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**Restlessly Seeking for God: Towards an Integration of  
Contemplation and Practice as Proposed by Henri Nouwen for a  
Spirituality of Priesthood in a Contemporary Korean Church  
Context**

Hong-Rak Chae

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*RESTLESSLY SEEKING FOR GOD:  
TOWARDS AN INTEGRATION OF CONTEMPLATION AND PRACTICE  
AS PROPOSED BY HENRI NOUWEN FOR A SPIRITUALITY  
OF PRIESTHOOD IN A CONTEMPORARY KOREAN CHURCH CONTEXT*

A thesis by

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Committee Signatures

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## ABSTRACT

*RESTLESSLY SEEKING FOR GOD:  
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Hong-Rak Chae

This thesis focuses on the insights of Henri J. M. Nouwen with regard to the spirituality of Christian priesthood in the modern Korean church. It searches for a harmonious integration of contemplation and practice within the context of the divided country of Korea. The integration of contemplation and practice has been discussed countless times in Christian history and was a central theme in the Second Vatican Council. Both contemplation and practice are indispensable elements in spirituality; thus, it is meaningless to address which element should take priority. The realm of contemplation is not visible, but practice can be visually perceived. Numerous mystics in spiritual theology have explored contemplation in their own ways, which makes it challenging to understand the depth of contemplation. Nevertheless, the mystic of our time, Henri J. M. Nouwen, explains contemplation and practice so efficiently that anyone can understand it. Through persistent prayer, he was able to stay awake to God's voice, whom he experienced with all his senses. For Nouwen, writing was a spiritual training to put the contemplation he realized into concrete practice. Therefore, this thesis explores the path of a harmonious integration between contemplation and practice through Nouwen's books.

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Christopher M. Hadley, S.J., STD, Director      Date

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I would also like to express my gratitude to my reader, Professor Eduardo Fernandez, S.J., who taught me generosity towards other religions. He always encouraged me with kind words and became an example of faith. He once told me, "Trust that God will be faithful to you, and to the rest of us, crazy servants!"

Additionally, I thank my writing coach, Hanna Kang, for her support with academic writing. Lastly, I would like to thank Jim Oberhausen, Paul Kircher, and Mary Beth Lamb for checking my enrollment and progress. With the wisdom and guidance of everyone at the Jesuit School of Theology over the years, I was able to access Henri Nouwen's spirituality in abundance. I found the direction of my remaining life of priesthood. I give all this glory to God, my Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who draws us into holiness. God has guided me in a beautiful relationship with new people.

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Need for a New Spirituality of Priesthood for Koreans**

By taking *aggiornamento* as one of its themes on the Second Vatican Council, the Church continuously has tried to accommodate the needs of modern people in this changing world. The Church needed to become more inclusive and attentive to its members. Sadly, many churches in Korea are failing to live up to their mission.<sup>1</sup> A newspaper in Korea reported that the credibility of all religious organizations (3.3%) was much lower than that of profit-seeking big corporations (6.9%).<sup>2</sup> Such a phenomenon might be revealing the collapse of fundamental trust in human beings and their society. Religion has been the fundamental basis of any human society since the dawn of history. Loss of confidence in religion may signal failure of trust in human beings, leading to a collapse of belief in individuals and society. I will briefly trace such phenomena in the context of modern Korean society.

Politically, the Republic of Korea is making headlines in denuclearization diplomacy. The Korean Peninsula stands at the fork between the era of peace through the denuclearization of North Korea and the era of continually escalating nuclear threats. Koreans still live in the shadow of a possible nuclear war. Even though South and North Korea held three presidential summit meetings in 2017, and North Korea and the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> Chan-Hong Baek, “스님, 목사, 신부도 직업윤리가 있어야 살아남는다 (The monks, pastors, and priests also have to have their professional ethics to survive),” Oh my News, accessed August 2, 2018, [http://www.ohmynews.com/nws\\_web/view/at\\_pg.aspx?CNTN\\_CD=A0001187598](http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0001187598).

<sup>2</sup> Jae-Seon Kang, “종교단체 신뢰도, 대기업 신뢰도보다 낮아 (The credibility of religious organizations was lower than that of large companies),” *Catholic Press*, accessed November 2, 2018, <http://www.catholicpress.kr/news/view.php?idx=5421>.

had their presidential summit as well, the fate of Koreans was not out of the nuclear shadow yet even at the end of these important meetings.

Socially, Koreans have watched numerous news accounts of the former government's illegal maneuvers during past presidential elections. In particular, the Sewol Ferry incident destroyed many Koreans' belief that the state must protect its citizens. For many Koreans, the tragedy has become an unforgettable trauma because many watched it sinking with people inside in real-time. The helplessness of people became collective grief, and the passivity of the government and their denial of responsibility turned people's grief into deep-seated anger.

Approximately four months after Sewol Ferry disaster, Pope Francis visited Korea and requested Korean bishops to do three things: to be with the poor, watch out for clericalism, and open their doors and ears for their colleague priests at any time. The Pope comforted those in suffering and stated that he could not maintain neutrality in front of human suffering. After the Pope left Korea, the reporters asked Cardinal Soo-Jung Yeom about his thoughts on the Ferry incident. On the spot, he replied, "I think it is not good to waste our power and energy on this matter. And I think that the tragic families should make concessions in some ways, so that all people's will can join together."<sup>3</sup> Regardless of his intentions, the conservative media used his words to advocate the government's position, and the progressive press rebuked the cardinal for shunning the victims. Similarly, Korean Catholics suffered division because of the words of the cardinal. As a result, the cardinal's attitude of maintaining mechanical neutrality rather

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<sup>3</sup> Hyun Cho, "염수정 추기경 '유족들 양보해야' 발언 뒤에는... (What happened after Cardinal Soo-Jung Yeom said that the tragic families should yield...)," *The Hankyoreh*, accessed August 27, 2014, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/religious/652993.html>.

upset both the conservative and progressive believers. Brotherly love has become weaker, and the gospel words lost their light.<sup>4</sup>

Culturally, the feminist “Me Too” movement exposed something negative in Korean society. The social movement, which began from a courageous testimony of sexual abuse of a female prosecutor, has simultaneously leveled attacks toward every institution in Korea, such as entertainment organizations, education organizations, and religious organizations, especially against the authority in the Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the original intention of protecting human rights and gender equality, some groups have employed extreme methods. For example, a feminist group called “Womad”—a moniker that combines the words female and nomadic—committed sacrilege against the Eucharist.<sup>6</sup> Such an incident of desecration against the Eucharist was unheard of in the past.

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, a pastor of the Myong Seung community of the Presbyterian church handed all the church authority and property, over to his son in private, thus violating the Presbyterian churches’ federal constitution. The reason he did so maybe the eighty-million-dollar slush fund he created during his tenure. Won-Jang Kim, “명성교회 부자 세습은 합법... 거센 논란 (A big controversy of the father-to-son succession of power of Myong Seung church),” Sasagun Plus 2 in KBS news, last modified August 10, 2018, <http://mn.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=4022681>; In a different case, members of the Korean Buddhist Jogye Order impeached their Executive Chief because of evidence that he had fathered an illegitimate child, forged his own degree of education career, and accumulated some of the Jogye Order’s property for personal use. Hak-Su Han, “큰 스님께 묻습니다 1 (A chief monk scandal 1),” *MBC PD Notebook*, no. 1153, accessed May 1, 2018, last modified May 4, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXFsbMYv4IA>; In another case, people have been mocking and condemning the Roman Catholic Church for dishonest financial problems and sex scandals of some dioceses in Korea. Byong-Cheol Shim, “희망원 비리, 대구시는 책임 없나? (The corruption of Daegu City Hope Village...Is Daegu City not responsible?),” Daegu MBC news, accessed May 29, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCYaUXlpJHA>; Such information, which is most often disseminated through television news and newspapers, has shaken people’s trust and risked destroying the community of believers and non-believers.

<sup>5</sup> Suk-Hee Sohn, “[인터뷰] 서지현 검사 ‘검찰 내 성폭행도 있었지만 비밀리에 덮여’ (A female prosecutor’s interview: The rape in the prosecution was secretly covered),” JTBC news, accessed January 29, 2018, [http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/article.aspx?news\\_id=NB11582419](http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/article.aspx?news_id=NB11582419).

<sup>6</sup> They took their home the body of Christ that sanctified in the Mass. And they made red graffiti and burned the Eucharist. Jin-Mu Huh, “위마드 ‘성체훼손’ 논란 일파만파 (There was blasphemy against

In another case, some Protestant pastors and followers fiercely protested the Korean government's enactment of anti-discrimination legislation, also known as the National Action Plan of Human Rights. The National Action Plan prohibits discrimination against sexual minorities and foreign refugees. Some conservative Protestant pastors find this law problematic because of their biblical doctrine. In this regard, Dr. Namsoon Kang, a professor at Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University, criticizes that some Protestants are involved in hate politics against sexual minorities and foreign refugees. She assesses their actions as disgusting, like a betrayal of the spirit of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> As a result, believers and non-believers are confused, frustrated, angry, and lost a vision of life. Hostility is growing faster than hospitality in the wounded heart of Koreans. A severe crisis broke out in the spiritual life of the Korean churches.

The analysis so far shows that the events of recent years have severely hurt the hearts of Koreans and left untreated traumas, anger, and hostility towards one another. Instead of loving their neighbors as themselves, they cannot love even themselves. The failure to sympathize with the suffering of others leads to an antagonistic society in which the banality of evil becomes everyday life, which summarizes the spiritual crisis of the Korean churches today.

As a Korean priest witnessing these events, I have grown saddened. The church, called to be the light of the world, has failed to live up to its mission. Rooted in faith in

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the Eucharist of Womad, and the controversy grew to an all-out),” *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, accessed July 11, 2018, [http://news.khan.co.kr/kh\\_news/khan\\_art\\_view.html?art\\_id=201807111127001](http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=201807111127001).

<sup>7</sup> Namsoon Kang, “예수상품을 파는 이들, 혐오정치를 멈추라 (Those who sell Jesus as a commodity, Stop the hate politics),” *Sisain*, no. 576 (October 2018): 1-3, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.sisain.co.kr/?mod=news&act=articleView&idno=32909>.

