiency to solidarity and from individual performance to common witness. The minister witnesses to Jesus and speaks and acts in the name of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> Prayer and communion with God stays again in the centre. We find Nouwen's references to the possible dangers in ministry in *Creative ministry* also ( see p.71-72.) The thrust of the book *In the name of Jesus* shows the changes in Nouwen himself. His life in Daybreak with the handicapped people inspired him to concentrate on downward mobility, the blessedness of the poor, the theology of weakness, being led etc. What is clearly noticeable in Nouwen's later books is that he shifts the emphasis from minister to Jesus. Jesus is the good news. In his name we minister. He is the incarnated Word, revelation of God's love, the visible guarantee of God's faithfulness and a sign of God's presence in our midst. Acting in the name of Jesus implies making the word of God the centre of the minister's life. Nouwen himself lived it.

### 4.3. Some observations about the theme-frequencies or variations

#### 4.3.1. What is left behind?

Looking at Nouwen's books chronologically I feel that Nouwen has left behind him certain themes and concentrated on new themes. It helps us to understand the developments in his thinking along with his maturing in age and in faith. I shall mention here only a few of them.

##### 4.3.1.1. Pastoral categories

As a pastoral theologian Nouwen started to write automatically in pastoral categories. In the book *Intimacy* he speaks about the problems of the minister and the training for ministry. In *Creative Ministry* the pastoral fields are the subjects of his attention. A few more books speak about pastoral themes. But we see clearly that Nouwen slowly left this field and wrote more about spiritual themes. Another concern which took a different direction was the social aspect of ministry. Nouwen was very much for the Liberation-theology. He himself went to South America to be with the poor. But slowly Nouwen's understanding of poverty took a spiritual dimension and he connected it to prayer, non-violence, community, contemplation etc. Nouwen did not want to see the cause of justice isolated from the total

---

theology is knowledge of God – communion with God in prayer. Nouwen preferred more a mystical theology and the ultimate aim of ministry is to lead people to mystical experience. The pastoral concept of Nouwen is unconventional. He is far from dogmatising and moralising. His concern for the individuals especially those needing care and love like Aids-patients, bereaved, sick, exploited, separated and who are victims of interruptions is concrete and comes from the heart.

<sup>44</sup> John Mogabgab, Henri's teaching assistant at Yale says that Henri made the Bible come alive and powerful. "During the five years I was Henri's research and teaching assistant at Yale, I had many opportunities to witness, in his encounters with God's Word, the power pulsing deep within the strange world of the Bible. There were times, especially when Henri's whole body would tense or tremble with the energy of a particular Scripture text." See Christopher Vinck, *Nouwen Then* 57.

plan of God's redemption of the mankind. The poor are not to be pitied upon, rather they call the rich to conversion. There is a 'reverse mission' of the poor calling the rich to conversion. The victims of oppression become the bearers of the good news for the oppressors. The only person I can really convert is myself. God's question to me is how much I am willing to change myself and not what is the fate of others.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.3.1.2. Writing for the Clerics

Although Nouwen has not explicitly anywhere mentioned that he was tired of writing for priests about ministry, a careful look into the contents of the books he wrote shows that in the beginning he wrote more for the ministers and candidates aspiring for ministry, but later he concentrated more on spiritual themes and reflections on spiritual life. May be his own understanding that being a good Christian forms the foundation of being a minister and his gradual identification with all those who suffer or seek God made him to shift his emphasis from clericalism to living as a good Christian. There is a clear move from writing for the ministers and stressing their function to the spirituality of the minister which is common to all Christians as well. That is one of the points which emerges strongly in our work.

#### 4.3.2. What is new?

If we look at the writings and life we feel that Nouwen was growing into certain themes. Towards the 90s Nouwen's themes were mainly belovedness, death, and resurrection. We have seen it at the end of the third chapter. During the last five years the death was a frequent theme. What is important about it is that he wrote about its inevitability without diluting the promises it holds. One of the important conversions noticeable in the life and writings of Nouwen is the notion of ministry as giving and receiving.

##### 4.3.2.1. Reverse ministry

Nouwen lays importance on the fact that ministry is not a one way traffic of giving alone. It is giving and receiving. A true minister sees God's face in those who need care and believes that "ministry is, first of all, receiving God's blessing from those to whom we minister."<sup>46</sup> Nouwen's stay in South America and in Daybreak taught him the lesson that ministers are not only givers but also receivers. As ministers we are called to receive the fruits of the faith of other people. It can be their willingness to forgive, their joy in the midst of suffering, and their hope and courage. Our call to live a life in the spirit of Jesus implies being sent out to give and receive the gifts of God to and from all people and nations. Sharing the gifts without manipulation and violence is important but equally important is "to receive the fruits of the lives of the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering as gifts offered for the conversion of the rich."<sup>47</sup> Thus the fruitfulness of our life and ministry brings forth life, "new life, life that manifests itself in new, fresh, and unique ways: a child, a poem, a song, a kind word, a gentle embrace, a caring hand, or a new communion among the nations."<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Here and Now* 59.

<sup>46</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* 83.

<sup>47</sup> Nouwen, *Lifesigns* 77.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 81.

#### 4.3.2.2. Spiritual life

For Nouwen spiritual life is inseparable from ministry. In the beginning he stressed prayer and contemplation. In the course of time we see that Nouwen specified the elements which form the spiritual life. He brings in terms like hope, care, trust, gratitude etc. The freedom from enslaving fear is the starting point of spiritual life. We can build it up with trust, hope, and care. Nouwen also recommended concrete spiritual disciplines like spiritual direction, prayer, solitude, silence, reading spiritual books, healthy friendships and listening to the nature. Towards the second phase of his life there is a strong focussing on the spiritual life and it's growth both for the ministers as well as for all Christians.

#### 4.3.2.3. Belovedness

Being beloved and becoming beloved<sup>49</sup> can be said to be the summery of Nouwen's teaching. This is possible when one sees himself as the glory of God and sees in others the glory of God<sup>50</sup>. This true identity of ours is not easy to accept. "The truth, even though I cannot feel it right now, is that I am the beloved from all eternity and am held safe in an everlasting embrace"<sup>51</sup>. One of the problems for Nouwen himself was to trust the voice of love. "I kept refusing to hear the voice that speaks from the very depth of my being and says: 'you are my beloved, on you my favor rests'. That voice has always been there, but it seems that I was much more eager to listen to other, louder voice saying: 'prove that you are worth something; do something relevant, spectacular or powerful, and then you will earn the love you so desire'<sup>52</sup>. Nouwen learned that embracing the truth of our belovedness makes us free, loving, compassionate and fearless to die. Our being beloved or the 'first love' of God is the truth of our being. For that we have to unveil the lie of the world that we have to be successful, relevant and productive in order to be loved or that we are not good enough. We have developed the theme belovedness in our work. Other than in the books *Life of the beloved* and *Return of the prodigal son* we find this theme appearing in several places especially in the *Inner voice of love*.

#### 4.3.2.4. Body and the spirituality of incarnation

I have already mentioned that his struggle with his own body prevented Nouwen from speaking or writing about it openly. But this theme was becoming stronger in the later years of Nouwen's life. "You have never felt completely safe in your body. But God wants to love you in all that you are, spirit and body...How then do you bring your body home? By letting it participate in your deepest desire to receive and offer love. Your body needs to be held and to hold, to be touched and to touch"<sup>53</sup>. For Nouwen accepting his body was living a true

---

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Life of the beloved* 26,37.

<sup>50</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Genese* 53.

<sup>51</sup> Nouwen, *Life of the beloved* 49.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 28-29. ( In the book *The inner voice of Love* Nouwen says that affirming one's gift from God and resisting those who would deny God's gracious acts in our lives is a real challenge not only in the life of the minister but for everyone who wants to live a spiritual life. "When you discover in yourself something that is a gift from God, you have to claim it and not let it be taken away from you". p.44)

<sup>53</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of Love* 19. (Michael Ford feels that in caring for Adam Nouwen discovered the sacredness of touch and slowly learned the body language. See Ford 159.)

spirituality. “A new spirituality is being born in you. Not body denying, or body indulging but truly incarnational.<sup>54</sup>” The word of God taking the human flesh shows the deep message of the body. Especially where bodies are broken and misused God is suffering in and through the humanity. Denying the body in the deeper sense can mean excluding the physically or spiritually homeless. Ministry can mean accepting the body and also giving a body.

#### 4.3. 2.5. Theology of weakness

Nouwen’s theology of weakness is inseparable from a spirituality of weakness, something about which Nouwen not only spoke about but also lived. According to him it were the weak themselves who led him to a new life. Caring for Adam revealed many spiritual truths to Nouwen. God is present in the midst of weakness. Nouwen moved from doing to being. The worth of a person is his being, being born of God and being precious and beloved in his sight. Jesus taught us to look at our experiences of brokenness, limitedness, woundedness and frailty with God’s eye. By embracing our brokenness we become spiritually strong and precious in the sight of God. Seeing the presence of God in the vulnerability of a person is ‘seeing from above’. Communities around the broken bodies are strong and spiritual because they reflect God’s presence in the midst of weakness. In their weakness the ‘poor’ are teachers and guides and so as much givers as receivers. They draw our attention to the fact God blesses spiritual poverty with his special presence and that our being is more important than our doing<sup>55</sup>.

Nouwen’s own life is a gradual movement from doing to being. He longed for more time to pray, to be simply with the friends, to spend ‘useless’ time with God and with the ‘poor’. Nouwen discovered in *passion* a new spiritual dimension. “All action ends in passion because the response to our action is out of our hands. That is the mystery of work, the mystery of love, the mystery of friendship, the mystery of community- they always involve waiting.”<sup>56</sup> According to Nouwen it is God’s vision that human life is a mission to proclaim the unconditional love of God in this world. God’s love for us, especially in human brokenness is revealed through Jesus’ way of vulnerability. The spirit of God is present in a special way in the community of faith that comes together as a fellowship of the weak with the poor in the centre.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>55</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Adam: God's beloved* 55-56. (Nouwen calls it a ‘reversal of values’ which opens up a new spiritual territory. Narrating a moving scene on Good Friday Nouwen shows not only how God suffers with us but also how to treat the suffering. “Today we brought the cross into the chapel and placed it on the lap of Michael, who was resting in his beanbag. Michael, who has severe cerebral palsy, was glad to ‘hold’ the cross and let people come to it to pray. Michael’s spastic body and the body of Jesus on the cross became like one body. As people formed a line to kiss the feet of Jesus on the cross, they realized that Jesus continues to suffer until the end of time in the countless people whose hearts and bodies are broken.” See *Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey* 141. “In Jesus all human suffering is collected. The broken heart of Jesus is the broken heart of God. The broken heart of God is the broken heart of the world.[...] Our care for the body calls us to unity beyond organisation, to intimacy beyond eroticism, and to integrity beyond psychological wholeness.” *Ibid.* 142)

<sup>56</sup> Nouwen, *Path of Waiting* 38. (Nouwen has written about the waiting *for* God and the waiting *of* God. In the Bible we have the examples of the active and patient waiting of being fully present to the moment of healing. Waiting can also be a waiting together and it has to be open-ended. An important aspect of waiting is giving up the desire to be in control and the willingness to be led to where I would rather not go. See *Nouwen, The path of waiting* pp. 15,16,24,35.)

<sup>57</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* 151.

The theology of weakness does not romanticise suffering, excuse incompetence, recommend submissiveness, self-denigration or defeat. It is not dooming oneself to be a doormat for the power-hungry society. Nor is it being passive, soft and subservient. “A theology of weakness challenges us to look at weakness not as a worldly weakness that allows us to be manipulated by the powerful in society and church, but as a total and unconditional dependence on God that opens us to be true channels of the divine power that heals the wounds of humanity and renews the face of the earth. The theology of weakness claims power, God’s power, the all transforming power of love.[...]A theology of weakness wants, ultimately, to show that God offers us, human beings, the divine power to walk on the earth confidently with heads erect.”<sup>58</sup> Nouwen says that there is a divine peace in the midst of weakness. That is his message of peace for the world. This is a challenging message for today's terror and war ridden world in which weakness and non-productivity are looked down upon with contempt. Few people are deeply religious to see the weakness as a reality of life and to believe that God is at work even in the midst of weakness.

#### 4.3.2.6. Downward mobility

The second phase of Nouwen’s life was a downward mobility and accordingly he also wrote a lot about the value of it and also of the struggles involved. His moving down from Harvard to Daybreak is the natural consequence of his new direction that stripping oneself of power and prestige in order to be empowered by God is in accordance with God’s own descending to the humanity. The seed that descends to the earth bears fruit. The glance of the upward movement is irresistible but not truly rewarding. The kenosis of Jesus is an example and invitation for all to be rooted in the love of God. It is not a running away from the world or ‘life realities’ but a following of Jesus and his Kingdom. Here the ministers are asked to follow the servant leadership of Jesus. The crowning of spiritual life for Nouwen is the willingness to be led. It is not easy not to be in control and let God lead us, and also be led by others.

#### 4.3.3. What is repeated?

Nouwen’s critics pointed out his repetitions of the same themes. But I feel that certain topics were so important for him that he brought our attention to them again and again. They help us also to understand the concern which underlies his writings and life. Some of such themes are:

##### 4.3.3.1. Availability

Nouwen's strength was his availability - physical and mental. This is one of the recurring theme in his writing too. For Nouwen pastoral care is also making one’s own life-journey available to fellow travellers and laying down one’s own life. This is applicable to Christian life too. “I have lived my whole life with the desire to help others in their journey, but I have always realized that I had little else to offer than my own, the journey I am making myself. How can I announce joy, peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation unless they are part of my own flesh and blood? I have always wanted to be a good shepherd for others, but I have always known, too, that good shepherds lay down their own lives- their pains and joys, their doubts and hopes, their fears and their love- for their friends.”<sup>59</sup> Availability means also

<sup>58</sup> Nouwen, *The path of power* 33-34.

<sup>59</sup> Nouwen, *Our greatest gift* Xi.

being attentive and present, being hospitable by creating space, and making the life journey together.

Making oneself available is needed in all the fields of ministry. It can be active as well as passive. According to Nouwen contemplatives like Thomas Merton are also true ministers. "He indeed made his own life available to others to help them find their own- and not his-way. In this sense, he was and still is a true minister, creating the free space where others can enter and discover God's voice in their lives."<sup>60</sup>

#### 4.3.3.2. Solitude and silence

Solitude is a word which recurs in many of his books. Nouwen put together the basic human loneliness and the importance of solitude. "There was a time when silence was normal and a lot of racket disturbed us. But today, noise is the normal fare, and silence, strange as it may seem, has become the real disturbance."<sup>61</sup> The tendency today is to become busy. "When we have no project to finish, no friend to visit, no book to read, no television to watch or no record to play, and when we are left all alone by ourselves we are brought so close to the revelation of our basic human aloneness ... that we will do anything to get busy again and continue the game[...]. When we live with a solitude of heart, we can listen with attention to the words and worlds of others, but when we are driven by loneliness, we tend to select just those remarks and events that bring immediate satisfaction to our own craving needs."<sup>62</sup> We have dealt with it in detail under the titles: *Out of solitude*, *Clowning in Rome*, *Reaching out* and *The way of the heart*. The theme solitude is connected to several other themes like prayer, silence, compassion, solidarity, Intimacy, ministry etc. For Nouwen silence and solitude were so important that "without a lonely place our lives are in danger. Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening speaking no longer heals, that without distance closeness cannot cure"<sup>63</sup>. For Henri solitude was one of the essential spiritual disciplines. It is not a sort of punishment. It is rather a basic openness to others and to the world and a receptive emptiness. Solitude is the spiritual path with certain boundaries.

