

THEOLOGY OVERVIEW

Many theology students, among others, have been greatly helped and challenged by the lectures and writings of Henri Nouwen. The fact is that his very person in life and in death encourages and uplifts those touched by his life and teaching. He was so very much alive and in touch with the world. Yet, it was so evident that he was not of the world. Here is a bit of his writing from *In the Name of Jesus*:

The original meaning of the word 'theology' was 'union with God in prayer.' Today theology has become one academic discipline alongside many others, and often theologians are finding it hard to pray. But for the future of Christian leadership it is of vital importance to reclaim the mystical aspect of theology so that every word spoken, every advice given, and every strategy developed can come from a heart that knows God intimately.

I have the impression that many of the debates within the Church around issues such as the papacy, the ordination of women, the marriage of priests, homosexuality, birth control, abortion, and euthanasia take place on a primarily moral level. On that level, different parties battle about right or wrong. But that battle is often removed from the experience of God's first love which lies at the base of all human relationships. Words like right-wing, reactionary, conservative, liberal, and left-wing are used to describe people's opinions, and many discussions then seem more like political battles for power than spiritual searches for 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. Dealing with burning issues without being rooted in 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 relationship 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 true witnesses without being manipulative.

For Christian leadership to be truly fruitful in the future, a movement from the moral to the mystical is required.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What most convicts or impresses you from this selection?
2. Among theology students and professors do you ever sense a spiritual coldness or dryness? Do you ever sense in yourself or others a defensiveness or contentiousness?
3. What do you know of the period of church history when theology was considered part of "union with God in prayer?"
4. What do you know of the "the mystical aspect of theology" and the "discipline of contemplative prayer?"
5. How can we discuss women's ordination, afrocentrism, homosexuality, abortion-and remain "flexible without being relativistic"?
6. What does it mean to be a "true witnesses without being manipulative?"
7. Where do you see yourself these days theologically and spiritually? What is this passage encouraging you to do?

Dean Borgman cCYS