Christ, someone should search for the solution because Jesus is the light as a living reality, most brilliantly illuminated in humanity. I found a clue in Henri J. M. Nouwen. As a priest and spiritual writer, he wrote many works to guide people and discover himself. His writing touched people's hearts because he deeply understood the emotions of a fickle person.<sup>8</sup> Because he often experienced existential crises, he wrote several compelling works in finding God in the darkness of ignorance. In this respect, his writings can be called mystical and they belong to the long tradition of ascetical theology.

### **The Significance of the Spirituality of Henri Nouwen in the Korean Church**

The Korean Catholic Church seeks to respond sensitively to the painful voices of the marginalized in society. However, not all believers take this mission as an important calling because some do not fully understand the Church's teachings on social participation and of social justice and consider Catholic social teaching not as essential as the Catholic dogma and catechism. As a result, conservative believers alienate the priests shouting social justice, which can be uneasy to the ears for some. Moreover, the priests who preach the Catholic social teaching themselves may have become hesitant to speak up because they fear being marked as communist or socialist. In this process, clericalism is increasingly shadowing the life of the priests themselves, whether they are aware of it or not.

Finding Henri Nouwen has been a blessing in my study of modern priestly spirituality. Nouwen was a diocesan priest for the laity. Most of his works advocated for

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<sup>8</sup> The Franciscan preacher Richard Rohr said that he felt Nouwen's high reputation in North America seems to be due to "his ability to describe inner experiences and outer states." I think that sums it up rather neatly. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Dance of Life: Spiritual Direction with Henri Nouwen*, ed. Michael Andrew Ford (Darton: Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005), 11.

the Christian faith and inspired lay people in the secular world.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, he invited countless people to enter more deeply into their spiritual life, namely, intimacy with Jesus and solidarity with a wounded world. This characteristic of Nouwen can be better understood through the words found in Pope Francis's letter. The Pope once wrote to Cardinal Marc Ouellet President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, "A shepherd cannot conceive of himself without his flock, whom he is called to serve. The pastor is pastor of a people, and he serves this people from within."<sup>10</sup> Here lies the reason a priest needs to serve the lay people. Pope Francis emphasizes the following:

Looking at the People of God is remembering that we all enter the Church as lay people. The first sacrament, which seals our identity forever, and of which we should always be proud, is Baptism. Through Baptism and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, (the faithful) "are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood" (Lumen Gentium, n. 10). Our first and fundamental consecration is rooted in our Baptism. No one has been baptized a priest or a bishop. They baptized us as lay people and it is the indelible sign that no one can ever erase. It does us good to remember that the Church is not an elite of priests, of consecrated men, of bishops, but that everyone forms the faithful Holy People of God. To forget this carries many risks and distortions in our own experience, be they personal or community, of the ministry that the Church has entrusted to us.<sup>11</sup>

Nouwen was also a figure who articulated the content of the Christian faith to suit the modern circumstances and exemplified it through his own life. John Dear, who was a Jesuit priest and peace activist and edited the book of Henri Nouwen, *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*, writes the following in the introduction:

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<sup>9</sup> According to John Dear, "the forty books after published his first book, *Intimacy*, provide a record of his passionate search for God and his strong desire to help others to find their way to God's home." Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*, ed. John Dear (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), xix.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, "Letter of the Holy Father to Card. Marc Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (19 March 2016)," accessed November 7, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160319\\_pont-comm-america-latina.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html).

<sup>11</sup> Francis, "Letter of the Holy Father to Card. Marc Ouellet," 19 March 2016.

Most of his readers knew his spiritual themes of prayer, intimacy, solitude, healing, ministry, and Eucharist. But underneath these good reflections on personal spiritual growth lay a definite social spirituality. Henri was a teacher, a preacher, and a writer, but his heart was open to the world and to the possibility of God's reign of justice coming to all people. Henri was a peacemaker.<sup>12</sup>

John Dear continues, "For him, spirituality not only celebrates God's intimate love for each and every one of us, but comprises an active, public love toward every human being on earth, especially our enemies. The inner contemplative life that he encouraged flows out and touches wounded humanity."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the theology of Nouwen is an excellent model to apply to the problems that plague Korea and Korean Church now. Nobody knew when the Korean War broke out that the South and North would have to live separately as hostile neighbors for nearly seventy years. As the separation and hostility have solidified in the Korean psyche and are expressed as selfish indifference, peace on the Korean peninsula seems an unattainable goal. This is the setting, though differ in language and culture, in which Henri Nouwen discovered his spirituality. This divided world was where Nouwen bridged his inner turmoil and proved with life that peace is not just the absence of violence but the ultimate form of social justice. Thus, the spirituality of Nouwen can heal our enemies and the wounded humanity because his life presents a type of holiness that is necessary in our times. Also, this model of mending division through contemplation is, I believe, the most needed path that would heal the wounded in Korea.

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<sup>12</sup> Nouwen, *The Road to Peace*, xii.

<sup>13</sup> Nouwen, *The Road to Peace*, xxviii.

How could he be a prophet of conversion despite his paradoxical life?<sup>14</sup> The answer can be found in Karl Rahner's idea of human beings. For Rahner, a human being is like an unending torrent of existential and practical questions. He writes, "Asking a question shows that we have a desire to know something. It brings to light a certain dynamism in the human spirit that drives us toward wanting to know something more, thereby expanding our connection with our own depths and with the wider world. In asking, we anticipate that there is a reality to be found."<sup>15</sup> In this regard, Nouwen's restless search for God made him a prophet of conversion, especially of the second birth. Conversion means turning to God to become a being of God. Thus, conversion is never a one-time process. The grace of conversion is to live in love with God. It can be experienced as a lifelong process.<sup>16</sup>

### **Scope and Contribution**

This thesis has four main goals which underlie the possible significance of its contribution to the field of Christian Spirituality: (a) to provide Korean priests the importance of the contemplative life so that they can strengthen their mandated mission and develop further the priesthood spirituality for Koreans; (b) to provide a new conception to assess their identity and spirituality through the theology of Henri Nouwen; (c) to help Korean priests rediscover solitude, celibacy, prayer as essential values of the

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<sup>14</sup> Albert wrote, "Nouwen's life and writings demonstrate both a struggle with and embrace of paradox." Albert Olson Hong, "Being Human: The Gift of Paradox in the Life and Thought of Henri J. M. Nouwen," (Master's Thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 2006), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 32.

<sup>16</sup> Annice Callahan, *Spiritual Guides for Today: Evelyn Underhill, Dorothy Day, Karl Rahner, Simone Weil, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 118.

contemplative life so that they can overcome clericalism; (d) to help Korean priests recognize their particular position, role, and responsibility in the Korean peninsula, overcome the banality of evil in Korean society, and become apostles of peace in Korea.

Chapter one explores the importance of contemplative life in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially the decree on the ministry and life of priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, and within the life and writings of Henri Nouwen. Chapter two hermeneutically focuses on two writings of Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* and *Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, and Contemplation*. Here, I examine the three characteristics of the contemplative life: solitude, celibacy, and prayer. These three contents are essential aspects of the contemplative life necessary for the ongoing formation of priesthood spirituality in the Korean context. In chapter three, I revisit Christian mission through pastoral approaches and suggest integration for Korean priests based on two writings of Nouwen, *Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community* and *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*. In so doing, I hope to provide contemplative life that encourages healing and reconciliation for the Korean church as a whole.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

A Jesuit of the eighteenth century, Jean-Pierre de Caussade once wrote, “The Holy Spirit writes no more Gospels except in our hearts. All we do from moment to moment is live this new gospel of the Holy Spirit. We, if we are holy, are the paper; our sufferings and our actions are the ink. The workings of the Holy Spirit are his pen, and with it he writes a living gospel.”<sup>17</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen is one figure who exemplified this teaching.<sup>18</sup> He held up his life experience as the material for spiritual reflection. His life, which represents what Caussade called “a living gospel,” is a text written with his own sufferings, desires, actions, and struggles.<sup>19</sup> This means that human experience is the stuff of spirituality and that under God’s grace and, enlightened by loving faith, a person constructs his/ her spiritual life out of his/her interactions.

Nouwen awakened people to the importance of contemplative life. Nouwen once wrote, “To contemplate is to *see*, and to minister is to *make visible*; the contemplative life is a life with a vision, and the life of ministry is a life which this vision is revealed to others.”<sup>20</sup> If to contemplate is to see, and to minister is to make visible, could Christians be better equipped to practice charity as the fruit of contemplation?

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<sup>17</sup> Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (New York: Image Books, 1975), 45.

<sup>18</sup> I will refer Henri J. M. Nouwen hereafter to as Nouwen.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Ellsberg, “Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and the Living Gospel,” *Merton Annual* 19 (November 2006): 340.

<sup>20</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, and Contemplation*, 1st ed. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1979), 88.

## **The Significance of Contemplative Life**

The decree on the ministry and life of priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, of the Second Vatican Council defines the identity of the priesthood in the ministry of the Church as follows:

The Lord Jesus, “whom the Father has sent into the world” (John 10:36) has made his whole Mystical Body a sharer in the anointing of the Spirit with which he himself is anointed. In him all the faithful are made a holy and royal priesthood; they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and they proclaim the perfections of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. Therefore, there is no member who does not have a part in the mission of the whole Body; but each one ought to hallow Jesus in his heart, and in the spirit of prophecy bear witness to Jesus. The same Lord, however, has established ministers among his faithful to unite them together in one body in which, “not all the members have the same function” (Romans 12: 4).<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, as regards priesthood, the Second Vatican Council maintains that “their ministry itself, by a special title, forbids that they be conformed to this world; yet at the same time it requires that they live in this world among men.”<sup>22</sup>

### ***A Fresh Call to Renewal***

According to the exhortation of Jesus, all the faithful are called to holiness: “Be you therefore perfect, as your Heavenly Father perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Particularly, all priests can and must seek the vocation to the life of perfection. The decree on the ministry and life of priest states these words: “Priests are bound to acquire that perfection in special fashion. They have been consecrated by God in a new manner at their ordination and made living instruments of Christ the Eternal Priest that they may be able

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<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on the ministry and life of priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Dec. 7, 1965, no 2.