#### 4.3.3.4. Prayer

Prayer is a theme which runs from the first book to the last without interruption. We have dealt with it as we analysed the books: *Intimacy*, *With open hands*, *Clowning in Rome*, *The way of the heart*, *In the name of Jesus*, and *Here and now*. It is connected to almost all the themes. Nouwen's reflection on prayer is not the discovery of his brain but the fruit of his own struggles and the confession of his heart. His struggles, anxieties, doubts as well as ecstasies are outspoken in solidarity with those who are also on the same journey to respond to the innermost call and desire to experience the love of the one whose name is Love. Truly praying is converting thoughts into prayer and descending with the mind into the heart. The prayer of the heart is the most rewarding form of prayer.

#### 4.3.3.5. Social engagement

---

<sup>60</sup> Nouwen, *Genese* 184.

<sup>61</sup> Nouwen, *With Open Hands* 36.

<sup>62</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out* 17,26.

<sup>63</sup> Nouwen, *Out of solitude* 14.

For Nouwen prayer without action is incomplete. Our social concern, solidarity with the poor, compassion towards the suffering, resistance to the evil and oppressive systems and structures, and confronting the oppressor are part of the Gospel values. However for Nouwen the oppressor needs equally our compassion and the chance of conversion. Violence is no solution to change the world. Non-violent resistance, prayer and community are the answers to peace and justice. Nouwen was first impressed by the liberation theology but later he was more convinced of the contemplative way of Thomas Merton. The starting point of the change in the world is the change of the individuals and the best way is to start with oneself.

#### 4.3.3.6. Community

Nouwen was a very independent person but loved community. The community has an ecclesiological as well as spiritual dimension. Only remaining anchored in the community we can experience intimacy and spiritual growth. It need not be always a physical togetherness but a spiritual and supporting bond. Being together and doing together has a missionary and witnessing character.

#### 4.3.3.7. Eucharist

A very quick look at the writings will show that Eucharist was an important theme for Nouwen. He himself confessed that it was the centre of his life. The biographers also did not miss the point that he was faithful to the celebration of the Eucharist<sup>64</sup>. Nouwen's reflections on the Eucharist are shared in the books *With burning Hearts* and *Can you drink the cup* which we have already seen in Chapter III.

The very deep Eucharistic Theology of Nouwen is closely connected to ministry. Nouwen dedicated two books to this theme and in several places of other books also this theme is mentioned. For Nouwen the Eucharist is not only the bread of life but also a way of life. According to Nouwen in the Eucharist absence and presence touches each other. "Precisely where we feel most present to each other we experience deeply the absence of those we love. And precisely at moments of great loss we can discover a new sense of closeness and intimacy. This is also what the Eucharist is about. We announce the presence of Christ among us until he comes again! There is both presence *and* absence, closeness *and* distance, an experience of at-homeness on the way home. I was struck again by the paradox that loving someone deeply means opening yourself to the pain of her or his absence."<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> In his afterword to the book *Sabbatical Journey* Nathan testifies that Nouwen celebrated the Eucharist even in the hospital room. That shows how important was Eucharist and prayer for Nouwen. "On Friday morning we pulled the curtain around his bed, and amid the hustle and bustle of hospital life Henri and I celebrated the Eucharist together. It was simple, prayerful, and truly a moment of giving thanks. Less than twenty-four hours before he died, Henri yet again entered into the mystery of what had been for him the most central act of his life." See *Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey* 225.

<sup>65</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* 114. (For Nouwen the Eucharist had a wider connotation. "The presence of Christ in the Eucharist becomes a 'special problem' only when we have lost our sense of His presence in all that is, grows, lives and dies." See *Nouwen, Creative Ministry* 103. Eucharist points out towards God's way of embracing and including everyone and his presence everywhere and in everything.)

The Eucharistic theology of Henri becomes appealing not only because of the insights but also because of his own person who tried to live what he wrote.<sup>66</sup> Celebrating the Eucharist is celebrating our belovedness<sup>67</sup>. Nouwen used the Eucharistic words - Taking, Blessing, Breaking and Giving - to show how we can live as the beloved when we take our lives in the hands, bless it, break it and give it to others in the Eucharistic way. Eucharistic life involves holding the cup of our lives. "Holding the cup of our life means looking critically at what we are living.

This requires great courage, because when we start looking, we might be terrified by what we see"<sup>68</sup>. We lift the cup of our life to proclaim the life that we claim as ours and to bless others with it. "We lift the cup 'to life', to affirm our life together and celebrate it as gift from God ... When we are fully able to embrace our own lives, we discover that what we claim we also want to proclaim."<sup>69</sup>

#### 4.3.3.8. Death

Nouwen did not shy away the theme Death. Nouwen started writing about this topic after the death of his mother. Other circumstances led him to write about it again. Although he would not have welcomed an early death Nouwen was prepared for death. "From the very beginning, Nouwen counseled us to see dying as a continual process- not a sudden interruption, but a dynamic dimension of living in each moment. We should not be surprised when suffering and death come."<sup>70</sup> One of Nouwen's funeral homily titled *On Departure* draws our attention. "Jesus' farewell today is an invitation to understand our life as a constant departure from the familiar to the real, a growing sense of freedom and independence, ... a constant dying away from the past in which the final departure is a final independence. Life is a school in which we are trained to depart. If this is true, death is no longer a cruel destiny [that] ruins all efforts ..., but a signal to deeper understanding. We

---

<sup>66</sup> Robert Jonas puts it beautifully in the following words, "perhaps this powerful and frail, healed and broken, happy and sorrowful man embodied something to which the Eucharist points. For those who believe Henri's vision, this meal that he loved is a tuning of heaven and earth, a true alignment and integration of mortal and immortal, temporal and eternal. [...] His perseverance did not save him from personal suffering, cure his emotional wounds, make him an effective agent of social change, or answer everybody's spiritual questions. [...] Perhaps, because he loved the Eucharist so completely, his life and death are gradually becoming sacred bread and wine for others. [...] He showed us all that the very things we often flee- our vulnerability and mortality- can, at any moment, become the place of holy transfiguration, for us and for the world." See *Robert Jonas, Henri Nouwen lxviii-lxix.*

<sup>67</sup> 'Belovedness' is a central theme for Nouwen. See the books *Life of the beloved* and *Adam, God's beloved.*

<sup>68</sup> Nouwen, *Can you drink the cup* 27. (Henri wrote that we become what we pray. Chris sees a parallel in the Eucharist too. "Holding our cup is an opportunity for confession...Yet it is also an opportunity for thanksgiving, receiving our sorrows and joys, as well as our missteps and advances, with equanimity, allowing them to touch and to shape our souls into the persons we want to become". See *Chris Glaser, Henri's Mantel 136.*)

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 57,58. The Hebrew word for saying Prosit is 'L'chaim' which means to life. (Chris Glaser writes commenting on Nouwen's writings on the Eucharist; "We follow Jesus, who held his cup, contemplating his call in the wilderness and other 'lonely places' in prayer, and then lifted his cup in ministry and mission, and drank his cup of passion, passing it on to his disciples who would further his work and take it to the ends of the earth, saying, 'Drink from it all of you'. In proclaiming what we claim, we offer one another not only a taste of our lives, but the fruit of our lives, what has grown in our own fertile soil- sometimes, frankly, growing out of life's manure, sometimes growing out of life's more welcome nutrients". See *Chris Glaser, Henri's Mantel 138.*)

<sup>70</sup> Jonas, *Henri Nouwen lxiv.*

can love, not in spite of death, but because of it.”<sup>71</sup> The question of death is connected to the question of aging. His book on aging and care helps us to grow in age with nobility. It is of importance in our today's pastoral context in which the old people are not always seen and treated in the most Christian way. Nouwen's reflections on death help us to die without an enslaving fear.

#### 4.4. Influence of biography on writing and vice versa

In the above considerations we have closely watched the life and favourite themes which are intensely connected to each other. Here I am trying to make a literary-biographical appraisal to bring out the mutual influence that marks Nouwen's life and writings. There are very many parallels between the dominant themes in his writings and his life.

##### 4.4.1. Nouwen's vocation and life as priest

We have seen biographers writing and Nouwen himself confessing that his desire to become a priest was present from the very early age. Nouwen never looked back. I think it is in this sense that Ford writes that 'a priest is born'.<sup>72</sup> What is significant is that two voices followed him, the voice of his father saying that he should be successful and efficient and the voice of his mother saying that he should be a good priest. It is interesting and important to notice that he followed more the first voice during the first phase of his life but the voice of his mother emerged stronger during the second phase. Nouwen was convinced of his priestly vocation and wrote the first books about priests and for the priests or priestly candidates.

Later on Nouwen's understanding of the priesthood underwent some changes<sup>73</sup> The family background with its pressure to perform well, his conflicts caused by the unusual sexual drives and unquenched thirst for love, all that must have helped the one-sided ascending on the career-ladder which only brought frustration, partly due to the competitive mentality of the academic world and partly due to his inner conflicts, which made Nouwen to write as a way of redemption.

The paradox is that Nouwen himself is weighed down and confused and made a retreat to the solitude of the Trappist Monastery.<sup>74</sup> Three spiritual books and a journal followed. He was strengthened to write two more books for the ministers *Living Reminder* and *Clowning in Rome*. Interestingly enough he had to confront himself once again after the death of his

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Lxv.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Ford, *The wounded prophet* 70.

<sup>73</sup> Nouwen's first mass in the cathedral was celebrated with the golden chalice but later the Eucharistic celebrations with the 'weak' in *Daybreak* was with a simple transparent cup.

<sup>74</sup> The struggle about his vocation is noticeable also in the choice of the topics for the books. The books *Intimacy* and *Creative ministry* are more theoretical and related to the profession. But the books that follow show clearly Nouwen's awareness of the problem of the tension between function and identity. So the books *With Open Hands* and *Thomas Merton* concentrate on prayer and contemplation. Nouwen is never at peace only with prayer alone because the Christian way is the way of contemplation and action. So he writes again for the ministers *Wounded Healer*. The later books suggest that Nouwen was continuously in search of his real vocation.

mother and moved to the solitude of the monastery. Two spiritual books appeared followed by a book for the ministers *The Way of the Heart*. Finally the theme spiritual life got the priority and Nouwen wrote some twenty-five books of which only one points out towards the dangers in ministry: *In the Name of Jesus*.

The point I want to elucidate from this phenomenon is that in Nouwen there was a constant and creative tension between reality and ideal, between action and the question of the identity of the minister. From action to contemplation and from contemplation to action is the slogan of Nouwen. Both the books and his life are witnesses of this truth. The ground for this must have been his own restless and impatient search for the centre of his life and a life and ministry from that place which he rightly called the heart. Nouwen tried to live his vocation as priest most authentically and relentlessly both through his writing, teaching, preaching, counselling, organizing, and celebrating as well as by sharing his woundedness with the wounded humanity. The existential situation was the springboard into the spiritual realm for Nouwen.

For Nouwen 'vocation' meant more the basic call of every Christian. Living our lives gracefully and carefully is our great vocation<sup>75</sup>. It is to be distinguished from profession and career. Career that expresses obedience to our vocation does not stand on the way. The minister's vocation consists of introducing depth into human lives and letting God's beckoning voice resound in the midst of other voices. Nouwen thought for a while that it was his vocation to live with the poor in Latin America. But at Daybreak Nouwen fully understood what was his real vocation. "For many years I tried to get a glimpse of God by looking carefully at the varieties of human experience: loneliness and love, sorrow and joy, resentment and gratitude, war and peace. I sought to understand the ups and downs of the human soul, to discern there a hunger and thirst that only a God whose name is Love could satisfy. I tried to discover the lasting beyond the passing, the eternal beyond the temporal, the perfect love beyond all paralysing fears, and the divine compassion beyond the mortal quality of our existence to a presence larger, deeper, wider, and more beautiful than we can imagine, and to speak about that presence as a presence that can already now be seen, heard, and touched by those who are willing to believe. However during my time here at Daybreak, I have been led to an inner palace where I had not been before. It is the place where I am held safe in the embrace of an all-loving Father who calls me by name and says, 'You are my beloved son, on you my favour rests' "<sup>76</sup>. Nouwen's life was a constant search for his true vocation and his writings helped him to remain faithful in his search.

According to Nouwen his true vocation was to enter into the inner sanctuary of his own being where God had chosen to dwell. From that place he could speak and write back into the many places of his own and other people's restless lives. "I know now that I have to speak from eternity into time, from the lasting joy into the passing realities, of our short existence in this world, from the house of love into the houses of fear, from God's abode into the dwellings of human beings."<sup>77</sup> Nouwen called it the prophetic vision: looking at people and this world through the eyes of God. Thus we see how Nouwen's vocation

---

<sup>75</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, Aging, the fulfillment of life 14. (Beumer also interprets vocation as following one's **call** to find "the very specific place (in you, around you) to which you are being called so that you can be completely yourself, can become whole, can be the very best that you are capable of being" *Beumer, Henri Nouwen* 73.

<sup>76</sup> Cfr. Beumer, Henri Nouwen 81.

<sup>77</sup> Nouwen, Return of the prodigal son 17.

slowly evolves from teaching and writing, living with the poor in Latin America, living with the handicapped to becoming the beloved son and the loving father. The book *Return of the prodigal son* is also a story of Nouwen's vocation. He left the family, transformed the elder son in him and finally became the loving father<sup>78</sup>.

#### 4.4.2. Leaving the family, coming home and becoming the father

To follow one's vocation one has to leave the family. "Family can give us a sense of belonging, but in order to claim our deepest belonging, our belonging to God, we have to move away from those who pretend to know us and discover the deepest source of our lives. Our parents, brothers, and sisters do not own us. Without leaving them it is hard to fully become free and listen to the One who called us even before we were born."<sup>79</sup>

One of the difficult processes in the spiritual journey is to "unhook ourselves from the restraining emotional bonds that prevent us from following our deepest vocation."<sup>80</sup> The invitation of Jesus to leave father, mother, brothers and sisters implies primarily the willingness to set ourselves free from "everyone who prevents us from fully knowing God's unconditional love."<sup>81</sup> Both the love of the family and the wounds received from the family can prevent us from following our vocation. Forgiveness is a healthy way of leaving the bonds that keep us captives. According to Nouwen it is important to forgive our parents for their imperfect love and let our children forgive us for our imperfect love. The experience of the real source of love helps us to be grateful for our own lives and that of others. In this sense parents can receive children as God's gift, provide them for a while a friendly space to grow and finally pass them on as gifts for others. The only way to prevent the pain of love from destroying us or the worrying mind making us restless is to set the hearts on His Kingdom first.<sup>82</sup>

Moving to Daybreak was the way back to the father for Nouwen, although he knew that he had not yet arrived and that he was not yet free to be held by the father. Nouwen also tried to find God somewhere, in something till he heard the inner voice of love and truth telling him that he is God's home, that God lives in his innermost being<sup>83</sup>. Nouwen realised that the ultimate goal of our spiritual journey is to become perfect in love like our heavenly father. In both spiritual and real sense Nouwen left his family. Slowly he became a spiritual adult and finally he became a loving and merciful father. Through his spiritual maturing Nouwen was not far from this goal as he left the home at Daybreak for the heavenly home. It was a second or third leaving to come back to the true home.

