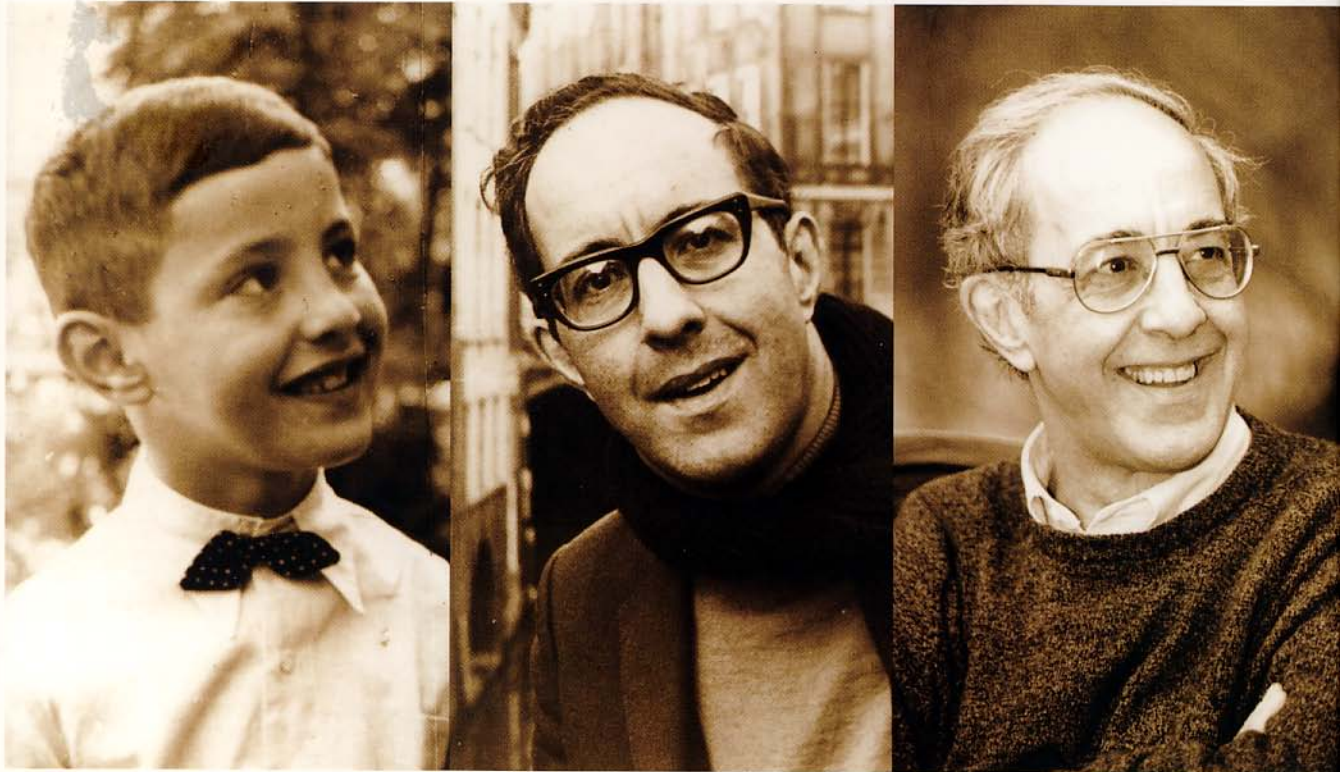


HENRI NOUWEN



HIS LIFE AND VISION

Michael O'Laughlin

Illustrated with 140 Photos

Founded in 1970, Orbis Books endeavors to publish works that enlighten the mind, nourish the spirit, and challenge the conscience. The publishing arm of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Orbis seeks to explore the global dimensions of the Christian faith and mission, to invite dialogue with diverse cultures and religious traditions, and to serve the cause of reconciliation and peace. The books published reflect the views of their authors and do not represent the official position of the Maryknoll Society. To learn more about Maryknoll and Orbis Books, please visit our website at www.maryknoll.org.

Copyright © 2005 by Michael O'Laughlin.