<sup>22</sup> Decree on the ministry and life of priests, Dec. 7, 1965, no 3.

to carry on in time his marvelous work whereby the entire family of man is again made whole by power from above.”<sup>23</sup> Also, the decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life, *Perfectat Caritatis*, enunciates, “The sacred synod has already shown in the constitution on the Church that the pursuit of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels draws its origin from the doctrine and example of the Divine Master and reveals itself as a splendid sign of the heavenly kingdom.”<sup>24</sup> Sadly, few priests and faithful seem to be aware that they must seek perfection and that the most significant fruit of contemplation is to practice charity.

The vocation to the life of perfection will depend upon priests’ responding to the importance of their role as prophets in this world today. Priests have been called to be stewards of the mysteries of God. This stewardship requires that priests live out the mystery of Christ as the pattern for their own ministry and self-giving.<sup>25</sup>

### ***The Practices of the Spiritual Life***

God is eager to call all priests into a fuller life of prayer. When the prophet Samuel was a young child, he did not yet recognize the Lord, since the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. When God called Samuel for the third time, he finally responded, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9). In Paul J. Philibert’s analysis,

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Pius XI, encyclical letter *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Dec. 20, 1935: AAS 28 (1936) no 10. Decree on the ministry and life of priests, Dec. 7, 1965, no 12.

<sup>24</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life *Perfectae Caritatis*, Oct. 28, 1965, no 1.

<sup>25</sup> Paul J. Philibert, Melvin Blanchette, and Daniel E. Danielson, *Stewards of God’s Mysteries: Priestly Spirituality in a Changing Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), 83-4.

In Samuel's life... He is learning to listen for God's voice as he moves between sleeping and waking, action and contemplation, group activity and solitary work, ministry and study, giving and opening up to receive, effort and rest. Listening to the voice of God transformed Samuel from a generous and pious child, who was ready to give his life to religious service, into an astute prophetic judge who was able to act authoritatively at God's direction.<sup>26</sup>

God speaks to our heart, but in God's own way. For instance, God spoke to Moses in thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai and to Elijah in a gentle breeze on Mount Horeb. God spoke to David in the grandeur of the starry sky and the beauty of creation in the psalms and to Hosea in the lonely silence of the desert. These were great moments of revelation and a new form of awareness of and listening to God. God often speaks in silences and hears our silences. That is the way Christian life works.<sup>27</sup>

The decree on the ministry and life of priests accentuates the significance of the Eucharist with prayer:

Hence, as they fulfill the role of the Good Shepherd, in the very exercise of their pastoral charity they will discover a bond of priestly perfection which draws their life and activity to unity and coordination. This pastoral charity flows out in a very special way from the Eucharistic sacrifice. This stands as the root and center of the whole life of a priest. What takes place on the altar of sacrifice, the priestly heart must make his own. This cannot be done unless priests through prayer continue to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of Christ.<sup>28</sup>

### ***History of Contemplation***

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, once wrote, "Contemplation is not the pleasant reaction to a celestial sunset, nor is it the perpetual twitter of heavenly birdsong.

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<sup>26</sup> Philibert et al, *Stewards of God's Mysteries*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Philibert et al, *Stewards of God's Mysteries*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Decree on the ministry and life of priests, Dec. 7, 1965, no 14. "May it be a duty of love to feed the Lord's flock.": St. Augustine, Tract on John, 123, 5: *PL* 35, 1967.

It is not even an emotion. It is the awareness of God, known and loved at the core of one's being."<sup>29</sup> In this awareness, a contemplation can become "so vivid as to transport and to transfix, it can for long periods be faint almost to the point of imperceptibility."<sup>30</sup>

Thus, it is impossible to describe the bliss of contemplation. The author also wrote,

Then will he sometimes peradventure send out a beam of ghostly light, piercing this cloud of unknowing that is betwixt thee and him: and shew thee some of his privy, the which man may not, nor cannot speak. Then shalt thou feel thine affection inflamed with the fire of his love, far more than I can tell thee, or may or will at this time. For of that work that falleth to only God, dare I not take upon me to speak with my blabbering fleshly tongue (Chapter 26).<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, Clifton Wolters, who translated *The Cloud* into Modern English, argues that the nature of contemplation is such that it is unspeakable. "Even if it were permissible to speak of it, no words could be found. So mystical writers in general do no more than hint at this glory; they are content to describe the path to the Heavenly City, the pitfalls to avoid, the obstacles to surmount, the training to undergo, the mists to grope through."<sup>32</sup>

However, "if the glory of contemplation is properly beyond the power of the human pen, the life of contemplation is not," the author of *The Cloud* says.<sup>33</sup> I think this part is crucial. Human beings are created by God, but not wholly spiritual. No one can see God and live. God as pure Spirit bespeaks himself fully and completely in Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Incarnation is that it has become possible for humans to see

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<sup>29</sup> Clifton Wolters and Pseudo-Dionysius, eds., *The Cloud of Unknowing: And Other Works*, Penguin classics (Harmondsworth, New York: Penguin, 1978), 46. I will refer *The Cloud of Unknowing* hereafter to as *The Cloud*.

<sup>30</sup> Wolters *et al*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Wolters *et al*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Wolters *et al*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 47.

<sup>33</sup> The author of *The Cloud* explains it in his three chapters, 68-70; see. Wolters *et al*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 142-46.

God in and through Jesus Christ. In and through Christ, we know that God is a loving Father whom we can see by looking at his son.<sup>34</sup> That is why Christ is the original sacrament for us. Thus, we can understand that the emphasis of *The Cloud* is not on the glory of contemplation, but on the life of contemplation.

### **The Contemplative Life of Henri J. M. Nouwen**

Nouwen exemplifies a path that reaches out to the contemplative life through his writings and his lifestyle. After trying his vocation as a monk and a missionary, Nouwen gave up his academic career as a professor in his mid-fifties to become a pastor among men and women with developmental disabilities. Then he lived a life of learning from the handicapped until his death.<sup>35</sup> Nouwen himself once said about the rejoicing of these Masses with the handicapped:

It is the presence of Jesus among us, real and concrete, that gives us hope. It is eating and drinking here that creates the desire for the heavenly banquet, it is finding a home now that makes us long for the father's house with its many dwelling places. Who better than severely mentally handicapped people can teach us this liberating truth? They do not read newspapers, watch television, or discuss the possibilities of a future disaster. They do not dwell upon the future. Instead they say, "Feed me, dress me, touch me, hold me... Kiss me, speak to me. It is good to be here together now."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See John 14:8-10. "To have seen me is to have seen the Father... Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

<sup>35</sup> He confessed, "I'm a very restless person but L'Arche became for me the place where I really came home. There's nothing in me that desires to go anywhere else. I'm still a restless person but in the deeper places of myself I really feel I've found home. In many ways the little ones, the people with limited gifts, have become for me those who have called me home. In their simplicity they reveal for me God's love." Nouwen, *The Dance of Life*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life signs: Intimacy, Fecundity, and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 122-23.

Nouwen was always on the way home, and he did not forget that throughout his life. According to Jurjen Beumer,<sup>37</sup> the life of Nouwen can be summed up in five words, “A Restless Seeking for God”:

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. Searching for God, but gradually discovering that God was even more intensely searching for him, as his beloved.<sup>38</sup>

Michael Ford, a British theology student and journalist, evaluated Nouwen as a person who was “making prints out of negatives, of seeing dark experiences in a more positive light.”<sup>39</sup> Nouwen’s confession in *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* proves this point:

I don’t believe that my life is a long row of randomly chained incidents and accidents of which I am not much more than a passive victim. No, I think that nothing is accidental but that God molded me through the events of my life and that I am called to recognize his molding hand and praise him in gratitude for the great things he has done to me.<sup>40</sup>

Nouwen’s life was based on contemplation, so that all things were possible, for instance, his restless seeking for God, that of seeing dark experiences in a more positive light. Another reason is that Nouwen’s insight has its root in the thought of Evagrius Ponticus, one of the Desert Fathers. Evagrius had a great influence on the renewal of monastic

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<sup>37</sup> He was a Protestant pastor in Holland and attempted the first written to understand Henri Nouwen’s life and message.

<sup>38</sup> Jurjen Beumer, *Henri Nouwen: A Restless Seeking for God* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 1997), 167.

<sup>39</sup> Nouwen, *The Dance of Life*, 2; Michael O’Laughlin assesses Michael Ford’s *Wounded Prophet* is “not an entirely accurate portrayal of Nouwen, mostly because of its negative assessment of Nouwen’s psychological health.” See. Michael O’Laughlin, *God’s beloved: a spiritual biography of Henri Nouwen* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 10-11.

<sup>40</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1981), 76.

spirituality in the East and the West. He defined contemplation as a *theoria physike*, that is, a vision (*theoria*) of the nature of things (*physike*). He said, “the contemplative is someone who sees things for what they really are, who sees the real connections, who knows ‘what the scoop’ is.”<sup>41</sup> Evagrius accentuates the necessity of spiritual discipline to attain such a vision, and calls this discipline the *praktikos*: “It is the taking away of the blindfolds that prevent us from seeing clearly.”<sup>42</sup> As a result, the contemplative life is “a life in which we begin to see our world as a transparent world, the world that points beyond itself and thus reveals its true nature to us.”<sup>43</sup>

Like Evagrius, Nouwen stressed that the contemplative life is to see our world as a transparent world, to point to the other side of the world we face so we see its true essence. As long as our world remains opaque, it will not show us its true identity. Therefore, Nouwen noted that the contemplative life needed a constant movement from opaqueness to transparency in the three central relationships: nature, time, and people.

### ***Contemplation of Nature***

In recent decades people have become particularly aware of the importance of our relationship with nature. Nouwen points out that it is because of a false contemplation,

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<sup>41</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 88; For that, Michael Ford wrote, “He was particularly struck by the writings of one Desert Father, Evagrius Ponticus, who viewed the contemplative life as one that began to see the world as transparent, pointing beyond itself to its true nature. The contemplative was someone who saw things for what they really were, who saw the real connections, who knew, as Merton used to say, “what the scoop” is.” Michael A. Ford, *Wounded Prophet: A Portrait of Henri J. M. Nouwen* (Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1999), 10.

<sup>42</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 88.