---

<sup>78</sup> Nouwen left his family as well as his country both in the literal and spiritual sense.

<sup>79</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* 209.

<sup>80</sup> Nouwen, *Here and Now* 113.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 114

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

<sup>83</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.* 14-16. (For Nouwen the gradual unfolding of the spiritual mysteries and his own spiritual growth had a lot to do with the painting of Rembrandt. Nouwen identifies himself with the younger son who wandered far and wide with his teaching, preaching and searching his vocation but feeling homeless and tired and longing for the compassionate love of the merciful father. Going to Daybreak was really going home.)

#### 4.4.3. Downward mobility

The self-emptying of Jesus in Phil. 2, 6-8 was one of Nouwen's favourite themes and it carries a special meaning when we consider Nouwen's own life of 'descending' and experiencing the powerlessness. This according to Nouwen is the way to be filled by God's power which enables us to be in solidarity with the powerless with the power of love. God's own response to the diabolic (divisive) power is powerlessness. "In Jesus of Nazareth, the powerless God appeared among us to unmask the illusion of power, to disarm the prince of darkness who rules the world, and to bring the divided human race to a new unity."<sup>84</sup> The birth and death of Jesus are clear examples of God's proving his power through powerlessness. His life rooted in the Beatitudes was also a 'powerless' way of living. The downward mobility is the movement of the kingdom of God, God reaching out to man, God coming down to save the humanity. We are called to follow the way of Jesus against the upward currents of our time.

##### 4.4.3.1. Jesus' way

The way of Jesus is the descending way of the cross, the way of *becoming* poor, not desiring success and accomplishment, giving up being in control and the illusion of greatness. Jesus compassion and sharing in our poverty is an invitation to forgive, care, heal and create a community of love. "It is the way not of upward mobility but of downward mobility. It is going to the bottom, staying behind the sets, and choosing the last place!"<sup>85</sup> The way of Jesus is "the way of hiddenness, powerlessness and littleness."<sup>86</sup> This self-emptying, humble way against the desire for influence, power, success and popularity is the road to peace and joy.

In the descending way of the incarnation Christ emptied himself, suffered misery and a cruel death, not as a masochist, but as the way to know God. Through Jesus "the descending way of love, the way to the poor, the broken and oppressed becomes the ascending way of love, the way to joy, peace and new life. The cross is transformed from a sign of defeat into a sign of victory, from a sign of despair into a sign of hope, from a sign of death into a sign of life."<sup>87</sup> The descending way for each one is different. The way God wants us to tread is concealed in the heart, may be overgrown with weeds. In prayer we need to clear the way and walk with small steps of love. Participation in the Eucharistic bread which came down from heaven helps us to learn gradually to walk Christ's kenosis. "If we want to follow Christ and 'have his mind', we are called to empty ourselves of these privileges and become servants of the people. True servants depend on those whom they serve. They are called to live lives in which others guide them, often to places they would rather not go."<sup>88</sup> A grateful minister sees that the Lord himself is the gift. "The mystery of ministry is that the Lord is to

---

<sup>84</sup> Nouwen, *The path of power* 18.

<sup>85</sup> Nouwen, *Bread for the journey* June 28.

<sup>86</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 118. (According to Christopher Vinck the pattern of Nouwen's life consisted of breaking down barriers of professionalism and entering the 'holy inefficiency' See *Christopher Vink, Nouwen Then* p.23. The first part of Nouwen's life was more an upward mobility and the second part a clear downward mobility. Christopher feels that Nouwen's mobility was an inward mobility rather than a downward mobility. Like David Thoreau who returned to solitude when he was not recognised as a writer and wanted to learn what life had to teach, Nouwen also learned a lesson that the essence of life is something other than the demands and distractions of the compulsive society. See *Ibid.* 31.)

<sup>87</sup> Nouwen, *Letter to Marc about Jesus* 47.

<sup>88</sup> Nouwen, *Gracias* 19.

be found where we minister” (Mt. 25, 40).

#### 4.4.3.2. Upward mobility

According to Nouwen moving upwards, climbing the ladder upwards, proving one’s worth and capabilities; these are typical tendencies of today. People striving the upward mobility often lack contact with their interior and are often empty, lonely, and frustrated. This was one of Nouwen’s concerns because he experienced it in himself and in many of those with whom he had to do. “Everything in me wants to move upward.”<sup>89</sup> At another place he says, “I notice in myself how difficult it is to change direction on the ladder.”<sup>90</sup> On his ‘road to Daybreak’ Nouwen experienced this very much. “Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I am a part.”<sup>91</sup>

The world with its compulsions and competitions suggests to climb the ladder and every fibre of our being rebels against it when we want to change the direction. Making it to the top, entering the limelight or breaking the records are rewarded with money and fame. However there is also a trap hidden in it which only a few people see. “The higher we climb on the ladder of success, the more glory we collect. But this same glory also creates our darkness. Human glory, based on competition, leads to rivalry; rivalry carries within it the beginning of violence; and violence is the way to death. Thus human glory proves to be vain glory, false glory, mortal glory.”<sup>92</sup>

From his own experience Nouwen proved that becoming poor is at the same time becoming rich internally. “There has been so much individualism, competition, rivalry, privileges, favours, and exceptions in my way of living that few deep and lasting bonds could grow.”<sup>93</sup> The longing of the soul is to enter into a bond with God and with one another. “He (Jesus) came to invite us to enter with him into that intimate covenant that exists between himself and his Father. This is the bond that is the source and goal of all bonding. All creation is called to unity with God in and through Jesus, whose whole being is bonded in love to his divine Father.”<sup>94</sup> According to Nouwen only this way we can form a community of God’s people and care for each other. A community can be built not on words but on the body, that is, caring for each other. “At L’Arche the body is the place where the word is met. It is in relationship to the wounded body of the handicapped person that I must learn to discover God.”<sup>95</sup>

#### 4.4.3.3. Ministry and downward mobility

Jesus has clearly warned against the upward tendency when he speaks about being in the world and not of the world. In the book *In the Name of Jesus* we have already touched this point (Nr. 13). This point is repeated in other books too. “A good leader is able to ‘decrease’ so that others can ‘increase’. It certainly requires a great inner strength and confidence to ‘let go’ of the dominant position and let others develop their leadership with your

<sup>89</sup> Nouwen, Road to Daybreak 154.

<sup>90</sup> Nouwen, Letter to Marc about Jesus 41.

<sup>91</sup> Nouwen, Road to Daybreak 154.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>95</sup> Nouwen, Road to Daybreak 151.

affirmation and support. It is no secret that in church and society many leaders cling to their positions as long as they can.”<sup>96</sup> Nouwen added that, “The long painful history of the church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led. Those who resisted this temptation to the end and thereby gives us hope are the true saints.”<sup>97</sup> Again, “Dealing with burning issues without being rooted in a deep personal relationship with God easily leads to divisiveness because, before we know it, our sense of self is caught up in our opinion about a given subject. But when we are securely rooted in personal intimacy with the source of life, it will be possible to remain flexible without being relativistic.”<sup>98</sup> This means choosing intimacy over power and compassion, over control. By allowing God’s grace to enter into our own and other’s lives, we can welcome another’s way as a faithful response that may differ from our own faithful response.<sup>99</sup> Ministry requires a solid spirituality. To stand up to the temptations and compulsions of the world and to bring comfort, healing and life to the suffering people as an act of witnessing to the loving and redeeming presence of God, the minister must tread the way of Jesus. It is the radical, downward and vulnerable way of Jesus. The minister’s willingness to make his wounds source of healing for others, his willingness to lay down his life for others and his willingness to be led by the voice of God determine the creative power of ministry. This is not possible without the knowledge of the ‘first love’ that assures our belovedness and embraces all our love and service. Therefore the themes that reoccur in Nouwen’s writings are solitude, silence, prayer and contemplation. For Nouwen every minister is an artist who paints a reality which can be witnessed, as if through a window, by those who give attention.<sup>100</sup>

#### 4.4.3.4. The struggle of descending

The downward mobility involves struggle. "Wherever I turn I am confronted with my deep-

---

<sup>96</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey* 209. (Installing Nathan as the pastor of the Daybreak community Nouwen explains Nathan’s role which I think reflects Nouwen’s picture of the ministry . He explains it with the help of two triangles, one with the point up and the other with the point down. “Nathan is boss but also shepherd, a leader who gives direction but also a leader who listens, a man who talks with the government, is concerned about budgets, and connects our agency with other agencies, but also a man who holds us together as community, prays with us, joins us at the table, and keeps our focus on those who are the weakest among us. The triangle with the point up shows that we are *in* the world as an agency not afraid of competition. The triangle with the point down shows that we are not *of* the world but we are a community of service and care. After explaining these two triangles, I put them on top of each other so that together they formed a star. I believe that it is precisely the tension between the upward and the downward triangles that creates the light, a guiding and enlightening light. It is very hard these days to be a good leader, prudent as a snake and gentle as a dove.” See *Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey* 155. That Nathan’s leadership was celebrated with affirmations, encouragements, songs, speeches, skits, and many blessings shows how the people can support their ministers.)

<sup>97</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* 60.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>99</sup> Nouwen’s life journey was also an example of giving up power. “At a mature age, just when he felt the most competent and confident in his leadership, he learns that love requires a leadership that is not about control but about responsiveness to the actual concerns of those who follow. He realizes that power and control are often substitutes for people who are unable to love intimately”. See *Chris Glaser, Henri’s Mantel 117*. “Henri couples the temptation to power with a fear of intimacy. When we control others, we can keep them at a distance, a distance that prevents true love. When we objectify others, mutuality is impossible. When we allow others close to our hearts, to the core of our being, intimate connection and community are possible. And we are led as we lead”. *Ibid.* 118

<sup>100</sup> Cfr. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* 104. (Chris Glaser adds to it that the minister is both a clear window pointing to God as well as a stained glass window telling a personal story. Cfr. *Chris Glaser, Henri’s Mantel* 86.)

seated resistance against following Jesus on his way to the cross and my countless ways of avoiding poverty, whether material, intellectual, or emotional.”<sup>101</sup> Choosing poverty is choosing to make every part of one’s journey with Jesus. “After all, it is not *my* poverty that has any value, but only God’s poverty, which becomes visible through my life.”<sup>102</sup>

#### 4.4.3.5. Ministry of leading and being led

Nouwen’s upward journey, conversion and the downward journey are clearly visible from his life and writings. The real turning point was giving up the reputed job at Harvard and opting to live with the handicapped. Caring for a person like Adam might have been illogical for the worldly spirit but is truly the spirit of Jesus whose emptying himself meant being filled by his father’s love. A spiritual union with him and a ministry in his name are both invitations to free oneself from the ascending way of the darkness and descend into the Kingdom of the Light. One who chooses the descending way must be willing to be led even to places where one does not want to go. (Jn. 21,18)

#### 4.4.4. Nouwen’s own woundedness and the wounded healing

One of the profound thinking of Nouwen is the ministry of wounded healing<sup>103</sup>, that wounds are at the same time sources of healing and that the minister is a wounded minister as well as a healing minister. Some of the important aspects of this notion are caring for one’s own wounds, befriending them, making them available and holding them out to God for healing.

Life with and among the handicapped people helped Nouwen to transform himself. “It was the affective wounds of the handicapped people in my own home that opened the door to my own wounded affectivity.[...] Care, compassion, love for neighbour, promise, commitment, and faithfulness...I turned and turned these concepts in my mind and heart, and sometimes it felt as though the spiritual life I had built up over the years was now proving to be made of cardboard and ready to go up in flames. The handicapped men and women and their assistants forced me to look at myself in ways that were very humbling. Often I doubted whether there was any solid ground under my feet. [...] The most radical challenge came out of the question, Is Jesus truly enough for you, or do you keep looking for others to give you your sense of worth?”<sup>104</sup>

Nouwen learned from his own life and taught that we have to move from our wounds and losses to seeing life as an opportunity to learn, heal and live. It is caring for one’s own wounds. “When our unhealed wounds determine the atmosphere around us, we become anxious”<sup>105</sup>. “Facing our losses also means avoiding a temptation to see life as an exercise in having needs met”<sup>106</sup>. For Nouwen the brokenness is a gateway to new life<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>101</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 154.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 154.

<sup>103</sup> Nouwen illustrates this concept with the help of a legend from the Talmud. “Rabbi Yoshua ben Levi came upon Elijah the prophet while he was standing at the entrance of Rabbi Simeron ben Yohai’s cave.....He asked Elijah, “When will the Messiah come? Elijah replied, “Go and ask him yourself”: “Where is he?”. “Sitting at the gates of the city”. “How shall I know him?”. “He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and then bind them up again. But he unbinds one at a time and binds it up again, saying to himself, ‘Perhaps I shall be needed: if so I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment “. *See Nouwen, Wounded Healer p. 81-82.*

<sup>104</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 221f.

<sup>105</sup> Nouwen, *Turn my mourning into dancing* 14.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>107</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of love*, 61f. (For most of Henri’s friends his wounded healing was the most

#### 4.4.5. A lifelong *reaching out* to himself, to others and to God

We have seen that the word 'Love' is inseparable from Nouwen's books. He dwelt on the commandment of love. "Love the Lord, your God and love your neighbour as yourself" at a deeply spiritual and psychological level. This commandment of love which summarizes all the law and prophets summarizes also Nouwen's teachings. Actually for him the core of Christian life is to live in the love of God. Being in this world and not of it, living in the spirit of God, listening to the inner voice of love, all that means a life centred and rooted in God. Human love has its limitations and it is the divine love that makes the human love possible. Love of God naturally leads to the love of self and the love of the neighbour. This three dimensional movement of reaching out to God, reaching out to oneself, and reaching out to others is beautifully brought out in the book *Reaching Out*. By reaching out from our false self to our true self, by reaching out to our loving God in love and by reaching out to others in ministry, friendship, compassion, hospitality etc. we live the commandment of love.