Published in 2005 by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545-0308.

Published in Great Britain in 2005 by Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1 Spencer Court, 140-142 Wandsworth High Street, London SW18 4JJ.

Published in Canada in 2005 by Novalis, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 1C4.

All rights reserved.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following publishers for permission to reprint material from books by Henri Nouwen: Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc., for *Reaching Out*, copyright © 1975 by Henri J.M. Nouwen; *The Road to Daybreak*, copyright © 1988 by Henri J.M. Nouwen; *A Cry for Mercy*, copyright © 1981 by Henri J.M. Nouwen; *The Inner Voice of Love*, copyright © 1996 by Henri J.M. Nouwen. Crossroad Publishing, for *Sabbatical Journey*, copyright © 1998 by the Estate of Henri J.M. Nouwen; *In the Name of Jesus*, copyright © 1993 by Henri J.M. Nouwen; *Life of the Beloved*, copyright © 1992 by Henri J.M. Nouwen; *Here and Now*, copyright © 1994 by Henri J.M. Nouwen. Ave Maria Press, for *Can You Drink the Cup?* copyright © 1996 by Ave Maria Press. HarperCollins Publishers for *Intimacy*, copyright © 1969 by Henri J.M. Nouwen; *Letters to Marc about Jesus*, copyright © 1988 by Henri J.M. Nouwen; *Bread for the Journey*, copyright © 1997 by Henri J.M. Nouwen; *Our Greatest Gift*, copyright © 1994 by Henri J.M. Nouwen.

Thanks to all who granted permission to use their photographs in this book. We apologize for any credits that were omitted; these can be corrected in a future reprint.

Learn more about Nouwen, his writing and the work of the Henri Nouwen Society. Visit www.HenriNouwen.org

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Queries regarding rights and permissions should be addressed to:
Orbis Books, P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0308.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

Designed by Roberta Savage.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data: 2005016720
Orbis ISBN 1-57075-612-0

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
DLT ISBN 0 232 52633 8

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data:
A catalogue record for this book is available from Library and Archives Canada
Novalis ISBN 2-89507-710-X



Professor at Yale Divinity School. (Courtesy Yale Divinity School)

Yale

Henri Nouwen's first book, *Intimacy*, had interested and impressed the dean and several faculty members at Yale Divinity School. For that reason Henri had been invited to speak at Yale while he was teaching at Notre Dame, and while he was in Holland he received another request that he lecture at Yale. On that visit from Holland to Connecticut he was given a surprise interview and even a job offer. However, Henri declined. He had decided that his future was at home, in the Netherlands.

However, interest in Nouwen at Yale did not diminish. As he continued to produce a number of engaging and practical books and articles in English, the divinity school renewed its offer. Nouwen hesitated. The offer from Yale was attractive, but he wanted time to finish projects in Holland, and he insisted that if he went to Yale, he could not be expected to produce technical works of scholarship like the rest of the faculty. This had been his downfall several times already.

Yale agreed to Nouwen's terms and he decided to join the divinity school faculty. He was to be the psychological half of a two-person team working in the field of pastoral ministry. However, in the end this arrangement or division of labor never came to pass. Much as had happened when he was recruited to join the psychology department at Notre Dame, once Henri arrived at Yale, he found his interest in representing the psychological approach to be waning further and being replaced by a strong desire to weave personal spirituality back into pastoral ministry. Indeed, by this point spirituality had become his primary focus.

"I experienced it in my own seminary years and saw it at Notre Dame, at the North American College, at Yale Divinity School, and at many other places. Everywhere there was the tendency to live, act, and think as if the real life is not here but there, not now but later. This tendency makes the formation of community so difficult, if not impossible."

—¡Gracias!