<sup>43</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 89. In a conference at the Gethsemani Abbey Merton explicates regarding the contemplative life. It means a life in which we continually move from opaqueness to transparency.

which places nature in humankind's possession to be manipulated based on real or fabricated needs, that "nature remains opaque and does not reveal to us its true being."<sup>44</sup> He asserts that nature is a gift to be received with admiration and gratitude. Nouwen summons John Henry Newman's claim that nature is "a veil through which an invisible world is intimated."<sup>45</sup> Newman once wrote, "The visible world is... the veil of the world invisible... so that all that exists or happens visibly, conceals and yet suggests, and above all sub serves, a system of persons, facts and events beyond itself."<sup>46</sup> Thus, Nouwen also lamented the destruction of nature: "How differently we would live if we were constantly aware of this veil and sensed in our whole being that nature desires us to hear and see the great story of God's love to which it points."<sup>47</sup>

As a result, what Nouwen continually emphasizes about nature is the value of existence itself, that everything has value in itself. He is convinced that "the movement from opacity to transparency in our relationship with nature not only leads us to a deeper contemplation of the world that surrounds us but also broadens our ministry of teaching, healing, and worship."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 92.

<sup>46</sup> John Henry Newman, *Essays Critical and Historical*, Vol. II (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), 192.

<sup>47</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 93.

<sup>48</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 94.

## *Contemplation of Time*

Nouwen defines time as a second relationship in which there is an ongoing movement from opaqueness to transparency. At the same time, time can be a great enemy that constantly threatens our living: it is not money but time which enslaves us in contemporary society. Indeed, it seems that many people today feel they have no time, and that they see themselves as victims of ongoing pressure from all the things they have to deal with day by day.

Nouwen explains time experienced as *chronos* as following:

Life is nothing more than a chronology, a randomly collected series of incidents and accidents over which we have no control. To experience life in this way can soon lead us to a sense of fatalism. This fatalism often manifests itself under the guise of boredom. Boredom does not mean that we have nothing to do or that there is not enough going to entertain us, but that we are gnawed by the feeling that whatever we do or say makes no real difference. It is the feeling that the real decisions are made independent of our words or actions. Boredom, therefore, is a symptom of living in time as *chronos*.<sup>49</sup>

Also, he analyzes *kairos* as an opportunity:

All these concerns about our clock-time come from below. They are based on the presupposition that our chronology is all we have to live. But looked upon from above, from God's perspective, our clock-time is embedded in the timeless embrace of God. Looked upon from above, our years on earth are not simply *chronos* but *Kairos*— another Greek word of time— which is the opportunity to claim for ourselves the love that God offers us from eternity to eternity.<sup>50</sup>

According to Nouwen, Jesus is the man who can see that his time in his own life is God's time. Jesus lives every moment in God Father's wills and enters into his last hour as

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<sup>49</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 95.

<sup>50</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit* (Darton: Longman and Todd Ltd, 1994), 125.

*kairos*. In doing so, he “liberates history from its fatalistic chronology” through his death on the cross.<sup>51</sup>

Nouwen explains time in terms of *kairos* instead of *chronos* when he describes the contemplative life. In other words, the contemplative life is “not a life that offers a few good moments between the many bad ones, but a life that transforms all our time into a window through which the invisible world becomes visible.”<sup>52</sup> It is the meaning of Nouwen’s words, “To contemplate is to *see*, and to minister is to make *visible*.” All who are suffering are tempted by fatalism, especially the poor, the elderly, and those who are imprisoned physically or spiritually. The contemplative life is a life that can break the chains of this fatalism and help others to see the real nature of what takes place in their lives. It is to “bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18).

### ***Contemplation of People***

Here, Nouwen escalates the importance of contemplation as *theoria physike* that Evagrius which Evagrius spoke about. He starts this section by explaining that the word *person* comes from Latin *per-sonare*. The Latin verb *per-sonare* means “sounding through.” What is something that sounds in and through us? Nouwen claims that our vocation involves becoming a human being, the original human being of true beauty like a Jesus Christ. In other words, “as persons we sound through a love greater than we

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<sup>51</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 96.

<sup>52</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 97.

ourselves can grasp, a truth deeper than we ourselves can articulate, and a beauty richer than we ourselves can contain.”<sup>53</sup>

Contemplation as seeing the real connections has a significant meaning in the context of an interpersonal relationship. Nouwen portrays contemplations as follows:

Contemplation enables us to see the gifts in those to whom we minister, and ministry is first of all the reception and affirmation of what we hear sounding through them so that they themselves may come to a recognition of their own giftedness. What more beautiful ministry is there than the ministry through which we help others to become aware of the love, truth, and beauty they reveal to us? Ours is a time in which many people doubt their self-worth and are often on the verge of a self-condemnation that can lead to suicide. We can indeed save lives by discovering in those in need the gifts that ask to be shared.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, contemplation and ministry enrich one another and lead us to rejoice, for God continually reveals Godself to us by changing people’s lives. In conclusion, when we can see nature as a gift, time as *kairos*, and people as persons, we will see that our whole world is a sacrament that reveals to us the great love of God. That is why Nouwen emphasizes contemplation a constant movement from opaqueness to transparency through Evagrius’ idea of *theoria physike*.

### ***Thomas Merton and Henri J. M. Nouwen***

Nouwen was not alone in what he accomplished. He was part of larger movements. There were several spiritual writers that Nouwen drew from and who preceded him in the formation of his vision. Thomas Merton is one of the most influential people in Nouwen’s life. Merton depicted the contemplation of God in this world as follows:

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<sup>53</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 99.

<sup>54</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 100.

Contemplation is not vision because it sees “without seeing” and knows “without knowing.” It is a more profound depth of faith, a knowledge too deep to be grasped in images, in words, or even in clear concepts. It can be suggested by words, by symbols, but in the very moment of trying to indicate what it knows the contemplative mind takes back what it has said, and denies what it has affirmed. For in contemplation we know by “unknowing.” Or better, we know beyond all knowing or “unknowing.” Poetry, music and art have something in common with the contemplative experience. But contemplation is beyond aesthetic intuition, beyond art, beyond poetry... It knows God by seeming to touch Him. Or rather it knows Him as if it had been invisibly touched by Him... Touched by Him who has no hands, but who is pure Reality and the sources of all that is real! Hence, contemplation is a sudden gift of awareness, an awakening to the Real within all that is real.<sup>55</sup>

Nouwen believed that Merton was right in focusing on the world as we find it, rather than what is beyond the world. To find the world we must begin in the world and strip away the husk until we find the perfectly pure kernel at the center. As Nouwen says,

We are called to be contemplatives, that is *see-ers*, men and women who are called to see the coming of God. The day of the Lord is indeed always coming. It is not a coming which will occur in some distant future, but a coming here and now among us. The Lord’s coming is an ongoing event around us, between us, and within us. To become a contemplative, therefore, means to throw off—or better, to peel off—the blindfolds that prevent us from *seeing* his coming in the midst of our own world. Like John the Baptist, Merton constantly points away from himself to the coming One, and invites us to purify our hearts so that we might indeed recognize him as our Lord... Thomas Merton invites us to an always deeper awareness of the incomprehensibility of God. He continually unmask the illusions that we know God and so frees us to see the Lord in always new and surprising ways.<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, Nouwen’s idea of contemplation is not about free imagination nor any withdrawal from reality. It was important for Nouwen that contemplation was not some kind of escapism. Both Merton and Nouwen were not looking beyond this world in search of some heavenly realm. They were seeking the presence of God in the world around us. Indeed, Nouwen had surprisingly little interest in some of the classic figures of

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1961), 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> Nouwen, *The Road to Peace*, 196-97.

the Christian spiritual tradition. Centered on the Bible and the Eucharist, he preferred to explore the ordinary elements of existence and the pathway of his own feelings.

Nevertheless, he had a particular ability to make familiar things come alive and infuse them with new meaning, such as words that we all know by heart, stories we have heard countless times, truths that we recite. The special gift comes from the fruit of his creative, contemplative process of living in this world.

Nouwen's idea of the contemplative life challenged my existing idea of contemplation and ministry. I understood contemplative life as the final stage of a "beatific vision" (*visio beatifica*), which is reserved for the saints in heaven. This notion of spirituality elevates contemplation as the last stage of the spiritual life, one unattainable for ordinary people. We learn through Nouwen's life to see the world not as something to be transcended but to be embraced.

In summary, it is in the midst of a dark world that the Christian community is put to the test. There is a need for countless holy priests who dedicate their lives to others with pure generosity in a dark world, because they are the people who will make the world smile and awaken hope by living a holy life with their humility in this age. The contemplative life is essential in the spiritual life of priests. Contemplation is to see the essence of things and to minister is to make visible those things. Nonetheless, the reason we can understand contemplation is because some have lived contemplative lives. Christian faith is in the constant connection between the gospel and life. Nouwen taught and lived out Jesus Christ-centered theology and contemplation. He is the most remarkable contemplator that I have found. In particular, he is a restless seeker of God as a diocese priest. His context resonates with my priestly status and anxiety about what it

means to live in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. In Chapter Two, I will analyze *Reaching Out*, one of the most influential books of his theological understanding.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXPLORING SOLITUDE, CELIBACY, AND PRAYER AS ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE IN PRIESTHOOD

This chapter explores the three directions of spirituality that Nouwen found in God's hiddenness or the negative experience of God's presence. Nouwen believed that we could recognize the various poles in our lives that vacillate and are held in tension, in the thick of our deep anxiety. By sharing both the light and the dark sides of his faith, Nouwen showed that the spiritual life was "not necessarily about climbing a ladder of perfection but about embracing one's wounds and finding the transforming power of God at work in them."<sup>57</sup> The first movement he proposed is a process from loneliness to solitude. It relates to reaching out to our innermost self. The second movement is from hostility to hospitality, which determines our relationship with others. The third and, for Nouwen, the most important movement is the process of going from illusion to prayer. This movement structures our real relationship with God. Nouwen explained the order of the movements in his book, *Reaching Out*. He stated that the first two movements come first only because they are easier to understand than the third movement, not because they are more important. However, since the third movement is the most critical goal in spiritual life, I will cover the third movement first in this chapter.