For Nouwen this theme of reaching out was also a confession of his own life. For Nouwen it was a life long process of reaching out to his wounded self, to the God of healing who dwells in his heart and to the humanity consisting of his family, friends, co-workers, students, readers or beneficiaries of his ministry. In this aspect also Nouwen's life was not different from what he wrote or taught.<sup>108</sup>

The sequence or development of the three movements draw our attention. The first movement is to oneself. Anthropologically and psychologically seen one's own life situation, one's own biography is the best place to understand others better and experience God. Nouwen's conflicts and crisis led him to reach out to himself which gave him a better

---

touching. According to Christopher Vinck Henri was gifted but humble, wounded but able to heal. "Most people who read Henri's work find, to their astonishment, that they connect with him immediately. They feel as if they know him, as if they can see his soul. He had the gift of allowing you to see his confusion, anguish, pain, and uncertainty as well as his spiritual harmony, deep sense of connectedness, and well-being [...] able, ultimately, to touch in each of us a resonant chord- a connection with the transcendent." (*Vinck, Nouwen Then 109.*) Nouwen's confession of his brokenness has helped several people to accept theirs and hope for transformation. "He often admitted how great the battle is to overcome one's own weakness. By doing so in such a public way, he gently gave me permission to live with my own so hope: to choosing hope over cynicism, compassion over competition, hospitality over hostility." (*Ibid. 118*) For Nouwen living through one's own inconsistencies and paradoxes and befriending one's brokenness is only one side of the coin; the other side consists of transcending imperfections by choosing hope and being connected to others. It was Nouwen's own experience of the loneliness that prompted him to write about the wounded healing. In his own words: "I might, I thought, bring me more in touch with other people's experience of loneliness. If I would not run away from it, but feel it through all the way, it might become fruitful. Then suddenly I had this idea that loneliness which is pain, when you do not runaway from it but feel it through and stand up in it and look it right in the face, that there is something there that can be a source of hope, that in the middle of the pain there is some hidden gift. I, more and more in my life, have discovered that the gifts of life are often hidden in the places that hurt most." (*Vinck, Nouwen Then 134*) Woundedness, forgiveness and peace are interconnected. By attending to the wounds of others, even the wounds of wounding us, we can stop the recycling of violence and pave way for peace. Forgiving implies 'for giving up' justifiable retribution. (*Cfr. Chris, Henri's Mantel 116.*)

<sup>108</sup> Deirdre La Noue's excellent study on Nouwen has chosen to put the spiritual legacy of Nouwen under these aspects. She has presented it in question forms: To whom do I belong? Who am I? What is my purpose? See *Deirdre, The spiritual legacy of Nouwen*. The books and the life index of Nouwen show a clear move from profession to confession.

sensibility for others situation and be willing to reach out to others. This determines also the picture of God and the experience of God. Woundedness leads to reaching out.

#### 4.4..6. From clericalism to Christian Spirituality

As I have mentioned and clearly visible in his writings, the spiritual life was the focus of Nouwen's attention. His life and writings point out to the gradual process of attaining spiritual maturity. Born in a pious family and filled with the desire for a deep spiritual life Nouwen often asked himself some fundamental questions regarding spiritual life and searched relentlessly for answers.

A careful look at Nouwen's life and works shows that clericalism which was dominant in the beginning slowly melted into the importance of spiritual life which is the core of ministerial life too. Through the positive way of looking at the whole of life and projecting joy as a hidden gift to be discovered Nouwen showed us that what matters is our being a good Christian who nourishes himself with the fruits of Christ's death and resurrection and invites others to share in it. Thus a solid and mature spiritual life is the true identity of a minister and the foundation of ministry.

#### 4.5. The new profile of ministry as functioning and confessing

The golden thread running through the writings of Nouwen is that true ministry lies beyond professionalism and that ministry has to do with the heart. In the observations and analysis I have tried to focus on the functional character of ministry as well as the identity of the minister. I have tried to show that according to Nouwen there is a confessional character of ministry which goes beyond the exercise of the function and which is manifested in the spirituality of the minister. We shall go a little deeper into the consideration how ministry is more than a functioning, a beyond professionalism.

According to the mind of Nouwen ministry is **functioning from the heart and confession**<sup>109</sup> **from the heart**. For Nouwen the word heart plays a great role. Heart is the centre of our lives, the inner space where we find God, others and ourselves. Nouwen's spirituality is a spirituality of the heart. By heart he does not mean the seat of human emotions in contrast to the mind as the seat of human thought. Heart for Nouwen is the "source of all physical, emotional, intellectual, volitional, and moral energies"<sup>110</sup> Heart is the dwelling place of God and the source of goodness. It can become also the place of the evil forces. As such it is the place of prayer which directs itself to God from the centre of the person and thus affects the whole of our humanness.<sup>111</sup> It is the place of trust, the centre of our being, the place where we are most ourselves, where we are most human, where we are most real, where God has hidden the divine gifts of trust, hope and love<sup>112</sup>. Heart is our home where God lives from which we go astray at times and to which we always yearn to return. Nouwen says, "much of the crisis in the life of the Church today is connected with a lack of knowledge of the heart."<sup>113</sup>

<sup>109</sup> In English the word confession is used for both the notions 'Bekennen' und 'Beichte' in the German language. In our work the word confession is used in the sense of Bekennen.

<sup>110</sup> Nouwen, *The way of the heart* 60.

<sup>111</sup> Cfr. Ibid. 60.

<sup>112</sup> We find references to this theme in Nouwen's books *Road to Daybreak* 47, *Return of the Prodigal son* 158, *The Way of the Heart* 66, *Cry for Mercy* 28,30,70, *A letter of Consolation* 28,32.

<sup>113</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 48. (Michael Ford comments on it saying, it is the place where humanity and divinity touch each other, where the finite heart of humanity is mystically unified with the infinite heart of

The heart is the place which lies deeper than the dark areas into which we are often afraid to step into. It is the place “where God dwells and where we are invited to live with God.”<sup>114</sup> To pray one must descend with the mind into the heart and true prayer is a prayer of the heart. To enter into and to live in this inner space - the holy, beautiful and precious place - one must live solitude and silence. Contemplation is nothing but descending with the mind into the heart. To live from the heart is ‘to be at home’ and it is from the heart that we have to minister to. “Jesus calls us to repent, which means to have a contrite heart, a heart broken open by the plough of suffering, a heart able to receive the seed of the Kingdom, a heart able to see the treasure in the field, a heart capable of listening to the soft voice of love. Even though we live in a violent world, full of hatred and war, we can already enter the Kingdom now and belong to a community of faith, hope, and love.”<sup>115</sup>

Heart is like the hub of a wagon wheel. Staying there we are connected to the heart of God and the heart of the world and from there we can be in touch with other people who are like the spikes of the wheel. A heart-centred ministry enables us to be creatively present as well as to be absent. True ministry is heart-centred. Ministry from the heart is compassionate. A wide heart embraces the whole humanity into itself. Heart creates community. It is from this place that the minister can confess his faith, his weakness and woundedness and make himself and his words a source of inspiration.

#### 4.5.1. Ministry as functioning from the heart

The essential characteristics that should underlie teaching, preaching, individual care, organising and celebrating are the mutual, dynamic, interpersonal and interactive relationship and the verbal or non-verbal dialogue resulting from it. The minister must go beyond professionalism and become a companion. There is a giving and receiving and it goes beyond the level of merely fulfilling a job. What makes Nouwen’s understanding of ministry as a ‘Function of the heart’ unique is his connecting it to notions like hospitality, creative absence, solidarity, simple presence etc. They all flow from the heart.

##### 4.5.1.1 Hospitality<sup>116</sup>

For Nouwen the word hospitality was a profound term and means a lot in the context of ministry. It is the quality of offering a friendly and free space to the strangers. It is the welcoming, receiving, showing understanding and sharing of a generous and compassionate heart. For Nouwen this was the guiding principle of teaching, preaching, individual care, organizing, celebrating, friendship, intimacy, community etc. It is a virtue needed both in ministry as well as in spiritual life. In ministry those who are ministered to are our guests who need a welcome place. In spiritual life we need to offer this place to God and to his Spirit.

In a sermon on ministry as hospitality Nouwen says, “Ministry is to convert hostility into

---

God. Cfr. Michael Ford, *The wounded Healer* 18.)

<sup>114</sup> Nouwen, *Here and Now* 8.

<sup>115</sup> Nouwe, *Sabbatical Journey* 207.

<sup>116</sup> In his book *Reaching Out* he deals with it in detail.

hospitality, the enemy into a friend. It is not an attempt to redeem people, but to offer the free space where redemption can take place. The paradox of ministry is that you are called to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness, where the stranger can enter and discover himself as created free...free to sing his own song, speak his own language, dance his own dance (and ) free also to leave and follow his own vocation.”<sup>117</sup>

Parental love requires letting go and it is such love that recognizes and values the child as an independent soul, not an extension of the parental self. Nouwen also cautioned about the subtle dangers. “Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his or her own.”<sup>118</sup> “The really great saints of history don’t ask for imitation. Their way was unique and cannot be repeated. But they invite us into their lives and offer a hospitable space for our own search.”<sup>119</sup>

Hospitality enables sharing experiences, it allows one’s own questions, doubts and struggles to become building blocks of a safe house for the questions, doubts and struggles of others<sup>120</sup>. Hospitality is not a safe neutrality. “when we want to be really hospitable we not only have to receive strangers but also to confront them by an unambiguous presence, not hiding ourselves behind neutrality but showing our ideas, opinions and lifestyle clearly and distinctly. Space can only be a welcoming space when there are clear boundaries”<sup>121</sup>. Hospitality is applicable not only in our relationship to others but also in our relationship to God. “Spiritual life is nothing more or less than to allow that space to exist where God can dwell, to create the space where God can manifest itself.”<sup>122</sup> Hospitality touches the horizontal and vertical dimensions of ministry.

#### 4.5.1.2. Simple, personal and real presence

A key word that appears in the book *Wounded Ministry* under the aspect ‘ministry to a hopeless man’ is personal presence involving personal response and personal concern. (PP.63-73) In the book *The way of the heart* even silent presence is a way to ministry. Nouwen wrote a lot about silence and solitude and practised them too. He says, “I feel an increasing desire to be silent with friends. Not every event has to be told, not every idea has to be exchanged. Once an atmosphere of mutual trust is present, we can be silent together and let the Lord be the one who speaks, gently and softly. Listening together to Jesus is a very powerful way to grow closer to each other and reach a level of intimacy that no interpersonal exchange of words can bring about.”<sup>123</sup> Only through real, simple and

---

<sup>117</sup> Robert Jonas, Henri Nouwen xxxi. (Christopher Vinck feels that the hospitality about which Nouwen speaks is not playing a role of a polite host or hostess in a social setting. It is much more profound: It is an attitude of the heart that is always alert and alive in the present moment. The hospitable heart spontaneously offers a safe place for other people to share their concerns and feel respected, and at the same time it reaches out to others. See *Christopher Vinck, Nouwen Then 118f*.

<sup>118</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching out* 51.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 100.

<sup>120</sup> Chris Glaser comments that “Pastors and spiritual guides and teachers will often say they learn as much from the people with whom they work as they teach.” See *Chris Glaser, Henri’s Mantel 54*.

<sup>121</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching out* 69,70.

<sup>122</sup> Nouwen, *Genese Diary* 71.

<sup>123</sup> Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak* 189. (According to Jonas Nouwen advocated genuine pastoral presence in which the ministers must simply remain grounded in their own vulnerability, their brokenness in Christ and resist the temptation to objectify their fellow Christians, making them into mere parishioners, clients, or directees. Certain boundaries between ministers and those they serve are good but without distinctions.

personal presence before God and before others we make our ministry effective.

#### 4.5.1.3. Creative absence

Living our presence well means also our absence. Serving others needs also times of absence, prayer, solitude and writing. “Your community needs you, but may be not as a constant presence. Your community might need you as a presence that offers courage and spiritual food for the journey, a presence that creates the safe ground in which others can grow and develop, a presence that belongs to the matrix of the community. But your community also needs your creative absence.”<sup>124</sup> In the resurrection scene Nouwen discovered an always present tension between presence and absence, “tension between coming and leaving, intimacy and distance, holding and letting go, at-homeness and mission, presence and absence. [...] It puts us on the journey to the full realization of the promise given to us.”<sup>125</sup>

According to Nouwen action brings more fruit when we also withdraw after the action. Nouwen’s daring phrase ‘the ministry of absence’ is remarkable. The proper balance between presence and absence can bear more fruit. “The great mystery of the divine revelation is that God entered into intimacy with us not only by Christ’s coming, but also by his leaving”.<sup>126</sup> Ministers must point to God’s presence as well as His absence. The minister’s absence can help people to be reminded of their Lord’s presence. Jesus left his disciples so that he could send the Holy Spirit. “The minister is not called to cheer people up but modestly to remind them that in the midst of pains and tribulations the first sign of the new life can be found and a joy can be experienced which is hidden in the midst of sadness.”<sup>127</sup>

So true ministry calls for a creative withdrawal, where the spirit can manifest itself and lead to the fullness of truth. Ministers withdrawal helps others to reflect and to be with the Lord in prayer. “Without this withdrawal we are in danger of no longer being the way, but *in* the way; of no longer speaking and acting in his name, but in ours; of no longer pointing to the Lord who sustains, but only to our own distracting personalities.”<sup>128</sup>

#### 4.5.1.4. Solidarity

Solidarity is the natural fruit of intimacy. It is the feeling of solidarity which prompts us to minister out of love and compassion. The mission of Jesus was to gather us into one people and to form us into one family. An intimacy which excludes others is guided by rivalry and competition. The spirituality of the one who does not see the inner connection between intimacy and solidarity “will become either privatised or narrowly activist and will no longer reflect the full beauty of living in God’s house.”<sup>129</sup> By not yielding to the temptation

---

The minister must be available as whole person who participate simultaneously as both giver and receiver.  
See *Jonas, Henri Nouwen xxxi.*

<sup>124</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of Love* 68.

<sup>125</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical journey* 145.

<sup>126</sup> Nouwen, *The Living Reminder* 42.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* 47.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 47-48

<sup>129</sup> Nouwen, *Lifesigns* 44.

of power exercising and by confessing to God and to one another one's own woundedness and weakness, the ministers live the Christian solidarity which is the fertile ground for God's healing work. The source of energy for it is prayer. Prayer leads us to our inner sanctuary and solidarity leads us to the world. The knowledge of the truth moves us to act truthfully; to work for reconciliation, unity and peace. Activism is a fearful, nervous and anxious attempt to work for a better world but "those acting within the house of God point through their action to the healing, restoring, redeeming, and re-creating presence of God".<sup>130</sup> We can notice that for Nouwen compassion, hospitality, solidarity and community belong to the essence of ministry.

#### 4.5.2. Ministry as confessing from the heart

The right disposition to ministry or, as we have put it earlier, the identity of the minister can be summarised in the word 'Confession'. That ministry is a 'professing profession', that it is beyond professionalism point to the factor that ministry involves confessing oneself, one's own life and one's own faith. Ministers become authentic and creative when they confess their brokenness as well as belovedness.

##### 4.5.2.1. Confession of faith

In his very first book Nouwen deals with the question of faith in connection with intimacy. The minister's maturing in faith is essential to be able to lead others to faith. It is clear that the minister himself is a seeker as shown by Nouwen's own life. The minister need not hesitate to share his doubts, struggles and problems regarding faith. Through theological reflection and contemplation the minister himself must grow into intimacy with God. In this regard the minister's own picture of God has great influence on the people who are ministered to.

The past with its joyful and sorrowful moments, each happening not outside the loving presence of God, must be seen in 'the all of it' and remembered in gratitude in order to come to a "deeper recognition of God's mercy, a strong conviction of God's guidance, and a more radical commitment to a life in God's service."<sup>131</sup> Faith and trust in the love of God is the basis of life according to Nouwen. "The great spiritual challenge is to discover, over time, that the limited, conditional, and temporal love we receive from parents, husbands, wives, children, teachers, colleagues and friends are reflections of the unlimited, unconditional and everlasting love of God."<sup>132</sup>

##### 4.5.2.2. Confession of one's own wounds

In dealing with Nouwen's concept of the 'wounded healer' we have seen that for Nouwen one's own wounds are also the source of healing. How to go about with one's wounds are beautifully present in his writings and shown through the example of his own life. Confessing one's wounds lead to the awareness of our common brokenness and woundedness and together when all the wounds are placed under God's healing presence we move from bitterness to gratitude, from fear and judgement to compassion, from compulsive actions and reactions to solidarity. In confessing the wounds of loneliness, hurt feelings, rejection, ingratitude, injustice, exploitation, weakness, helplessness, hopelessness etc. to

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>131</sup> Nouwen, *Here and Now* 82.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 78.