Although Yale got something different than they had bargained for, Nouwen's contribution to the life of the school was huge and innovative. During his time at Yale Nouwen taught classes on ministry to prisoners and to the elderly, on ministry in secular institutions, on discipleship, on the relationship of ministry and spirituality, on the ministry of Vincent van Gogh, on prayer, and on Thomas Merton. Besides his academic courses, Nouwen became a de facto chaplain to the Yale student body and community. Henri Nouwen was one of the first Roman Catholics to join the Protestant faculty of this storied and famous American academic institution. His celebration of mass in the basement chapel of the school became a staple of community life at Yale, and these services were attended by students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

His popularity as a professor was matched by a growing reputation as a spiritual writer. In the ten years he was to remain at Yale he was more and more widely read and quoted as an authority in the field of pastoral ministry and spirituality. In addition, Henri Nouwen ended up spending more time with students than any other faculty member, and he made friendships with dozens of them that would last for decades. As students began to arrive at Yale specifically because of Nouwen's presence there, some of the faculty did become somewhat envious. This was understandable. Henri Nouwen was completely different from them in a number of ways. As a Catholic he provided a splash of color in an otherwise very traditional atmosphere, and while they toiled in the library to produce serious works of scholarship, he dashed off little books on spiritual themes that anyone might read and enjoy. They were serious scholars, but he was the popular one who everyone was reading.

Although there was faculty resentment of Nouwen's fame and his popularity among the students, Yale was a very good place for Henri Nouwen to expand and deepen his mission to America and the world. It was at Yale that Nouwen rounded



out his persona as a humble seeker with a magical insight into matters of the human heart. It was at Yale that he learned to speak more openly about his own spiritual journey instead of using textbook examples and other abstractions, and it was at Yale that he found the forum to speak about the civil rights movement, American foreign policy, and the many other concerns that were shaking the nation and the world.

Nouwen was granted tenure at Yale in 1974, some three years after his arrival. For most people, achieving tenure at an Ivy League school is the highest rung on the professional ladder and represents the culmination of a long career. For Nouwen, Yale was a good place to be, but not one where he expected to stay forever. There was a restlessness in Nouwen that had been part of his temperament since he was a small child, and that same restlessness asserted itself more and more

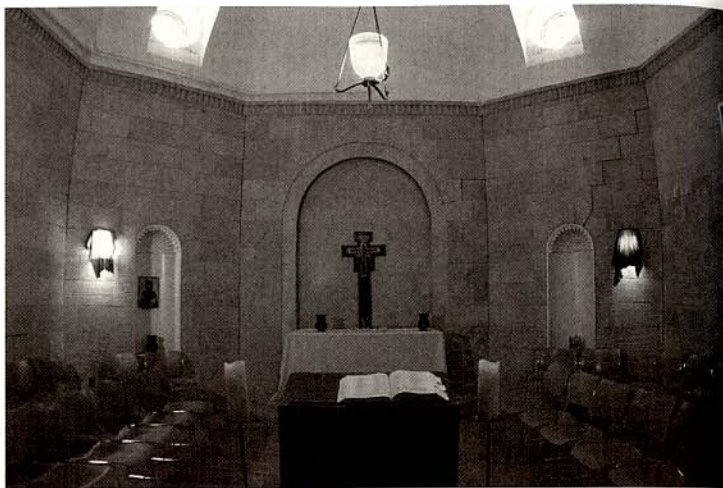
Teaching with his whole body.

(Photo by Ron van den Bosch, used with permission)

This chapel at Yale Divinity School has since been named the Henri Nouwen Chapel. (Courtesy Yale Divinity School)

“When I asked to come to Yale, my bishop said I could go for a few years; I stayed ten. Meanwhile, I became an associate professor, then a tenured, full professor. I was doing well on the level of my ambitions. . . . But I began to question whether I was really doing God’s will.”

—The Road to Peace



in the decade he remained at Yale. In spite of his success in ministering to students, teaching ministry, and writing interesting books for the wider public, he was feeling increasingly hollow and ungrounded. If he were to apply his theory about personal spirituality at the heart of ministry to his own person, he knew that the conclusion would be that his own spirit was broken and his sense of certainty very tenuous. He knew he ought to be closer to God than he was, ought to be doing more than he was, and so he was forever searching the horizon for some new person or interest or activity to give him a greater sense of fulfillment.