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<sup>57</sup> Nouwen, *The Dance of Life*, 4. Nouwen did not simply yearn but strove practically to link contemplation and action, to introduce the shock of liberation theology into spirituality and offer the path of a spiritual life, which would also embody responsibility for the present-day world. Nouwen felt profound solidarity with others until the end of his life.

## **Reaching Out to Our God: The Most Crucial Movement from Illusion to Prayer**

To live with the mystery of God, an understanding of contemplation is essential. In general, contemplation can be defined as the beloved awareness of God at the core of one's being; such awareness reveals itself in a contemplative life because it bears a particular fruit that may be witnessed as actions of charity in someone's life.<sup>58</sup> Also, a contemplative life enables us to see our world as a transcendent world, a world that points beyond itself and reveals its true nature to us.

Nouwen was a remarkable companion who showed us the way of contemplative life throughout his life. He devoted himself to practicing the virtue of charity instead of dwelling on the feelings of his inadequacy and weakness. He encouraged and supported those Christian communities which were under an oppressive government system. Through uninterrupted contemplation, he was able to advise and demonstrate that Christians will be the light, salt, and leaven to their brothers and sisters in society. There is no doubt that he offered hope, courage, and confidence to the oppressed in his time, and also "now and here" (Luke 21:19). His contemplative life, revealed through his lifelong charity, can be inferred from his achievements and writings as the fruits of his endurance and devotion.

Nouwen constantly found the answers to his existential questions in the Bible and reached out to his innermost self, to fellow human beings, and to God. One of Nouwen's

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<sup>58</sup> Isaiah 55:10-11. "Yet just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down, And do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, Giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it."

lifelong questions was, “What does it mean to live a life in the Spirit of Jesus Christ?”<sup>59</sup> This question was fundamental in his spiritual life ever since he visited Latin America by the invitation of Gustavo Gutierrez. He even wrote the foreword to Gustavo’s book, *We drink from our own wells: The Spiritual Journey of A People*. In this book, Gustavo wrote, “Spirituality is like living water that springs up in the very depths of the experience of faith.”<sup>60</sup> Nouwen interpreted it as follows, “To drink from your own well is to live your own life in the Spirit of Jesus as you have encountered him in your concrete historical reality.”<sup>61</sup> Nouwen’s agreement to Gutierrez’s invitation resulted from his discernment of spirits through contemplation in everyday life. The visit to Latin America gave him new enlightenment, which took his life to a new path.

Subsequently, he wrote a book where he illustrated his struggles with his inner turmoil, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. After a long hesitation, he decided to write this book because of his faith. He believed that his life “belongs to others just as much as it belongs to himself and that what is experienced as most unique often proves to be most solidly embedded in the common condition of being human.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, his personal conviction influenced him to write the book.

In *Reaching Out*, Nouwen describes the movement from illusion to prayer as the most important movement in spiritual life. This is because, through the third movement, a person can reach God: “The movement from illusion to prayer undergirds and makes

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<sup>59</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1986), 13.

<sup>60</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *We drink from our own wells: The Spiritual Journey of A People*, translated by the Spanish by Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), xiv.

<sup>61</sup> Gutierrez, *We drink from our own wells*, xiv.

<sup>62</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 14; Nouwen, *The Dance of Life*, 4.

possible the movements from loneliness to solitude, from hostility to hospitality, and lead us to the core of our spiritual life.”<sup>63</sup>

### ***The Paradox of Prayer***

Although prayer leads us to the core of our spiritual life, it is often considered something that people do when they face human limitations. The word prayer, in general, is understood as an expression of powerlessness rather than a creative communion with the source of all life. When Jesus taught about prayer, he said: “When you pray, do not be like hypocrites. (...) go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret” (Matthew 6:5-6). Also, before all these things, one must “seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). And in his first letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul urged “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Here, the paradoxical function of prayer is captured. According to Nouwen, “The paradox of prayer is that we have to learn how to pray while we can only receive it as a gift.”<sup>64</sup> In our history, all the great saints and all the spiritual directors said that we should learn how to pray because prayer is our first obligation and also our highest calling. Prayer needs arduous training to arrive at an intimate relationship with God. The masters of spirituality taught that prayer was not worth talking about without an endless and arduous effort. Prayer is truly a gift of God. St. Paul put it very clearly: “I tell you that

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<sup>63</sup> It means that it is so closely attached to our deepest inner self that it is very difficult to express it in any human language. In other words, “this ‘first and final’ movement is so central to our spiritual life that it is very hard to come in touch with it, to get a grasp on it, to get hold of it, or even to put a finger on it. Not because this movement is vague or unreal, but because it is so close that it hardly allows the distance needed for articulation and understanding. Maybe this is the reason why the most profound realities of life are the easiest victims of trivialization.” Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 114.

<sup>64</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 123.

nobody speaking by the spirit of God says, 'Jesus be accursed.' And no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Thus, we can say that it is God's spirit who prays in us while we pray by ourselves.

Nouwen's insight into prayer is thoroughly biblical, doctrinal, mystical, and relationship-oriented. First, the foundation of his ideas is in the Bible. He acknowledges God's initiative in our relationship with God through the words of 1 Corinthians 12:3. We cannot force God into a relationship. God comes to us purely in His free will, and no discipline, effort, or ascetic practice can make him come. So, prayer is a free gift from God.

Second, his thoughts are doctrinal because they unfold the mystery of the Incarnation. He adds that prayer is "grace." That is, in Jesus Christ, God has entered into our lives in the most intimate way, so we can enter into his life through the Holy Spirit. That is also what Jesus spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper. "But I tell you the truth; it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). Jesus came to us to become like us and left us to allow us to become like him. By giving us His Spirit, his breath, he became closer to us than we are to ourselves. Through that very God's breath, we can call God "Abba, Father" and be able to participate in the mysterious divine relationship between Father and Son. Therefore, Nouwen emphasizes that praying in the Spirit of Jesus Christ means participating in the deep life of God himself.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Merton expressed the meaning of participating in the deep mystery of God himself: "The union of the Christian with Christ... is a mystical union in which Christ Himself becomes the source and principle of life in me. Christ Himself... 'breathes' in me divinely in giving me His Spirit." Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 159; Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 125.

Third, it is mysterious because prayer is God's breath within us. There is no image that better expresses our intimacy with God than God's breath. We are like asthma sufferers who are cured of their anxiety. The Holy Spirit has removed our narrowness and made everything new for us. Therefore, the new life we receive or enjoy is God's own divine life. According to Nouwen, prayer is God's breath within us, and by that breath, we share in God's deep inner life, by which we are born afresh.

Fourth, his thoughts are relation-oriented. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to help us fully understand the truths contained in the divine life. For Nouwen, truth does not mean an idea, concept, or doctrine, but a genuine relationship.<sup>66</sup> That is to say, by not defining truth as an idea or concept, Nouwen recognizes the limitations of human reason damaged by the original sin. At the same time, he invites all human beings to this mystery by defining truth as the actual relationship between the Father and the Son. Hence, truth can be described as being led into the same relationship that Jesus has with the Father, having a divine marriage with the Lamb of God. Therefore, Pentecost corresponds to the fulfillment of Jesus' mission. When the Holy Spirit comes to Jesus' disciples and dwells among them, their lives are transformed into Christ's life, a life shaped by the love between the Father and the Son. Thus, spiritual life is indeed a life in which we are lifted up as participants in the divine life.

### ***The Experience of Absence and Presence of God***

The divine nature of God is beyond everything: our heart and mind, our expectations and desires, and all the experiences and events that make up our lives. Yet,

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<sup>66</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making ALL Things New*, trans. Chan-Sung Seung (Seoul, Korea: Pauline, 1990), 36-7.

God is still in the center of all of it. when we touch the heart of prayer, it becomes manifest that the distinction between God's presence and absence does no longer exist. In prayer, God's presence is no longer separated from his absence, and his absence can never be distinct from his presence. God's presence feels like absence because it is a level of existence that is entirely different from human experience. On the other hand, his absence is often felt so strongly that we experience a new sense of his presence. The psalmist powerfully expresses this level in Psalm 22: 2-6:

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?  
Why so far from my call for help, from my cries of anguish?  
My God, I call by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I have no relief.  
Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the glory of Israel.  
In you our fathers trusted; they trusted and you rescued them.  
To you they cried out and they escaped; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

In the Old Testament, this prayer expresses the Israelites' experience and the Christian experience of culmination. Jesus was alone when he said this prayer on the cross. In that moment of complete emptiness, everything was fulfilled.<sup>67</sup> A new light was seen in that moment of darkness. While the moment of God's absence was powerfully expressed, his presence was affirmed most profoundly. When God himself in his humanity became part

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<sup>67</sup> I introduce Lao-tzu's idea of Tao for a better understanding of the mystery [The Way the whole universe is working]: "The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name. Having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth. Having a name, it is the Mother of all particular things. Free from desire, you realize the mystery. Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations. Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the same source. The source is called mystery. Mystery within mystery. The gateway to all mystery." Lao Tzu, *Do-deok-kyoung (Thinking with Lao Tzu: A New Translation of the Tao Te Ching and Some Reflections)*, trans. with notes Kang-nam Oh (Seoul, Korea: Hyeonamsa, 2008), 19. The English translation from Korean is my own; "The term of our self-transcending spirit must be itself infinite, indefinable, forever beyond our grasp not at our disposal. To this ineffable plenitude Rahner gives the name 'holy mystery.'" Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest For The Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 35.

of our most painful experience of God's absence, he became most present to us. When we pray, we enter this very mystery.<sup>68</sup>

For Nouwen, spiritual life is to wait patiently in expectation, although it is a reminder to us of many unfulfilled experiences of God's absence.<sup>69</sup> It is in the center of our longing for the absent God that we discover his footprints and realize that our desire to love God is born out of God's love that has touched us. In the patient waiting for the loved one, we discover how much he has already filled our lives. When the destruction of life is so rampant and the raw wounds of humanity so visible, it is tough to endure the experience of God's absence and to keep our hearts open to patiently and reverently prepare his way. However, contemplative life aims to lead our lives to make it possible.