God and to one another we allow God's healing power into the places of our woundedness and let him heal us. Jesus himself is a wounded healer whose grace heals us when we gather in his memory, lift up our wounds, show them to one another and place them under his healing touch.

#### 4.5.2.3. Confession of one's weakness

Against the tendency to be productive and powerful Nouwen places the fruitfulness in the first place. The world looks down upon weakness but God's faithfulness and nearness is wonderfully present in the midst of weakness. The so-called foolish or clowning way of living chastity, poverty and obedience is a witness to something greater, the minister's faith in someone who is greater than us. It is living our weakness and feeling one with the weak. This is possible only when one nurtures the ground on which ministry grows, namely communion with God in solitude, silence and prayer. Nouwen's theology of clowning compares the spiritual realm with the material and says that although the spiritual life looks like a clowning amidst great deeds, finally that is what matters. Ministers life and deeds are to bear witness to this truth, especially the solidarity in the weakness and with the weak.

#### 4.5.2.4. Confession of Jesus

There will be no contention if I say that Nouwen's life and writings are Jesus-centered. As we see from the writings his initial concern was the minister, the formation of the minister and his identity. As his understanding of ministry became deeper he placed the existential situation of the minister- and of all Christians in general- in the first place. But his final conclusion was that Jesus must be the centre of our being and actions. In his name we minister. It is his presence in the other that should move us to minister to him. Thus there is a gradual development of the attention moving to Jesus.

Nouwen's concept of ministry and his understanding of the spirituality for the minister is Jesus-centred. Nouwen warns against the danger that the minister ministers in his own name and proclaims his own kingdom, rather than the Kingdom of God. There are the dangers of looking for relevance, popularity and power. The way of Jesus is the descending way, the emptying way and the powerless way. Speaking from above, looking with God's eyes, compassion instead of competition, being rooted in one's own heart and the heart of God, claiming one's belovedness and pointing to the belovedness of every person are typical notions used by Nouwen to show the difference when we act in the name of Jesus. The power of powerlessness is the uniqueness of a true minister. Therefore confessing Jesus and committing oneself to Jesus's ways is essential in ministry.

### **To sum up**

If we make an arch holding our work we see that the word heart binds the whole work although it is not very clear in the beginning. It extends from the intimacy of the heart to the way of the heart. It emerges as the **new** and **unique** position of Nouwen. To come to this conclusion we have seen the functional aspect of ministry in the selected books which speak about the classical pastoral works. They are qualified through the evocative, bilateral and actualising character of teaching enabled through the process of dialogue, the availability in preaching, the creative receptivity in individual pastoral care, the shared responsibility in

organising and the celebration of life in the celebration of the sacraments. All these point to a radical, personal and spiritual approach to ministry. Nouwen added to that the function of reminding and leading to celebration of life in the Eucharistic celebration. The reminding character of ministry focuses on Jesus and deepens the understanding of ministry. In placing Eucharist as a model of life Nouwen brought theology and theory to practical life.

The above considerations clearly point out the fact that Nouwen's approach is a definite departure from the understanding of ministry as a job or profession. There is no harm in making use of the knowledge of the human sciences and taking advantage of the various training facilities. The decisive factor is the pastoral spirit 'beyond' the obligatory duties. This is possible only through a new understanding of ministry or by recapturing the old understanding ministry as laying down one's own life.

The Eucharist as a way of life demands a spirituality of the minister and therefore we moved on to the identity of the minister. Nouwen's profound and deep understanding of ministry is coupled with the identity of the minister which slowly turned out to be the focal point of Nouwen's pastoral concept. The internalisation or the mystical character of ministry which invites the minister to enter into the depth of himself and of God and witnessing this God-experience through life and confessing it can be said to be the unique contribution of Nouwen to pastoral theology.

Thus the first thread that runs through Nouwen's books and our work is the 'beyond' which qualifies the function. The function has to go beyond profession, beyond giving help, beyond superficial or business relationships. It touches life and enables life. It is not isolated from God's work among us and therefore the minister must be in touch with the real source of ministry. Ministry with its diverse forms comes from a source deeper and higher than ourselves.

The second thread running through Nouwen's life and works can be said to be the search for the true identity which helps the minister to go beyond the limits of a profession. Nouwen felt that the essence of this identity is the essence of being a true Christian. The Second Vatican Council speaks about the specific roles of the ordained ministers (a brief account of it is given in the introduction) and speaks about the need for a sound spirituality but does not clearly say how his identity looks like. Nouwen's books lay down very clearly a number of points which contribute to the identity of the minister. They include Intimacy, prayer, solitude, contemplation, compassion, vulnerability, care, joy, gratitude hope etc all of which can be experienced in a true community. All of them finally point to the need for deepening the spiritual life which is the carrier for the taking off and landing of the ministry. Leading a spiritual life is an ongoing process of maturing. Here Nouwen showed that the life experiences form the better half of what we learn as theory. Ministry needs an open and sensible heart. The heart is the center of the spiritual life. This heart has to be nurtured by prayer. Heart is the fruitful ground where the best of the flowers of Christian ministry grows with the help of the manure of prayer and the water of grace coming from above.

Weaving the above threads together we can say that for Nouwen being an authentic Christian, whose words and actions come from a heart which is present to God and to others, is the boat from which we act as fishers of men. This heart is formed by love and is the dwelling place of love even in the midst of doubt, suffering, weakness and darkness. Spiritual life, which is often the prime concern of Nouwen, is the nurturing of this heart. I

would therefore like to present Nouwen's underlying thought regarding the pastoral approach as: **Ministry is Being Heart-Centered and functioning and confessing from the Heart.**

Nouwen's understanding of pastoral work and our understanding of Nouwen's pastoral concept can be concluded as going to the true source of ministry which is the heart. Nouwen wrote, "Give every part of your heart and your time to God and let God tell you what to do, where to go, when and how to respond. God does not want you to destroy yourself. Exhaustion, burnout, and depression are not signs that you are doing God's will. God is gentle and loving. God desires to give you a deep sense of safety in God's love. Once you have allowed yourself to experience that love fully, you will be better able to discern who you are being sent to in God's name."<sup>133</sup> In the heart lies the secret and hiding element that underlies all other thinking, without which there is no real ministry.

Nouwen invites us to keep moving with patience and trust towards the heart. "You have to keep moving, [...] . Live a faithful, disciplined life, a life that gives you a sense of inner strength, a life in which you can receive more and more of the love that comes to you"<sup>134</sup>. Only from this source and centre which is like axis of a wheel, we can exercise true ministry. For Nouwen heart is the place of solitude, the centre of prayer, the seat of hospitality, the source of confession, the abode of love, the wellspring of compassion, the cause of community and the womb of ministry.

The title of my work 'from functioning to confessing' does not mean that we leave out functioning and do only confessing. It shows the tension between functioning and confessing and the constant movement between them. Nouwen's invitation to all the ministers is not to limit themselves only to functioning. Ministry bears much more fruit when we do not hesitate to confess our faith-experience and God-experience. My reason for coming to the conclusion that ministry is a confession rooted in a spiritual life is based on the intrinsic development of the life and thinking process of Nouwen which we have seen in the thesis. Nouwen's life-long search for his true vocation, his imitating the downward mobility of Jesus, his converting his own woundedness into a healing source, his continuous reaching out to the place of love, his firm desire to become the spiritually matured and loving father make his life and works a proclamation of the truth that ministry is more than doing. It is being as well. The priest is expected to give a personal witness and an open confession of himself from the heart as a brother. The heart is the centre of our being and as a consequence only a ministry from the heart can bear witness to Jesus' continuing ministry among us. This heart which God has implanted in us must be protected and nurtured by a solid spiritual life. This leads us to the conclusion that it is the spiritual life which gives birth to a heart that ministers according to the mind of Jesus and in accordance with the guidance of the Spirit bearing witness to the love of the heavenly Father.

Nouwen's theory which is an honest confession of his own experiences, struggles and spiritual discoveries makes him a sympathetic spiritual author and an 'alter Christus'. The

---

<sup>133</sup> Nouwen, *The inner voice of Love* 106. (Robert Durback confirms that the word 'heart' occurs many times in the writings of Henri Nouwen. It holds a special place of importance in his theological reflection. He speaks often of the necessity of allowing the Word of God to 'descend from the mind into the heart.' In the return of the prodigal son the son leaning against the heart of the father is significant for Nouwen. *Cfr. Robert Durback, Seeds of Hope xvii.* One book on Nouwen is titled 'The heart of Nouwen' and there is a Video titled 'Straight to the heart'.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 55.

profile of Nouwen lies in the 'beyond' of the Function and in the 'Confession' of the heart. In the books Nouwen has shown that heart is the place of solitude, the centre of prayer, the seat of hospitality, the source of confession, the abode of love, the messenger of peace, the wellspring of compassion, the cause of community, and the womb of ministry. Many authors who have tried to present Nouwen or recapture him have pointed out the heart-centred spirituality and ministry of Nouwen.

#### **4.6. A tribute to Nouwen**

A historic-theological approach to Nouwen's writings is difficult because Nouwen as writer and preacher is more an artist and an individualist who could be evaluated only qualitatively from the angle of his personality and the inner developments of his writings. As a psychologist Nouwen spoke in psychological and spiritual categories and as a result his ecclesiology and Christology are only implied. The relevant quoting of the Bible and its penetrating interpretation shows that for Nouwen the Bible was the source of his inspiration. He dug out the hidden treasures in the Bible and broke the word of God as good news for the people living today.

Nouwen's theology of woundedness and weakness, is the result of regarding his own life experiences as a primary source of truth and inspiration, the insights of a wounded healer whose mine was his own suffering, as in the case of Anton Boisen, Rembrand and Vincent Van Gogh. It is a great consolation for all those who feel the 'imperfection' in their bodies as well as priestly function. Ministers are called to share in the divine nature by a God who came down to share in our imperfect human nature. Henri's struggle which was partly connected to his sexuality does not belong to the 'just me' of Henri. It is a basic loneliness<sup>135</sup>, a basic struggle of everyone and Henri's connecting it to the spiritual realm has a relevance for all the ministers who lead a celibate life and for all those who struggle with their imperfect intimacy.

The general tendency is to undermine the human aspect of the minister and speak more about the ordained status. Nouwen's understanding of the minister as 'persona Christi' takes into account also the human aspect of Christ who did not shy away the human sufferings and struggles. In the confession of one's own struggles, the clinging to God's love in spite of all the odds and belonging to the people of God as a community of grateful people the minister slowly grows in his spiritual identity.

Nouwen as an ordained priest concentrated in the beginning on the special priesthood but later emphasised more the common priesthood and the basic spirituality of the Christian life which in turn is the fundament of the ordained priests. He was a renowned pastor and writer but was not primarily interested in the priestly milieu. Nouwen's focusing on the 'commonness' and the 'communio' of the priests with the faithful is sympathetic to the people who have too long been uncomfortable with the 'authority' and 'elevatedness' of the clergy. Thus Nouwen's works serve to a great extent to conscientise the clerics as well as the laity about the mind and dream of the Council fathers of Vat. II<sup>136</sup>. The second Vatican

---

<sup>135</sup> According to Nouwen every individual is basically lonely because only God can quench the deepest longing of the soul. There is a second loneliness suffered by the ministers who devote themselves to the kingdom of God.

<sup>136</sup> Kevin Gillespie also feels that Henri was influenced by the existential and phenomenological literature of his time which also permeated the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. From the very beginning of his studies his quest was not a career as priest-psychologist, but to become a psychologically informed pastoral minister.

Council refocused its attention on the laity and the active participation of the local Christian communities. The Council wanted a new understanding of the mission of the Church and the role of the church in the world. The concerns of the Council Fathers are reflected in Nouwen's writings, but in a sharper language. He advocated that spirituality is not the luxury for religious but the way in which we can all be more fully human. Nouwen has revolutionized the hidden message of Vatican II, as I have already mentioned earlier, and sends a clear message to the church which overemphasizes the structure and the traditions.

The renewal of faith and the deepening of the spiritual life are the summary of the dream and vision of Nouwen. According to Nouwen a spiritual understanding of the life helps us to see life and death spiritually. The call to **be** and **become** the beloved of God through an intimate union with Jesus, to offer this true identity as a source of welcoming others and caring for others through ministry, to hold, lift and offer up our lives which becomes bread and wine for others can be said as the 'newness' of the teaching of Nouwen and the ultimate purpose and fulfilment of our lives. According to Nouwen the Eucharistic words Taken, blessed, broken and given summarise the life of Jesus - his being chosen, blessed, broken and given to the world by the father. They speak also about the chosenness, blessedness, brokenness and mission of every person which is the deeper meaning of our belovedness. That is the truth of our lives and we have to claim it and live it. He created a spiritual vision of 'active and inquisitive faith' and inspired everybody to live it. His vision is fashioned within his own brokenness and openness to God.

The theology of wounded healing is a revolution in the pastoral care and a deep insight in to Christian spirituality. We are called to convert our brokenness and woundedness to God's hidden sources of grace and healing. They can become openings to God's unfathomable love. God's blessings lie hidden behind our wounds. These wounds can be the wounds of loneliness and alienation, of broken relationships or of unfulfilled love. Nouwen's spiritual answer to this woundedness and brokenness is embracing them and putting them under God's blessings. Only by coming out of the vicious circle of wounds and need for love we can leave the house of fear and enter the house of love where we are loved unconditionally. Out of this house of love we can reach out to others in solidarity and compassion. Remaining in this circle of love we bear spiritual fruits like compassion, joy, peace, charity, and reconciliation. Thus Nouwen saw the stories of the individuals and nations in the

---

*Cfr. C. Kevin Gillespie, Psychology and American Catholicism 141.* (The Vatican Council Documents speak unequivocally about the need for all Christians to practice a spiritual life and to partake in the ministry of the church. The Council lays down the ministerial functions which involve preaching God's word and connecting it to the concrete circumstances of life and the celebration of the sacraments with the Eucharist as the summit. [...] All ministry leads to the formation of a genuine Christian community. Ministers as leaders 'must discover with faith, recognise with joy and foster with diligence the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity'. (Presbyterorum Ordinis Nrs.4-9) The Council did not overlook the spiritual identity of the minister. The unity and the harmony between the function and the person of the minister is achieved by joining themselves with Christ in the recognition of the Father's will and in the gift of themselves to the flock entrusted to them. This is achieved by penetrating intimately through prayer into the mystery of Christ. (PO Nr.14) The council speaks about the danger of loneliness of the priests (PO Nr.17), reminds of the problems of the modern world and of the modern man (Cfr. Gaudium et Spes :Church in the modern World Nrs. 4,5,7,8,10.), about church's obligation to show great solidarity with the human race and its history (GS Nrs.1-3), the task of opening up to man the mystery of God (GS Nr.41) and speaks clearly about the need for greater attention to spiritual training of priests with emphasis on prayer and spiritual direction. (Cfr. Optatum Totius Nr.8.))

broader context of God's love. That is also the starting point of true peace making.