### ***The Prayer of the Heart: From Illusion to Prayer***

There are many ways to pray. Just as artists search for their own style, people who pray search for the prayer of their heart. The question about the prayer of the heart is, in fact, the question about our most unique vocation to look for God's presence and live in God's presence. Actually, great saints in history did not ask for imitation. Their method was unique and cannot be repeated. Nevertheless, many saints in history made us speak the language of our hearts and gave us courage. They are our spiritual leaders. They do not ask for imitation, they help us live life as true as they did.

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<sup>68</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 126-7.

<sup>69</sup> Halik put it this way: "Faith and hope are expressions of our patience at just such moments [God's absence]-and so is love. Love without patience is not real love." Tomas Halik, *Patience with God: The story of Zacchaeus continuing in us*, trans. Gerald Turner (New York: Doubleday, 2009), xi.

Quoting from Bishop Theophan the Recluse of the Russian Orthodox Church, Nouwen provides a concrete way to approach God from our deep inner center:

I will remind you of only one thing: one must descend with the mind into the heart, and there stand before the face of the Lord, ever present, all seeing within you. The prayer takes a firm and steadfast hold, when a small fire begins to burn in the heart. Try not to quench this fire, and it will become established in such a way that the prayer repeats itself: and then you will have within you a small murmuring stream.<sup>70</sup>

To stand in the presence of God with our mind and heart is the essence of the prayer of the heart. That is, the prayer of the heart unites our whole person, puts our mind in our heart, and takes us in the presence of God of love, and unite our mind and heart in the intimate love of God.

According to Nouwen, first of all, the prayer of the heart requires that we make God our only thought. That means that we must dispel all concerns, anxieties, worries, and distractions, and fill the mind with God alone. One of the early Fathers said: “When thieves approach a house in order to creep up to it and steal, and hear someone inside talking, they do not dare to climb in; in the same way, when our enemies try to steal into the soul and take possession of it they creep all round but fear to enter when they hear that ... prayer welling out.”<sup>71</sup> In conclusion, our prayer becomes really a prayer of the heart when we have localized in the center of our inner being the empty space in which our God-filled mind can descend, and where the distinctions between thinking and feeling, knowing and experiencing, ideas and emotions are transcended, and where God can become our host. Then we can say with St. Paul, “yet I live, no longer I, but Christ

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<sup>70</sup> Theophan the Recluse’s statement quoted in Igumen Chariton of Valamo, comp., *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), 110.

<sup>71</sup> *The Art of Prayer*, 110.

lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20).

When our hearts belong to God, the world and its power cannot steal our hearts. When God becomes the Lord of our hearts, our original alienation is overcome and we sing like the psalmist: “You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know” (Psalm 139:13–14).

### ***Community and Prayer***

The movement from the illusion of one’s own safety and immortality to the prayer of the heart requires a gradual detachment from all false relationships and honest obedience to God from whom all goodness comes. By doing so, we gradually realize that while holding on to our illusions might lead to a truncated life, the surrender in love leads to the cross: Jesus’ way is not only the way of love but also the way of suffering.

Nouwen argues that it is another illusion to believe that our reaching out to God will set us free from suffering. God may take us where we do not want to go. But we know that if we do not go there, we will not find our life. Jesus reminds us that love is purified through suffering as he said, “whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). Hence, it is a sign of true spiritual maturity that we throw out our attachment to self-control full of illusions and reach out to God. Theophan the Recluse writes:

He who has repented travels towards the Lord. The way to God is an inner journey accomplished in the mind and heart. It is necessary so to attune the thoughts of the mind and the disposition of the heart that the spirit of man will always be with the Lord, as if joined with Him. He who is thus attuned is

constantly enlightened by inner light, and receives in himself the rays of spiritual radiance... like Moses, whose face was glorified on the Mount because he was illumined by God.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, prayer is by no means sweet and comfortable. Rather, prayer makes us suffer more. Because our love for God is our love for the suffering of God, in other words, entering into God's intimacy is to embrace all of human suffering with divine compassion. The more our prayer becomes the prayer of the heart, the more we love and suffer, the more we will see light and darkness, grace and sin, God and humanity. As we descend into our hearts and reach out to God, we will find love and pain together.<sup>73</sup>

We need to be careful that prayer might create the false impression that it is something private, personal, and so deeply hidden in our inner life. Since prayer is an individualistic and private affair, we have to share our prayers, which come from the center of our lives, with others. Since prayer is the most precious expression of human beings, it must grow and blossom through continued support and protection of community. Since prayer is the highest vocation that requires deep consideration and faithful patience, it cannot be left as a private matter. Since prayer requires waiting patiently in anticipation, it may be the most personal expression of the most personal emotion. Still, it always has to exist in the life of the community to which we belong.

### ***Prayer as Transcendental Space***

On two occasions, Jesus invited his closest disciples, Peter, John, and James, to pray together. He did once when he took them to the top of Mount Tabor, and there they

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<sup>72</sup> *The Art of Prayer*, 73; Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 151.

<sup>73</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 150.

saw his face shining like the sun and his clothes dazzling like a light (Matthew 17:2). The second case he took them to the garden of Gethsemane, and there they saw his painful face and his sweat falling to the ground like great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). The prayer of the heart brings us to both experiences, Tabor and Gethsemane. When we see God in his glory, we will see God in his misery, and when we feel the ugliness of his miserable humiliation, we will also experience the beauty of his transformation.

Therefore, the Christian community is not the product of human effort. God is the one who calls us out of Egypt and leads us to a new heaven and new earth. Because God first called, the Church as God's people was created. The church is a community called out of the old world into the new one.<sup>74</sup> The Christian community is not a closed community that embraces each other exclusively, but a group of companions who constantly shout out and advance toward the new world. The language of this Christian community is prayer. In prayer, we are with Him who made the community. We do not pray to each other, but to the God who is with us. The fact that this community is formed by prayer and expressed through prayer explains the existence of the church: prayer is a witness to the realization of God's presence in the midst of his people.

Prayer is not one of the many actions of a community. Rather, prayer is the existence itself of the community. When prayer becomes less of primary interest, and when many activities cease to be part of the prayer, the community quickly becomes a club with a common purpose but not a common calling. Not only is the community formed by prayer, but the community is also expressed through prayer. Therefore,

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<sup>74</sup> The Latin *ecclesia*, the origin word of the church, comes from the Greek [*kaleo* = call; *ek* = out]. And the mission of the church as a community toward a new heaven and a new earth is revealed. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 153-4.

without a community, individual prayers easily degenerate into egocentric and eccentric behaviors, but without individual prayers, the prayer of the community quickly becomes a meaningless routine. Individual and community prayers cannot be separated.

### **Reaching Out to Our Innermost Self: The First Movement from Loneliness to Solitude**

In this part, I explore the difference between loneliness and solitude. Loneliness and solitude seem to be synonymous, but they differ like night and day in their nature.<sup>75</sup> Nouwen transcends himself from loneliness to solitude in his spirituality to reach out to God. The difference between loneliness and solitude and its effect on Nouwen's life shall be further elucidated in this section. Furthermore, when loneliness is positively accepted, it cultivates a fruitful solitude in our innermost selves through compassion and solidarity, even in the midst of a painful reality.

#### ***A Suffocating Loneliness in Our Wilderness-like Modern World***

Nouwen investigates loneliness in this world. He focuses on the suffocating loneliness in our era as the Israelites had in the wilderness.<sup>76</sup> According to Nouwen, loneliness is one of the universal human experiences and sources of human suffering in

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<sup>75</sup> The Latin word *solus* is the origin word of solitude and solitary, and it means alone. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 37.

<sup>76</sup> It is necessary to briefly look at the meaning and purpose of wilderness in the Bible. God planned that Israelites, after their departure from slavery in Egypt, walk in the route of the wilderness in their Exodus. He prepared the wilderness as an intermediate process that they must go through before entering the land of liberty. This process in the wasteland does not simply mean inter-spatial and temporal dimensions. It is very symbolic. It is the process of being born again in which the existence itself changes. In the wilderness, the Israelites saw the priority of their life. They acquired that their own plans do not work at all in this place and that they must live in dependence on God's providence. Therefore, for Israelites, the wilderness was a place of two faces. Namely, it was a place of hostilities to God and a spot of discernment together. Bong-mo Song, S.J., *광야에 선 인간 (A man in the wilderness)* (Seoul: Pauline, 2017), 15-30.

the world of today, where even the most intimate relationships have become part of competition and rivalry.<sup>77</sup> Loneliness feeds on the suspicion that “there is no one who cares and offers love without conditions and no place where we can be vulnerable without being used.”<sup>78</sup> Genesis 2:18 says that it is not good for the man to be alone, but the false expectation that humans exist to fill each other’s loneliness becomes a form of bondage. Similarly, loneliness is born out of the false expectation that human beings are called to take each other’s loneliness away. When we drive ourselves into the arms of our companions to resolve loneliness, those relationships will be excruciating, tiring, and suffocating in the end.<sup>79</sup> Those who suffocate from loneliness feel a painful void inside, and this debilitating void keeps the sufferers from forming or participating in a meaningful community. People need to face aloneness because this is how we protect and develop our own inner mystery. Nouwen writes, “It is this inner mystery that attracts us to each other and allows us to establish friendship and develop lasting relationships of love. An intimate relationship between people not only asks for mutual openness but also for mutual respectful protection of each other’s uniqueness.”<sup>80</sup>

How do we face loneliness? Nouwen pondered this question for a long time: “What then can we do with our essential aloneness which so often breaks into our consciousness as the experience of a desperate sense of loneliness?”<sup>81</sup> He sought the road

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<sup>77</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 23-6.

<sup>78</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 26.

<sup>79</sup> Nouwen insisted that “as long as our loneliness brings us together with the hope that together we no longer will be alone, we castigate each other with our unfulfilled and unrealistic desires for oneness, inner tranquility and the uninterrupted experience of communion.” Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 31.

<sup>81</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 34

of conversion from loneliness into solitude and highlighted the difficulty in facing loneliness and turning it into a fruitful solitude.<sup>82</sup>

### ***A Creative Response through Solitude***

Transforming loneliness into a fruitful solitude is certainly challenging, even in secluded monastery life. The difficulty multiplies even more in a secular world with a multitude of distractions. By becoming more attentive in daily life, however, one can learn the difference between being present in loneliness and being present in solitude. For example, when alone in an office, a house, or an empty classroom, we can either fall victim to restless loneliness or enjoy quiet solitude. What Nouwen stressed is the solitude of the heart as an inner attitude or quality that does not depend on physical isolation. According to Nouwen, we can attentively listen to the words of others when we live with the solitude of heart. Unfortunately, when driven by loneliness, we tend to select only those remarks and events that bring immediate gratification to our cravings or needs. On the outside, a person suffocating in loneliness may not look much different from a recluse hermit who dwells in solitude. Nevertheless, their inner world entirely differs. The conversion begins when we recognize the poles between which we move and develop a sensitivity for this inner tension—like Merton’s distinction between our real selves and

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<sup>82</sup> Nouwen wrote, “To live a spiritual life, we must first find the courage to enter into the desert our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude. This requires not only courage but also a strong faith. As hard as it is to believe that the dry desolate desert can yield endless varieties of flowers, it is equally hard to imagine that our loneliness is hiding unknown beauty. The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it is the movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward-reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play.” Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 34-5.

false selves.<sup>83</sup> Once we learn to identify the disparity, we no longer feel lost. On the contrary, we can begin to discern the direction in which we want to move.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the beginning of a spiritual life is to develop this inner sensitivity.

In addition, as Jesus said in Luke 5:4 to “put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch,” we can create that precious space where we discern God’s voice by transforming our loneliness into a deep solitude. Nouwen stresses that “solitude does not pull us away from our fellow human beings but instead makes real fellowship possible.”<sup>85</sup> He attests it through Merton’s case. Merton spent the last years of his life living as a hermit, but his contemplative solitude brought him into deeper intimacy with others. On January 12, 1950, Merton wrote in his diary, “it is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am, the more affection I have for them. It is pure affection and filled with reverence for the solitude of others.”<sup>86</sup> As his life grew in spiritual maturity, Merton came to see with a penetrating clarity that solitude did not separate him from his contemporaries but rather brought him into a deep communion with them.<sup>87</sup> Nouwen summarizes his view and emphasizes the importance of solitude once again:

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<sup>83</sup> Merton profoundly influenced Nouwen. Here, a brief understanding of Merton’s spirituality will be helpful. Robert Inchausti once wrote, “At the heart of Merton’s spirituality is his distinction between our real and false selves. Our false selves are the identities we cultivate in order to function in society with pride and self-possession; our real selves are a deep religious mystery, known entirely only to God. The world cultivates the false self, ignores the real one, and therein lies the great irony of human existence: The more we make of ourselves, the less we actually exist.” Thomas Merton, *Seeds*, edited with an introduction by Robert Inchausti (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), 1.

<sup>84</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 37-9.

<sup>85</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 42.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1956), 261.

<sup>87</sup> Merton’s experience in Louisville gave him another deeper understanding of contemplation. Even today, a monument stands in Louisville in commemoration his enlightening experience. The

Without the solitude of heart, our relationships with others easily become needy and greedy, sticky and clinging, dependent and sentimental, exploitative and parasitic, because without the solitude of heart we cannot experience the others as different from ourselves but only as people who can be used for the fulfillment of our own often hidden needs.... In this solitude we encourage each other to enter into the silence of our innermost being and discover there the voice that calls us beyond the limits of human togetherness to a new communion. In this solitude we can slowly become aware of a presence of him who embraces friends and lovers and offers us the freedom to love each other, because he first loved us.<sup>88</sup>

The conversion from loneliness to solitude is not a movement of a withdrawal *from* somewhere but rather a movement *toward* somewhere. Besides, once we have tasted this solitude, we can become detached from false ties and attached to God and each other in a surprisingly new way.

### ***From Solitude to Compassion and Solidarity***

In solitude, we can pay careful attention to the world and search for an honest response. Nouwen argues, “A real spiritual life does exactly the opposite: it makes us so alert and aware of the world around us, that all that is and happens becomes part of our contemplation and meditation and invites us to a free and fearless response.”<sup>89</sup> The movement from loneliness to solitude is a movement toward a deeper engagement in the

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following is evidence showing how powerfully his insight captured him: “Though ‘out of the world’ we [monks] are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest. We take a different attitude to all these things, for we belong to God. Yet so does everybody else belong to God.... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. And I suppose my happiness could have taken form in the words: ‘Thank God, thank God that I am like other men, that I am only a man among others.’ ... It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God Himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race! To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake.” Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1968), 157-58.

<sup>88</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 44.

<sup>89</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 50-1.

most urgent issues of our age. If that is the case, then, why would Christians not break their own religious shells and stretch out their arms to the suffering world? Nouwen assesses that it is because the religious sentiments of the West have become so individualized. Hence, concepts such as “a contrite heart” have been reduced to personal experiences of guilt and the willingness to repent for it. As a result, the catastrophic events of our days, e.g., wars, mass murders, unbridled violence, crowded prisons, torture chambers, hunger and illness of millions of people, are safely kept outside the solitude of our hearts. Our contrition remains no more than a religious emotion.<sup>90</sup>

Nouwen recalls Merton’s idea of finding the answer to the inner solidarity that prevents self-righteousness and makes compassion possible. Merton once wrote,

Once God has called you to solitude, everything you touch leads you further into solitude. Everything that affects you builds you into a hermit, as long as you do not insist on doing the work yourself and building your own kind of hermitage. What is my new desert? The name of it is compassion. There is no wilderness so terrible, so beautiful, so arid and so fruitful as the wilderness of compassion. It is the only desert that shall truly flourish like the lily. It shall become a pool, it shall bud forth and blossom and rejoice with joy. It is in the desert of compassion that the thirsty land turns into springs of water, that the poor possess all things.<sup>91</sup>

Merton’s life as a monk demonstrates that his withdrawal from the world paradoxically brought him into closer contact with it. In solitude, he could discover the pains of the world more and a way to respond to them.

To sum up, the solitude of the heart is the place where compassion comes into being. This compassion makes us very much aware of ourselves and brings us in solidarity with our fellow human beings. In our solution-oriented society, we want to alleviate suffering without sharing, just like wanting to save a child from a burning house

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<sup>90</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 54.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1956), 323.

without the risk of getting hurt. However, it is more important to realize that the beginning of healing is indeed in solidarity with the pain, that compassionate solidarity takes its shape in solitude.<sup>92</sup>

### ***Solitude as Emptiness before God***

Nouwen says, “if it is true that solitude diverts us from our fears and anger and makes us empty for God, then it is also true that precisely in solitude an enormous space opens up into which we can welcome all the people of the world.”<sup>93</sup> This means that in solitude, we are able to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. He adds,

In real solitude there is an unlimited space for others, because there we are empty and there we can see that, in fact, nobody stands over and against us. An enemy is only our enemy as long as we have something to defend. But when we have nothing to hold onto, nothing to protect, nothing to consider as exclusively ours, then nobody can be an enemy and then we can, in fact, recognize in the center of our solitude that all men and women are brothers and sisters. In solitude, we stand so naked and so vulnerable before God, and become so deeply aware of our total dependency on his love, that not only our friends but also those who kill, lie, torture, rape, and wage wars can become part of our flesh and blood. 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. And thus intercessory prayer is the prayer of self-emptying because it asks of us to give up all that divides us from others so that we can *become* those we pray for and let God touch them in us.<sup>94</sup>

In summary, I described in the introduction of this thesis how Korean society affected the life of its religious community. With Nouwen’s ideas, I suggested solitude as a response to the emergencies of our age. I claimed solitude as the place where mature intimacy can develop among people, as the place where we can discover our common

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<sup>92</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 60-2.

<sup>93</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 31.

<sup>94</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 31-2.

vocation, and where our great encounter with God can take place. Solitude enriches the contemplative life. I showed solitude as the foundation of our lives in a community and the holy ground in which chastity, obedience, and poverty blossom. The movement from loneliness to solitude is indeed a movement by which we reach out to our innermost being to find our great healing powers, not as a unique property but as a gift to be shared with all human beings. Furthermore, this movement leads us spontaneously to the movement from hostility to hospitality. Hence, the movement from hostility to hospitality will be the second characteristic of the spiritual life that can encourage us to reach out creatively to the many whom we meet on our way.

### **Reaching Out to Our Fellow Human Beings: The Second Movement from Hostility to Hospitality**

In this second part, I want to look at hospitality as a witness to the innermost sanctum, which is a holy, empty space in human life. As Nouwen maintained, the celibate man or woman affirms and proclaims that all human's intimacy finds its deepest meaning and fulfillment when it is experienced and lived as a participation in the intimacy of God's self. However, in a world where traditional patterns of human communications have broken down and they no longer offer the intimate bonds they did in the past, aloneness, which is the basic human condition, has entered so deeply into our emotional awareness. Loneliness constantly tempts us to want more than our fellow human beings can give.<sup>95</sup> Nouwen diagnoses that "much of the intense desire for love, acceptance, and belonging is cruelly turning into jealousy, resentment, and violence."<sup>96</sup> In turn, he

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<sup>95</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 37-42.

<sup>96</sup> Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 44.

suggests the second important characteristic of the spiritual life by which our hostilities can be converted into hospitality. He proposes celibacy as a “sign of hope” in this world, that is, celibacy is a “visible manifestation of the holy space.” In other words, celibacy can be a forceful testament in service of grown-up human relationships.<sup>97</sup>

### ***Hospitality as a Creative Space for Strangers***

Nouwen recognizes that the purpose of being a Christian is to exercise hospitality. He asserts that this vocation as a Christian is “to convert the *hostis* into a *hospes*, the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced.”<sup>98</sup> He first reveals that hospitality is a term with a biblical background. For example, it is the story of Abraham when he invited three strangers at Mamre (Genesis 18:1-15), the story of the widow of Zarephath who offered food to Elijah as a man of God (1 Kings 17:9-24), and the story of two disciples who received the stranger on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). According to Nouwen, “the biblical stories help us to realize not just that hospitality is an important virtue, but even more that hospitality between guest and host can reveal their most precious gifts and bring new life to each other.”<sup>99</sup>

However, there is an ambivalence. While the core of Christian spirituality is to reach out to strangers and invite them into our lives, there is an assumption in this world that strangers are potentially dangerous and that it is up to them to disprove it. Fear and

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<sup>97</sup> Thomas Aquinas provides the best definition of celibacy. Aquinas calls “celibacy a vacancy for God. To be a celibate means to be empty for God, to be free and open for his presence, to be available for his service.” Thomas Aquinas quoted in Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 44-5.