What makes Nouwen and his writings so appealing is his courage to speak in unequivocal terms about the brokenness of the world and our individual brokenness. He made himself transparent and vulnerable. He does not offer any quick solutions to our brokenness but digs deeper into the factors that hurdle our attempts to understand, accept and live with them under God's grace who can transform the bread and wine of our joys and sorrows into spiritual food enabling our body and soul to resurrect. Nouwen's first book which spoke about intimacy and the last ones dealing with spiritual life show the direction of our lives. From our need for intimacy we are called to find our spiritual home in our intimacy with God. Ministry is accompanying this journey of becoming and the essence of ministry is sharing our commonness.

For Nouwen contemplation, creative writing and attentiveness to each other's needs come from the center of the heart and belong to God. Henri lists a number of things which belong to the identity of the minister. But he does not claim that the minister is overnight all that. It is a 'becoming' and that is what the ministers have common with all our brothers and sisters, who are also called to become perfect as the heavenly father is perfect.

We can attribute it to Nouwen's credit and achievement that he tried to couple the priestly life with the Christian way of life and emphasizes the two important teachings of the Council namely the role of the priests as well as the identity of the priests. The spirituality of the minister is basically contained in the spirituality of the Christian way of life and therefore the real question about the spirituality of a minister is, what is being a true Christian? Thus the essence of being a Christian is being transported to the function of the priest. The real point is that a spirituality of the priest without a spirituality of the Christian hangs in the air. This has a great implication for the formation of priests who should keep in mind that being an authentic Christian is the first and foremost task upon which a true spirituality of the ministers can be built up. Nouwen criticizes the stereotyped and 'object' picture of a priest in which the priest is a finished instrument through which ministry flows. Nouwen shifts the emphasis from the function or 'role' of the priest to the person of the priest with his unique biography in which he lives and proclaims the incarnation of Jesus. Our sympathy for Nouwen lies in his focusing on the point that every priest has the right to live his own life with its existential struggles and human emotions and feelings. It is facing the realities of one's own life which gives the chance of becoming a lively priest. In a situation where there is a scarcity of priests there is a greater danger of limiting a priest to his function or office who eventually suppresses his wounds and limitations instead of working on them.

Nouwen's theory of the pastoral disposition is very helpful to the ministers as well as the religious seekers of our time. Nouwen's shifting the emphasis from doing to being as reflected in the biography and in many books helps us to see aging, suffering, poverty and weakness in a new way. Nouwen pleads for compassion instead of competition. This has a tremendous value in a society which thinks only in terms of utility and production and considers the not productive persons as burden. Nouwen focuses rightly on the problem of loneliness, fear and anxiety which is only growing in our modern society. Only through prayer we can be present to God in the midst of joy, sorrow and hardships. Out of this inner source of peace we can work for true peace in the world. Nouwen's drawing our attention to non-violence is very important in today's context of mistrust, hatred, violence and

counter-violence.

Nouwen's theology is futuristic, pointing to the kingdom of God which is already here and now and is yet to come. His concept of ministry is radical, humanized and incarnational. In his concept of the identity of the minister there is a creative tension between what one is and what one wants to be. In its maturing process they fertilize each other. So there is neither a finished theory nor a finished Priest but only the possibility of growing into or **becoming** a minister.

It is important to note that Nouwen remaining a faithful priest stood almost with his back to the church. He does not quote many church documents. He was less interested in systematic-theological discourses. His eyes were directed to God and the situation of the world in which he lived. He visualized a church built on spiritual people who bind the wounds of each other instead of inflicting new wounds, who bring the good news to the hungry and bring hope and consolation to those who need a 'being lifted up'. His private support to homosexual relations<sup>137</sup> sends a clear message that he did not want to be tied to the frame of the moral teachings of the church. He had his own place in the service of the church but he did not allow himself to be tied down to a job, place or idea. He was mobile and experimental. He placed great value on human experience and searched into the unknown territories of the human experience of his fellowmen and composed out of it a spirituality of ministry. Through his sensibility he pioneered a correcting of the existing priest-spirituality. Here he was provocative although he remained a fragment. The question of the unconditional love and our experiencing something of that in the limited human love here and now and at the same time choosing to live in the house of love in which God offers his first love is the nucleus of Nouwen's spirituality which carried him throughout his life and on which he wrote. Certain inconsistencies and ambivalence especially about his body, a taboo theme in the beginning, also mark the person of Nouwen. He was easily hurt, demanded more love than what others could offer, almost eccentric and was at times depressive.

Henri was disarmingly honest about his weaknesses. He himself was a bundle of paradoxes. He wrote against clinging to others in love but almost clung to others wanting to be loved. He was not ashamed to write or preach because he could not put all that into practice. The loneliness haunted him. Instead of offering solutions he pointed to our basic loneliness and God's desire to redeem us in and through our loneliness. Nouwen showed that the time of solitude can become a purifying desert. As he grew older and more mature he grew more secure in welcoming all of God's children, even his own stranger within. For Nouwen discerning between personal and universal was important. Henri had a wonderful stock of 'words about God' in his spiritual cupboard. In telling one's own story and in listening to the stories of others we discover the spiritual treasures. For some people Henri was manipulative but others considered him an artist who painted his own spiritual map. "Like a child or an artist, Henri could see the same thing as if for the first time. And also like a child or an artist, he had an insecurity that made him doubt he had anything to offer anyone, one that seemed to haunt him his entire life"<sup>138</sup>.

---

<sup>137</sup> Cfr. Ford, *The wounded Prophet* 60. (Interestingly Nouwen did not go also too far to be hooked or trapped in a controversy which may have affected his image. This support is understandable as he himself suffered this problem as a thorn in the flesh for the whole of his life.)

<sup>138</sup> Chris Glase *Henri's Mantel* 39-40.

Henri was a hungry lover<sup>139</sup>, wounded healer, a clown of God, a living reminder, a compassionate and loving father, a beloved friend, a flyer, a catcher and a minister. What is remarkable with Nouwen is his sensibility to people and surroundings, his perception of the persons and situations, his understanding which is a quality of the heart, his openness, his compassion and his commitment to Jesus. Henri was a 'larger than life, person and could not live all what he wrote. His 'unevenness' and conflicts fuelled his charisma and highly engaged way of life, leading to an abundance of the fruits of intimacy, fecundity and ecstasy.

I thank Nouwen for the courage he gives me to stand in my pains and loneliness and to enter into human relationships which help the maturing process of my person. After walking several times through the garden of Nouwen's life and literary works I feel more comfortable with my own life, my friendships and the ministry entrusted to me. Nouwen's thoughts are sure to open our eyes for the problems of the priests which remain till today in many places as taboo. In his remaining open and woundable he risked his own life and paid a high price for it but became a great wounded healer. His willingness to lay down his life for his friends and his downward journey to his own heart and the hearts of the people in *Daybreak* is an example which everyone cannot imitate, but his honest search for his true vocation as minister and his enthusiasm for Jesus and his Good News can help us in our own search for our identity in ministry.

Henri's life ended 'unfinished'. The real fruitfulness of his life is visible after death. According to Chris Nouwen's spirit is multiplied through the many books and their readers. His legacy is passed on to those who live his spirit. "This may be Henri's greatest legacy, that he transforms strangers to lovers- that is, breaks down protective walls and superficial distractions to reveal open hearts, wounded and blessed, yearning to love and be loved. The transformation of strangers to lovers, I believe, is the proper role of spirituality."<sup>140</sup>

For Henri the parable of the prodigal son is a parable of spiritual maturity, a being born again and 'being born from above'. Only God's spirit which throws light into the dark corners of our life can make us spiritual beings. Henri opened himself again and again to this light. Henri's shadow followed him but he trusted in the truth that there is a great light which cannot be overcome by the darkness and quested for that truth. His longing for intimacy and searching for a spiritual center of calm point to God's giving us his spirit in

---

<sup>139</sup> The testimony of Chris shows that Henri wrote about intimacy but missed intimacy. "Henri told me he believed in his vocation as a celibate priest, yet he wistfully missed a companion in life. For those with eyes to see and hearts to recognize it within Henri's writings, Jesus seemed sometimes to serve as a substitute for this absent partner, and his enthusiasm meeting new friends as recorded in journals, revealed his undying hope to meet that special someone." See Chris Glaser, *Henri's Mantel* 57-58. Henri's sentence from the video documentary *Angels over the net*, "It is nice to know that when I come back from my trip, there will be somebody to grab me" (*Ibid.* 151. ) shows according to Chris a missing intimacy. "Though Henri theologizes the catchers as God and our need to trust in a God who ultimately catches us, there is, in this quote, an echo of the little Henri who constantly wanted to be picked up and held as a child. And, though here he is using 'trips' as in flying through the air, still I can't help but think that, given his many trips all over the world, there is something in his words of the yearning of a celibate to come home to the arms of an intimate companion." *Ibid.* 151

The stay at L'arche and the friendship with the Rodleighs helped Nouwen to correct his disembodied spirituality and reclaim his body and his heart. The 'flights over the net' helped Nouwen to discover the spiritual truth, that not the failures but the willingness to start anew gives the feeling of just beginning to live.

<sup>140</sup> Chris Glaser, *Henri's Mantel* xii.

order to live in our hearts. For Henri aging was growing into light. "Aging can be a growing into the light, the light which takes away all the dark and gray lines that divide religious cultures and people and unites all the colors of the human search into one all-embracing rainbow."<sup>141</sup> Nouwen died young but his feeling one with the community of humanity and his untiring engagement to make known the great promises of God led many people to the light of God before he himself was consumed by the great light of the resurrection, Jesus Christ, who was his one and all and in whose name he ministered from the heart. By making his home in God Nouwen experienced true intimacy, remaining united with Jesus he bore abundant fruits and listening to the inner voice of God's Spirit his joy became true. Nouwen's parting words to Nathan Ball were that of gratitude, gratitude to all those who journeyed courageously with him, gratitude to God who chose him, blessed him, broke him and gave to the world - for you and me.

---

<sup>141</sup> Nouwen, *Aging* 83.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Our attempt was to make a search from the 'outside' to the 'inside'. Looking at Nouwen from his biography and his socio-ecclesiological context we have launched ourselves into the question of the pastoral function and the spiritual identity and the uniqueness of Nouwen's life and works. Our attention was on the priest, the ministry and the priestly spirituality. Throughout the whole work we have seen how Nouwen was interested in the spiritual progress of the ministers and the means of supporting it. Thereby we felt how Nouwen comes close to the basic spirituality which applies to all and how these aspects are to be taken into consideration in the pastoral theological reflection and training.

The treatment of the books look like an arch - from the academic ascending to the spiritual descending- according to the year of publication and the biography. The first part deals with the function and as I have mentioned, the key to Nouwen's pastoral concept lies in the 'Beyond'. This emphasizes mutuality, confession of one's own life, wholehearted presence, self emptying, creative absence and a commitment to prayer and solitude. The exercise of a creative ministry requires a creative dialogue. For a creative ministry which evokes life leading to faith, hope and love the minister must be willing to lay his life bare and even to lay down his life. This needs spiritual maturity, even the willingness to be led. Therefore it is no wonder that in the first book Nouwen tried to understand the problems and aspirations of the students, pin pointed the deficits in training and suggested improvements. The important themes which we notice around the ministry are training for ministry, social critic, going beyond, reminding, witnessing, confessing, resisting the temptations, being led etc. It was Nouwen's strong conviction that ministry must cut across professionalism.

What Nouwen finally wanted to say is that the spiritual maturing is the underlying factor of a fruitful and creative ministry. Here Nouwen looked for the spiritual identity of the minister. This was at the same time a search for Nouwen into his own spiritual roots. So Nouwen started writing more about books which cater to spiritual life and at the same time contain penetrating thoughts on good ministry. Through the concepts of the wounded healing, clowning ministry and reminding ministry which speak of a professing profession Nouwen connected the function to a spirituality. The built-in character of life and Eucharist is an important spiritual insight which exhorts the ministers to lead the faithful to a heart-burning spiritual experience and help them to drink the cup of their lives. Nouwen writes extensively about the signs and fruits of spiritual life and the means of growing in it.

The setbacks in the search for intimacy, the experience of one's woundedness, the burnt-out experience in ministry can all lead to compulsive ministry and the desire to be productive and successful which is more counter-productive than creative. Therefore there is the need to search for the true identity of ministry. All pastoral activities are intrinsically related to and inextricably tied to the minister's own spiritual life which is loyal to the Gospel message of losing oneself to gain life, emptying oneself to be filled from above and leaving the safe boat to be caught by God. Fruitful ministry is rooted in a sound spirituality which is cultivated in the heart.

Therefore in the second phase we have concentrated on the maturing in the spiritual identity. Nouwen's discovery and his message for others was the myth of power, self-sufficiency and success. He realized that the deepest of the longings of his heart can be satisfied only with

spiritual values like interdependence, vulnerability and ministry. His belief that what is most personal is also most universal urged him to make a confession of his life. He shared about his personal faith and struggles in faith as a gift for others. Nouwen's own life was a moving from productivity to fruitfulness, from being in control to being led, from power to weakness and from clericalism to being a Christian. The minister is called upon to grow in faith and intimacy, connect his woundedness to the woundedness of others and that of the world and place it under God's compassionate love and healing intervention. The ministers should see their weakness and irrelevance as chance of God's presence in the weakness and His special love for the weak. By practising solitude, protecting the holy and purifying himself and his actions through contemplation, the minister invites others to live the undivided love for God through simple means of practicing it. By guarding himself against the temptations of power, prestige and relevance, the minister is challenged to choose the downward way which breaks the inner and outer barriers. Nouwen's favourite themes solitude, prayer, belovedness, compassion, care, Jesus-centeredness, joy, gratitude, passion, waiting, expecting, hope, peace, freedom, befriending life, befriending death, our resurrection etc. reflect the tracks of a wonderful spiritual life.

The incarnational spirituality of identifying oneself with others and sharing their weakness and at the same time living in close communion with the source of all love and life (in prayer and contemplation) is the written and lived testament of Nouwen and as such the nucleus of his teaching. For Nouwen this spirituality is the ground, the driving force and the sustaining and nourishing element of ministry. The minister fosters and lives this spirituality which is the common vocation of all Christians and the bearings for the priestly ministry. The above spiritual programme of Nouwen is the basic program for ministry too. Nouwen's ambivalence consisted in being faithful to the church teachings and traditions and at the same time jump over certain meaningless walls of laws and restrictions. As a priest Nouwen chose to minister those who were marginalized. Such people can be ministered to only with sensibility, openness and compassionate love. Nouwen's strength was his commitment to the weak and his weakness was his not being able to be patient with his own weakness. He was a fiery announcer but not patient to live it all. He was obsessive and driven but in the heart of heart he was answering to a missionary vocation and mission. He was very ordinary and yet very saintly, a man of faith in Jesus and drawn to the Eucharist like a magnet. At his core he was more a priest than a professor and tried to inspire and deepen the faith of the students.

The spirituality envisaged by Nouwen is a life long process and stays parallel to his own life. Nouwen's terminologies, which are apparently weak, too soft and pious, contain a creative and positive tension and are in fact revolutionary. They reflect the hidden Nouwen-theology which is in fact the Nouwen-spirituality. His refocusing on the Christian mysticism and pointing to the Christian joy (Nouwen calls it ecstasy meaning coming out of static life) is an important contribution to our modern world which runs after 'quick happiness' and ends up in emptiness and frustration. The understanding of ministry as hunting for the hidden treasures in others, being with those who rejoice or weep, and empowering the materially and spiritually poor throws new challenges to ministers. Nouwen's social teaching is hidden in his spiritual teaching.

Nouwen is a man who lived what he wrote and wrote down what he lived. He was more an artist than a scribe. A seeker and a finder, a dissatisfied elder son, a lost younger son, a loving father: all-in-one. Nouwen's books reveal his struggle to understand his inner contradictions and his willingness to reveal those contradictions and to find God's presence

in the midst of them. What is remarkable is his ability to be present a spirituality of 'here and now' in spite of all the contradictions. Nouwen believed that we are not to wait for completion at the end of life, but to find it in our experience of God in each moment. In his confessing way of writing and ministering Nouwen goes from the periphery of the day to day life to the core of Christian life and makes himself available to God and fellow beings in spite of the truth that we do not understand all of life here and now.

Nouwen placed the growing distance between caregivers and care-receivers due to increased professionalization and the crisis of the personal and professional identity of the ministers in a fully new context, the context of God's reconciliation of the world in Jesus Christ who shared our human condition and our task of setting our heart's on God's kingdom and work for the realization of it in our midst. Nouwen's message is that scientism cannot replace personalism, techniques cannot replace ministry and rationalism cannot replace spiritual sensitivity. The existential situation of those who are pastured to as well as that of the ministers is a central point in Nouwen's pastoral vision. The ontological identity of the minister is not to be disconnected from the existential situation of the minister. The biography and writings of Nouwen point to the reality that becoming a priest is embodied in being a priest. Ministers who assist others in their growth must also be constantly willing to grow. Nouwen's process of maturing or 'becoming' has served as a provocation for my own life. It invites me to find my spirituality in the basic Christian spirituality and to find my priestly vocation on the common vocation which goes deeper than the gender or hierarchy discussions. Nouwen's contribution to the pastoral theory can be said to be 'the spiritual disposition of the pastoral' which qualifies and certifies the life of the minister as well as his ministry in the context of the modern world for the people of today.

Nouwen's affirming and befriending the human side of priestly vocation with its weaknesses and brokenness helps the priests not to deny themselves. By accepting themselves and placing themselves in the incubator of spiritual life the ministers can be slowly transformed through God's blessing into 'men of God' as bread is transformed into body. Only a priest undergoing the spiritual transformation can speak from the heart to the heart. His actions are no more actions but confessions. Confessing from the heart at all levels of life like intimacy, woundedness, weakness, hospitality, creative ministry, presence, withdrawal, emptying, dialogue, silence, reminding is the professing profession of a minister. His spiritual identity is his belovedness, compassion, Jesus-centeredness and contemplative life. It appears to be a high mountain which nobody can climb up. Nouwen's comforting message to the ministers is to remain faithful to our lifelong journey of **becoming** a minister. Thereby he corrects the imbalance between the unseen Christ in action, priest as 'alter Christus' and priest as a human being. As children of God we are loved and accepted, as we are, with our merits and weaknesses. The great truth of our belovedness is the true cause of our joy and the worth of living our lives. As heirs of the kingdom of God we are called to build it up till the humanity and the whole creation is consumed by the love of God.

The inner architecture of Nouwen's thinking consists of our basic struggle with our longings, limitations, doubts and uncertainties; our willingness to grow and mature and the hindrances on the way; the eternal love of God planted in our hearts which rises up in the small and intimate moments of prayer; our vertical relationship to others in love, compassion, solidarity and community; and the fulfillment of our life through aging and dying. Nouwen did not fix himself on ideologies. He avoided writing discourses and quoting authors and documents. He was existential and plausible till his death. He did not place his

priesthood above the people. Nouwen's provocative art was intended to correct the existing pastoral spirituality. He was uncomfortable with the stereotype picture of a priest. His terminologies contain a 'movement' (for example 'reaching out', 'beyond') and he has a dynamic understanding of ministry. He saw every human being and every community around the table of the Lord, breaking with each other word and bread, as a sacrament. His mobility, risking and experimenting mentality, restless seeking, discovering himself and scanning others through his sensibility made him an adventurer and a researcher into the undiscovered territories of pastoral field in our time.

Nouwen's priestly spirituality is deeply rooted in the Christian spirituality. Therefore we can call the 'growth in spirituality' as Nouwen's perspective for Ministers and naturally for the practical theology. Both the theory and practice should not get lost in action. In the writing and in his own person we notice the phenomenon of moving from the exclusiveness of the ministers to their commonness with other Christians. There is also a shift from addressing the ministers to writing for all those who want to lead a spiritual life. His writing for the clerics was more out of his duty consciousness, but his spiritual books are confessions of the movement of his heart. A journey towards the heart brought him to the essence of Christian life which is the climax of his teachings. Thus Nouwen is a model for priests who want to follow their vocation rooted in a sound spirituality. Nouwen's ultimate aim is to connect the pastoral spirituality to the Christian spirituality.

Nouwen was open and chose a simple language understandable for all categories of people. His language was spiritual and personal, feminine and innocent. We can also notice some sort of 'difference' and eccentricity in his priestly life. His allowing himself to be seen, even his personal struggles, is in accordance with the Christian spirit of sharing joy and sorrow. He confessed about his sexual struggles only very discretely in order to protect himself against a society and media which try to break into the intimate places to create sensations. But people who suffered like him and with him could understand his struggles and his trust and hope in God. It has helped his fellow Christians to identify themselves with him and be encouraged by him.

His 'inner fire' caused him a big price. The confrontation with himself and his limitations drove him to exhaustion and burn out. But he preferred to burn till the end rather than burning sparingly. Doing for Nouwen was becoming what God wants him to be. During the first phase of his life he discovered and learned the essence of what he wanted to do and be, in the second phase he tried to put them into practice and in the final phase - the quiet phase - he simply loved to live his being a Christian and confess it. In his writings he tried to articulate, evaluate, systematise and connect the psychological realm to the spiritual realm. Nouwen's claim that not only the pastoral duties but also the spiritual way of doing them belong to the core and purview of pastoral is, according to me, his contribution to the contemporary pastoral spirituality. Nouwen's assessment of the mental and spiritual state of the ministers, his brotherly approach and fatherly advice, his discipline and his freedom, his understanding and personal concern, his tireless search for the spiritual answers and his honesty and willingness to confess and share; all these are elements which we can incorporate into our learning-process and are useful contributions to pastoral theology. Nouwen's pastoral competence is his carving out the spiritual option for the pastoral theologians. Ministers are those who have profited the most out of Nouwen's person and writings. He has wonderfully connected psychology to spirituality and turned our attention

to the hidden treasures in the Bible. Thus the contribution of Nouwen to pastoral theology is substantial.

I hope that the confession of Nouwen which I have tried to present here helps the revival of the exercise of priestly vocation in a materialized and secularized west and in the westernizing third world countries. Nouwen's understanding of ministry as a confessing profession throws a real challenge to the church of today in which we notice the declining number of priests, especially in the developed countries, and the increasing number of parishes entrusted to a priest. Many priests are entering into the role of managers and are not able to make themselves available as spiritual guides or councilors. Even with the best of intentions some are not able to cope up with the double function of managerial and pastoral efficiency. Here we see the dilemma in which many ministers find themselves. Nouwen gives a clear role-definition of the minister and the means of exercising it. This is extremely helpful to the ministers to get more clarity for themselves and at large to the training for ministry.

Henri touched many people with his honesty, his wisdom and his pain and joy. He made people feel special and holy and loved and interesting and he was a man on a journey. The journey of life taught him important spiritual truths like belovedness, brokenness, the meaning of compassion and passion, God's hidden presence and real presence, peace in the midst of weakness, Patience, restlessness, waiting, expectation, discerning, trust, joy, gratitude etc. He invited people to celebrate life and he himself enjoyed celebrating the life. He caught many people like a trapeze artist and his ultimate goal was to be caught by the great catcher in heaven. He himself grew into the light, the light which takes away all the dark and grey lines that divide religious cultures and people and unites all the colours of the human search into one all-embracing rainbow of God's light. Nouwen entered this light leaving his words and actions to bear fruit in our world. This light which is nothing other than the love of God is the guiding principle of all pastoral activities and the essence of what Nouwen wanted to live and convey.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### BOOKS WRITTEN BY HENRI J. M. NOUWEN (Alphabetical Order)

1. A cry for Mercy: Prayers from the Genesee, *Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York* 1981.
2. A letter of consolation, *Harper Collins, New York* 1982.
3. Adam: God's beloved, *Orbis Books, New York* 1997.
4. Aging, the fulfilment of life, *Doubleday, New York* 1974.
5. Behold the beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons, *Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana* 1987.
6. Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on death and Life, *Crossroad, New York* 1992.
7. Bread for the Journey: Thoughts for every day of the year, *Harper Collins, San Francisco* 1997.
8. Can you drink the cup, *Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana* 1996.
9. Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer and contemplation, *Doubleday, New York* 1979.
10. with Donald P. McNeill and Douglas A. Morrison, Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian life, *Doubleday, New York* 198
11. Creative Ministry, *Doubleday, New York* 1978.
12. The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery, *Doubleday, New York* : 1989.
13. Gracias: A Latin American Journal, *Orbis Books, New York* 1995.
14. Heart Speaks to Heart, *Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana* 1995.
15. Here and Now - Living in the Spirit, *Cross Road, New York* 1997.
16. In Memoriam, *Ave Maria, Notre Dame, Indiana* 1996.
17. In the name of Jesus, *Cross Road, New York* 1997.
18. Intimacy: Essays in Pastoral Theology, *Harper, New York :San Francisco* 1969.
19. Jesus and Mary: Finding our Sacred Centre, *St. Antony messenger press, Cincinnati, Ohio* : 1993.
20. Letters to Marc about Jesus, *Harper, New York : San Francisco* 1988.

21. Life of the Beloved: Spiritual living in a secular World, *Crossroad, New York* 1997.
22. Lifesigns: Intimacy, Fecundity, and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective, *Doubleday, New York* 1990.
23. Love in a Fearful Land, *Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana* 1985.
24. Making all things new, *Harper, New York San Francisco* 1981.
25. Our greatest gift: A meditation on dying and caring, *Harper, New York, San Francisco* 1995.
26. Out of Solitude, *Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana* 1995.
27. Peacework , Prayer - resistance - community ( with a Foreword from John Dear published after the death of Nouwen ), *Orbis books, Maryknoll, New York* 2005.
28. Reaching Out : The three movements of the spiritual life, *Doubleday, New York* 1975.
29. Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of his Final Year, *Crossroad, New York* 1998.
30. The Inner Voice of Love: A journey from anguish to freedom, *Doubleday, New York* 1996.
31. The Living Reminder, *Gill and McMillan , Dublin* 1982.
32. The Path of Freedom, The Path of Peace, The path of Power, The path of Waiting (4Titles), *Crossroad, New York* 1995.  
(*Finding my way home* is a Revision of the path series)
33. The Return of the Prodigal son, *Doubleday, New York* 1994.
34. The Road to Daybreak: A spiritual Journey, *Doubleday, N. Y.* 1990.
35. The Way of the Heart, *Ballantine Books, New York* 1991.
36. The Wounded Healer: Ministry in contemporary society, *Doubleday, New York* 1972.
37. Thomas Merton, a contemplative critic, *Triumph Books, Liguori, Missouri* 1991.
38. Walk with Jesus: Stations of the Cross, *Orbis Books, New York* 1990.
39. With burning Hearts: A meditation on the Eucharistic life, *Orbis Books, New York* 1996.
40. With open Hands, *Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame Indiana* 1997.

**Three -in -ones**

Nouwen, H. : Ministry and Spirituality, *Continuum, New York* 1996.

Nouwen, H. : Spiritual Journals *Continuum, New York* 1997.

**Books written On Henry Nouwen**

Beumer, J., Henry Nouwen: A restless seeking for God, trns. David E. Schlaver and Nancy Forest-Flier, *Crossroad , New York* 1996. Originally published in Dutch by Uitgeverij Lannoo, Tielt, Belgium, 1996 under the title *Onrustig zoeken naar God: De spiritualiteit van Henri Nouwen*

De Vinck, C., Nouwen Then: Personal Reflections on Henri, *Zondervan publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan* 1999

Ford, M., Wounded Prophet, *Doubleday, New York* 1999.

La Noue, D., The spiritual Legacy of Nouwen, *Continuum, New York* 2000.

Laughlin, M. : God's beloved, A spiritual biography of Henri Nouwen, *Orbis books, Maryknoll, New York* 2004.

Laughlin, M. : Henri Nouwen, His life and vision, *Orbis books, Maryknoll, New York* 2005.

Porter, B., Befriending life: Encounter with Nouwen, *Doubleday, New York* 2001.

**Compilations**

Bence, E. : Mornings with Henri, *Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, Michigan* 1997.

Dear, J. : Road to Peace, *Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y.* 1998.

Durback, R. : A retreat with Henri Nouwen : *St Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, Ohio* 2003.

Durback, R. : Henri Nouwen in my own words, : *Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri* 2001.

Durback, R. : Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader, *Doubleday, N.Y.* 1997.

Ford, M. : Eternal seasons, *Sorin Books : Indiana and D.L.T. : London* 2003.

Garvey, J. : Circles of love : Henri Nouwen: Arranged for daily reading, : *Darton Longmann*

*and Todd London* 1996.

Garvey, J. : Henri Nouwen: Arranged for daily Reading, *Templegate publishers, Springfield* 1988.

- Gillespie, K. C. : Psychology and American Catholicism, *Crossroad, N. Y.* 2001.
- Glaser, C. : Henri's Mantle, *The Pilgrim Press, Cleaveland, Ohio* 2002.
- Greer, W. : Finding my way home: Pathways to life and spirituality, *Crossroad, New York* 2001.
- Greer, W. : The Only Necessary Thing, *Crossroad, New York* 1999.
- Johna, F. : Show me the Way: Readings for each day of Lent, *Herder, Freiburg im Br.* 1990.
- Jonas, R. A. : Henri Nouwen: Writings selected with an Introduction,  
(Also appeared as *Fire of the beloved*) *Orbis, Maryknoll* 1998.
- Jones, T. : Turn my mourning into dancing, *Word Publishing, Nashwill* 2001.
- Laird, R. and Christensen, M. J. : The heart of Henri Nouwen *Crossroad, New York* 2003.
- Müller, W. : Henri Nouwen: Springen, das Wagnis von Nähe,  
*Viertürme Verlag, Münsterschwarzach* 2002 .
- Nomura, Y. : Desert Wisdom: Nouwen's sayings from the Desert-fathers  
*Orbis Books, New York* 2001.
- Laughlin, M. : Jesus a Gospel, *Orbis Books, New York* 2001.
- Ringma, C. : Dare to journey with Henri Nouwen, *Pinon Press, Colorado Springs* 2000.

### **Videotapes:**

1. A Tribute to Henri Nouwen.
2. Straight to the heart: The life of Henri Nouwen
3. Angels over the net
4. Henri Nouwen's passion and spirituality: 'Belovedness'
5. From the house of fear to the house of love: A spirituality of peace making  
(Intimacy, Fecundity and ecstasy)
6. With burning Hearts: A meditation on the Eucharistic life

### **Audiocassette: (Daybreak Publications)**

1. Aging and Ministry ( 2 cassettes )

2. Desert spirituality and contemporary Ministry.( 3 cassettes )
3. Who will mourn, who will dance
4. Who are we? Exploring our Christian identity
5. A spirituality of waiting
6. The lonely search for God
7. Life of the Beloved

**Other books quoted :**

Flannery, A. : Vatican Council II, *Collegeville, Liturgical press* 1975.

Gillespie, C.K. : Psychology and American Catholicism, *Crossroad Publishing, New York* 2001.

Stollberg, D. : Therapeutische Seelsorge, *München, Kaiser* 1969.

**Tip to articles written by Nouwen**

Nouwen, H. : "*A New Life Among the Handicapped*" *New Oxford Review*, 53 Sep 1986, pp. 5-13.

....., *A Glimpse behind the mirror: Reflections on death and life*, *Weavings*, Nov-Dec 1989 pp.13-23.

....., *A ministry of presence and absence*, *Alban Institute Action Information*, Mar - Apr 1981 pp. 8-11

....., *A Picnic on a Tombstone & Other Reflections*" *New Oxford Review*, Mar 1994, pp. 9-15.

....., *A Self-Emptied Heart: The Disciplines of Spiritual Formation*" *Sojourners*, Aug 1981, pp. 20-22.

....., *A spirituality of Waiting: Being Alert to God's Presence in Our Lives*" *Weavings*, Jan-Feb 1987, pp.6-17.

....., *A Sudden Trip to Lourdes*" *New Oxford Review*, Sep 1990, pp. 7-13.

- ....., *"All is Grace"* Weavings, Nov-Dec 1992, pp. 38-41.
- ....., *"Anger's Burden"* Weavings, Mar-Apr 1994, pp. 26-30.
- ....., *"Bearing Fruit in the Spirit"* Sojourners, Jul 1985, pp. 26-30.
- ....., *"Blessed"* Living Prayer, Jul-Aug 1992, pp. 3-7.
- ....., *"Broken"* Living Prayer, Mar-Apr 1993, pp. 3-7.
- ....., *"Celibacy is a Witness to the World"* Vision'94, 1994, 28-30, p. 91.
- ....., *"Celibacy need Prayer and Poverty"* Vision'96, Jan 1996, pp. 68- 69.
- ....., *"Choosing Joy"* New Covenant, Nov 1992, pp. 7-9. \_\_\_
- ....., *"Christ of the Americas"* America, Apr 21, 1984, pp. 293-302.
- ....., *"Christ's Simultaneous Absence & Presence"* New Oxford Review, Jan-Feb 1987, p. 4-7.
- ....., *"Christian Leadership of Tomorrow"* Louvain Studies, Spring 1971, pp. 175- 178.
- ....., *"Compassion: Bringing Us Together"* The Sign, Oct 1976, p. 38.
- ....., *"Compassion: Solidarity, Consolation and Comfort"* America, Mar 13, 1976, pp. 195-200.
- ....., *"Coping with Distractions"* New Oxford Review, 53 Dec 1986, pp. 5-9.
- ....., *"Creating True Intimacy"* Sojourners, Jun 1985, pp. 14-18.
- ....., *"Deeper into Love"* Weavings, Sep-Oct 1995, p. 25.
- ....., *"Descend With the Mind Into the Heart "* Sojourners, Aug 1980, pp. 20-24.
- ....., *"Disappearing from the World"* The Sign, Nov 1976, pp. 5-7.
- ....., *"Discipleship and Reconciliation"*, - An interview with Mary  
 , Louis Eichenlaub and Anne McCarthy - Pax Christi USA, Winter 1991, pp. 20-21.

- ....., *"Does the News Destroy Compassion?"* The Sign, Sep 1976, pp. 25-27.
- ....., *"Drawing Closer to God & Man"* The Sign, May 1976, pp. 10-16.
- ....., *"Easter: No Easy Victory"* St. Anthony Messenger, Mar 1975, pp. 12-13.
- ....., *"Eight-part series on 'Compassion'"* Sojourners, Sep 1977 to Apr 1978, no page numbers, (John M. Kelly Library, Toronto).
- ....., *"Encounter in Solitude"* The Sign, Feb 1981, pp. 12-17.
- ....., *"Finding a New Way to Get a Glimpse of God"* New Oxford Review, Jul-Aug 1993, pp. 6-13.
- ....., *"Finding a Trapeze Artist in the Priest"* New Oxford Review, Jun 1993, pp. 8-14.
- ....., *"Finding Peace in Brokenness"* (original title is *Adam 's Peace*) World Vision, Aug-Sep 1988, pp. 4-7.
- ....., *"Finding the Friendly Space"* The Episcopalian, Jun 1973, pp. 9- 10,44.
- ....., *"Finding Vocation in Downward Mobility"* Leadership, Summer 1990, pp. 60-61.
- ....., *"Forgiveness: The Name of Love in a Wounded World"* Weavings, Mar-Apr 1992, pp. 6-15.
- ....., *"Gratitude"* America, Dec 4, 1982, pp. 352-353.
- ....., *"Hearing Heart to Heart"* Sojourners, Oct 1980, pp. 23-25.
- ....., *"Hidden Treasures in Our Lives"* Praying, Nov-Dec 1990, pp. 5-8.
- ....., *"Hospitality"* Monastic Studies, Easter 1974, pp. 1-28.
- ....., *"Humility"* America, Dec 11, 1982, p. 372.
- ....., *"Letting Go of All Things: A Response to 'The Work of Prayer'"*

Sojourners, May 1979, pp. 5-6.

....., *"Living the Incarnation"* New Oxford Review, Apr 1987, pp. 3-7.

....., *"Living the Questions: The Spirituality of the Religion Teacher"*  
Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Fall 1976, pp. 17-24.

....., *"Memories Can Be Healed"* The Sign, Feb 1977.

....., *"Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry"* Leadership, Spring 1995, pp. 81-87.

....., *"Orthodox Downward Mobility or Secularist Prosperity?"* New Oxford Review,  
Nov 1986, pp. 7-15.

....., *"Patience"* The Sign, Apr 1979, pp. 7-12.

....., *"Peace, a Gift We Receive in Prayer"* New Oxford Review, Sep 1985, pp. 7-18.

....., *"Pilgrimage to the Christian East"* New Oxford Review, Apr 1994, pp. 11-17.

....., *"Power, Powerlessness, and Power"* Weavings, Jan-Feb 1995, pp. 34-44.

....., *"Prayer and Ministry: An Interview With Henri J: M Nouwen"* Durken, D.,  
Sisters Today, Feb 1977, pp. 345-355.

....., *"Prayer and the Jealous God"* New Oxford Review, Jun 1985, pp. 7-12.

....., *"Reborn From Above"* Spiritual Life, Spring 1992, pp. 29-32.

....., *"Running from What We Desire"* Partnership, Jul-Aug 1986, pp. 32-35.

....., *"Saying 'No' to Death in All its Manifestations"* New Oxford Review, Oct 1985,  
pp. 10-18.

....., *"Saying a Humble, Compassionate, & Joyful 'Yes' to Life"* New Oxford Review,  
Nov 1985, pp. 19-26.

- ....., *"Seeing Christ"* America, Jan 11, 1986, pp. 4-7.
- ....., *"Service"* America, Nov 27, 1982, p. 325.
- ....., *"Silence: The Portable Cel'* Sojourners, Jul 1980, pp. 22-26.
- ....., *"Solitude and Community"* Worship, Jan 1978, pp. 13-23.
- ....., *"Solitude and Intimacy in the Family"* A. D. Correspondence, Jul 1976, pp. 2-7.
- ....., *"Spiritual Direction"* Worship, Sep 1981, pp. 399-404.
- ....., *"Spirituality and Ministry: An Interview with Henri Nouwen"* The Practice of Ministry in Canada, Spring 1987, pp. 11-13.
- ....., *"Spirituality and the Family"* Weavings, Jan-Feb 1988, pp. 6-12.
- ....., *"Stranger in Paradise"* The Sign, Apr 1976, pp. 13-18.
- ....., *"Temptation: The Pull Toward Upward Mobility"* Sojourners, Jul 1981, pp. 25-27
- ....., *"The Desert Counsel to Flee the World'* Sojourners, Jun 1980, pp. 14-18.
- ....., *"The Duet of the Holy Spirit: When Mourning & Dancing Are One"* New Oxford Review, Jun 1992, pp. 5-12.
- ....., *"The Extraordinary Witness Of Marthe Robin"* New Oxford Review, May 1987, pp. 4-10.
- ....., *"The Fullness Of Divine Love: Reflections on a Russian Pentecost Icon"* Sojourners, Jun 1986, pp. 24-27.
- ....., *"The Gulf Between East & West"* New Oxford Review, May 1994, pp. 7-16.
- ....., *"The Icon Of the Virgin Of Vladimir: An Invitation to Belong to God'* America, May 11, 1985, pp. 387-390.
- ....., *"The Monk and The Cripple: Toward a Spirituality Of Ministry"* America, Mar. 15,

1980, pp. 205-210.

....., *"The Most Profound Basis for the Sacredness Of All Human Flesh"* New

Oxford Review, Mar 1987, pp.15-18.

....., *"The Parish: A Safe Place to Face Our Pain"* Alban Institute Action

Information, Jan-Feb 1981, pp. 1-5.

....., *"The Peace That is Not of This World"* Weavings, Mar-Apr 1988, pp. 23-34.

....., *"The Poverty of a Host"* Monastic Studies, Easter 1974, pp. 65-69.

....., *"The Primacy of the Heart"* Expressions, Mar-Apr 1987, pp. 1,8.

....., *"The Selfless Way Of Christ: Downward Mobility as Christian Vocation"*

Sojourners, Jun 1981, pp. 12-15.

....., *"The Trusting Heart & the Primacy Of the Mystical Life"* New Oxford Review,

Oct 1986, pp. 5-14.

....., *"The Vulnerable God"* Weavings, Jul-Aug 1993, pp. 28-35.

....., *"To Meet the Body is to Meet the Word: Living the Incarnation at L 'Arche "*

New Oxford Review, Apr 1987, pp. 3-7.

....., *"Trying to Avoid Temptations When Among the Famous & Successful"* New

Oxford Review, Jun 1987, pp. 9-14.

....., *"Unceasing Prayer"* America, Aug 5,1978, pp. 46-51.

....., *"Unchanged by the World"* Sojourners, Aug-Sep 1991, pp. 28-29.

....., *"We Drink From Our Own Wells"* America, Oct 15, 1983, pp. 205-208.

....., *"Compassion: The Core of Spiritual Leadership"* Worship, Jan 1977, pp. 11-23.

....., with Donald McNeill and Douglas Morrison, *"The Parish as a Community of Compassion: A Style Of Pastoral Leadership"* The St. Luke Journal of Theology, Mar 1978,

pp. 89-101.

**Tip to Articles written on Nouwen**

Anderson, J. : *PW Interviews : Henri J. M. Nouwen* Publisher's weekly Oct 2, 1981, pp.3-4.

Arthur, B.P. : *Priest led from Ivy League to 'Answer Call' at L'Arche* The Saturday Windsor Star, Oct 14, 1989, pp. E6- E7.

Beckwith, B. : *A restless searcher for his Vocations* St Antony Messenger, Feb. 1999 p.50.

Brennan, T. : *A visit with Henri Nouwen* The critic, Summer 1978, pp. 42-49.

Callahan, A. : *Receptivity according to Ann Belford Ulanov and Henri Nouwen* Spiritual life, Spring 1992, pp. 33-44.

Coady, M.F. : *Nouwen finds rest at Daybreak* Catholic New Times, Nov 23, 1986.

Durback, R. : *Henri Nouwen : Memories of a Wounded Prophet* America, Jul 3, 1999 pp.14-17.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Henri Nouwen: Spirituality for a Technological age* Praying, May-Jun. 1987 pp. 9-14.

Ellsberg, R. : *A Sense of Being Sent* Catholic Worker, Jan-Feb. 1997 pp.6-7 .

Finley, M. : *Father Henri Nouwen on growing Spirituality* Our Sunday Visitor, Dec 18, 1988 p.7.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Father Henri Nouwen on growing Spirituality* Our Sunday Visitor, Dec 25, 1988 pp.8-9.

Fox, T. : *For Henri Nouwen Death Not So Mortal* National Catholic Reporter, Apr 1, 1994, pp. 11-12.

Frawley, J. : *Henri Nouwen: a Physician of the Heart* National Catholic Register, Dec 21, 1986, p.1.

Grainger, B. : *A Heart's Desire: Henri Nouwen's Journey Home* Sojourners, Nov-Dec 1996, pp.26-30.

Heyneman, J. S. : *Dutch Priest Advises Spending More Time With God* Macon Telegraph and News, Jan 4, 1989, pp. 1D-2D.

Hiltner, S. : *Henri Nouwen: Pastoral Theologian of the Year* Pastoral Psychology, Fall 1978, pp. 4-7.

- Kelly, R.J. : *Nouwen Puts Busy-Ness of Life in Perspective* The Catholic Transcript, Sep 3, 1982 p.4A.
- Kelly, P. : *Living the second Loneliness : Henri J. Nouwen at Daybreak* Companion, Jan 1990, pp. 5-12.
- Laird, R. : *Parting Words: A conversation on Prayer with Henri Nouwen* Fellowship in Prayer, Dec 1996, pp.6-20.
- Meehan, F.X. : *He Pleads, Knowing the Charge to Come* The Philadelphia Inquirer, Aug 13, 1983, p.9A.
- Mogabgab, J.S. : *The Spiritual Pedagogy of Henri Nouwen* Reflection, Jan 1981, pp. 4-6.
- Muldoon, N. : *Solitude: In he Writings of Henri Nouwen* Sisters Today, Dec 1984, pp. 219-226.
- O'Connor, L. : *Father Nouwen- Peacemaking is at the Core of Christian Life* Long Island Catholic, Sep 16, 1982.
- O'Laughlin, N. : *Henri Nouwen in Life and in Death* America, May 10, 1997 pp.18-20.
- Odell, C.M. : *Father Nouwen Sees the Light at Daybreak* Our Sunday Visitor Jul 12, 1992, p.5.
- Redmont, J. : *A conversation with Henri Nouwen- An interview with Henri Nouwen,* Harvard Divinity Bulletin, April-May 1983, pp. 8-10.
- Tekippe, T. : *The Living Reminder* Worship, Jan 1978, pp. 91-92.
- Wakin, E. : *Father Henri Nouwen: A Spiritual Guide For All Seasons* Our Sunday Visitor, Jul 18, 1982, pp.6-7.
- Wallace, J.A. : *Homage to Henri Liguorian*, Mar 1997, p.55.
- Wallis, J. : *The Deepest Questions of Life and Faith* Sojourners, Nov-Dec 1996, p.29.
- Walsh, C. : *Living the spiritual life: An interview with Henri Nouwen* St Antony Messenger, April 1986, pp.11-15.
- Walsh, C.: *Perspective* America Oct 26, 1996, p.8.
- Whitney-Brown, C. : *Safe in God's Heart: The gift and struggle of Henri Nouwen's life* Sojourners, Nov-Dec 1996, pp.30-32.