<sup>98</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 66.

<sup>99</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 67.

hostility are not limited to our encounters with strangers, such as burglars, drug addicts, or just strangely behaving people. In a world so permeated with competition, even close friends can become infected by fear and hostility when they experience threats to their safety. Paradoxically, Nouwen finds our healing power in facing hostility and fear, which is a unique feature of Nouwen's spirituality. He sees hospitality as a cure to the alienation and disconnection of our time. Namely, when hostility turns into hospitality, fearful strangers can become guests revealing to their hosts the promise they are carrying with them, and then the distinction between the host and the guest proves to be artificial and evaporates in recognition of the new-found unity.<sup>100</sup> That is why the guest and the owner present their most valuable things in hospitality and give each other new life.

Likewise, Nouwen encourages us to create a free and friendly space even though it seems empty. It is this paradox of hospitality that gives us healing power.<sup>101</sup> When we face our inner hostility and fear, we can discover hospitality. Nouwen affirms that when our hospitality does not make a creative space, "our fears, uncertainties, and hostilities make us fill our inner world with ideas, opinions, judgments, and values to which we cling as to a precious property."<sup>102</sup> Therefore, we have to recognize that emptiness is a

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<sup>100</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 67-71

<sup>101</sup> "The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations." Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 72.

<sup>102</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 74-5.

blessing and a precious gift of bringing new life.<sup>103</sup> Then we can “love to the end” our fellow human beings like the good Samaritan.<sup>104</sup>

### ***Forms of Hospitality***

The movement from hostility to hospitality determines our relationship with other people. That is, through this movement, we may become more sensitive to our inner movements and be more able to affirm an open attitude toward our fellow human beings when we make ourselves aware of the hospitality. Hospitality creates a free and friendly space where we can reach out to strangers and invite them to become our friends, and it can take place on many levels and in many relationships. Nouwen divides it into three types of relationships: the relationship between parents and their children, teachers and their students, and professionals—such as doctors, social workers, psychologists, counselors, nurses, ministers, and priests—and their patients, clients, counselees, and parishioners. At some point in our lives, we become involved in all three types of relationships. We can all be children and parents, students and teachers, healers and those in need of care. The complexity of these relationships of “ins” and “outs” arises a discussion with numerous principles.<sup>105</sup> However, the concept of hospitality might bring

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<sup>103</sup> The German word of hospitality is *Gastfreundschaft*, which means “friendship for guest.” In Dutch, it is *Gastvrijheid*, meaning “the freedom of the guest.” Hospitality indicates that we want to offer friendship without binding the guest and freedom without leaving him alone. After all, hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the strangers can enter and become a friend rather than an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, rather to provides them space where change can take place. Hence, hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the host's lifestyle, but rather the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71-2.

<sup>104</sup> “Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

<sup>105</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 80-1.

a unifying dimension that applies to all these interpersonal relationships. In other words, hospitality is the dimension of how I am doing under Jesus' love commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31).

### ***Parents and Children***

Nouwen understands God through hospitality. Namely, hospitality is the way that God created and treated all human beings. It belongs to the center of the Christian message that children are not properties to own, control, and rule over under parents' responsibility, but gifts to cherish, care for, and serve.<sup>106</sup> According to Nouwen, parents experience liberation when they realize that their children are their most important guests and strangers they have to know. Nouwen accented that "the hospitable home indeed is the place where father, mother, and children can reveal their talents to each other, become present to each other as members of the same human family and support each other in their common struggles to live and make live."<sup>107</sup> Parents have to encourage their children to listen to their inner selves and develop the freedom that gives them the courage to leave home and travel on. However, many parents suffer from deep guilt towards their children, thinking that they are responsible for everything their sons or daughters do. The difficult task of parenthood is to help their children grow up and permit them the freedom to stand on their own feet, physically, mentally, spiritually, and

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<sup>106</sup> "The family is the setting in which a new life is not only born but also welcomed as a gift of God. Each new life 'allows us to appreciate the utterly gratuitous dimension of love, which never ceases to amaze us. It is the beauty of being loved first: children are loved even before they arrive.'" Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on love in the family *Amoris Laetitia*, (19 March 2018), 166; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, (22 November 1981), 14: AAS 74 (1982), 96.

<sup>107</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 82.

independently. But for parents, the real temptation is to hold on to their children, to use them for their own unfulfilled needs, to cling to them, to make them feel that they owe their parents a big deal, either directly or indirectly. But from an aspect of hospitality, “a good host is not only able to receive his guests with honor and offer them all the care they need but also to let them go when their time to leave has come.”<sup>108</sup>

### ***Teachers and Students***

Hospitality also can be seen as a model for a creative interchange between teachers and their students. According to Nouwen, a teacher is a person who is to create for his students a free and fearless space where mental and emotional development can take place when we look at teaching in terms of hospitality. Thus, teachers must pay special attention to the task of “revealing” and “affirming.”<sup>109</sup> Like the Latin proverb *Nemo dat quod non habet*, one cannot give what one does not have. A good host is a person who, first of all, believes that his guest is carrying a promise he wants to reveal to anyone who shows genuine interest. Furthermore, a good host helps his guests discover their hidden talents and helps them develop and deepen those talents to continue their own path with a renewed self-confidence. It seems that more important than the infusion of any particular doctrine or conventional idea is to offer students the place where they can reveal their potentials to love, to give, and to create. Thus, revealing and affirming are the main characteristics of the relationship between teachers and their students. These

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<sup>108</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 84.

<sup>109</sup> Nouwen asserted that “the teacher has first of all to reveal, to take away the veil covering many students’ intellectual life, and help them see that their own life experiences, their own insights and convictions, their own intuitions and formulations are worth serious attention.” Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 87.

two aspects show that students are not just the poor, needy, ignorant beggars who visit knowledgeable people, but guests who honor the house with their visit and will not leave it without having made their contribution. In this way, teaching as a form of hospitality will be free from unrealistic burdens and, instead, will bring moments of joy to students and teachers.

### ***Healers and Patients***

Today all professionals, such as doctors, social workers, counselors, and ministers, who reach out to their fellow human beings should remind themselves that they do not own anyone who needs care. The great danger of the increasing professionalization is that it becomes a way of exercising power instead of offering service. But it is easy, too easy indeed, to blame the helping professionals. Nouwen assesses that the technocratic streamlining in our society has largely depersonalized the interpersonal aspects of the healing professions. He finds a solution in Christian spirituality. Namely, every human being is called upon to be a healer. He insists, “We all are healers who can reach out to offer health, and we all are patients in constant need of help. Only this realization can keep professionals from becoming distant technicians and those in need of care from feeling used or manipulated.”<sup>110</sup> Therefore, if we look at healing as creating space for the stranger, all Christians should be willing and able to offer this so-much- needed form of hospitality.

The first and most important task of any healer is making an accurate diagnosis. To do so, the healer has to make the suffering patient feel that the healer accepts his or

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<sup>110</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 93.

her story. According to Nouwen, listening is indeed one of the highest forms of hospitality:

Healing means first of all allowing strangers to become sensitive and obedient to their own stories. Healers, therefore, become students who want to learn, and patients become teachers who want to teach... Healers are hosts who patiently and carefully listen to the story of the suffering strangers. Patients are guests who rediscover their selves by telling their story to the one who offers them a place to stay. In the telling of their stories, strangers befriend not only their host but also their own past.<sup>111</sup>

Each person has a unique story. Often, it might not be easy for him/her to share his/her story because it is full of disappointments, frustrations, deviations, and stagnations.

However, there will be no hope for them in the future if their past remains unconfessed, unreceived, and misunderstood. Thus, healers should be willing to accept the story of their fellow human beings with a compassionate heart. That is the compassionate heart that Jesus Christ showed us.

### ***Receptivity and Confrontation***

The concept of hospitality can help us see that we are called to serve each other and create the space where that is possible. Honest receptivity means inviting the stranger into our world on his or her terms, not on ours. When discussing the three types of relationships of hospitality, we should emphasize receptivity and confrontation. If we really want to be hospitable, we must accept strangers and face them in a clear way. We have to clearly and distinctively show our own ideas, opinions, and lifestyle without hiding ourselves behind an ambiguous neutral position. No real dialogue is possible between somebody and a nobody.

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<sup>111</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 96.

Therefore, receptivity and confrontation are two aspects of Christian witness that are inseparable. They must remain in a careful balance. Receptivity without confrontation can lead to a bland neutrality that serves nobody, and confrontation without receptivity can be oppressive, which hurts everybody. In every life situation, we not only have to receive but also to confront.

### ***Hospitality and the Host***

The movement from hostility to hospitality is impossible without a constant inner connection with the movement from loneliness to solitude. As long as we are lonely, we cannot be hospitable because, as lonely people, we cannot create free space. Therefore, we have to know the difficulty of creating free space for a stranger when there is no solitude in our lives.

We can achieve a transition from hostility to hospitality when the movement from loneliness to solitude takes place. Nouwen asserts, “poverty makes a good host.”<sup>112</sup> This paradoxical statement needs some explanation. When we have found the center of our life in our own hearts and have accepted our solitude as a vocation, we are able to offer freedom to others. When we have given up our desire to be fulfilled, we can offer emptiness as a creative space to others. Poverty is the inner disposition that allows us to take away our defenses and convert our enemies into friends. We only perceive the stranger as an enemy as long as when we have something to defend. They are no longer enemies when we have nothing to defend.

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<sup>112</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 103.

Here, poverty of mind emerges as an important concept. Someone filled with ideas, concepts, opinions, and convictions cannot be a good host. There is no inner space to listen, no openness to discover the gift of the other. According to Nouwen, poverty of mind as a spiritual attitude manifests itself as a willingness to recognize the incomprehensibility of the mystery of life. Besides, the poverty of mind demands the continuing refusal to identify God with anything fixed because God cannot be caught or comprehended with any specific idea, concept, opinion, or conviction. Voluntary poverty of mind makes professionals open to receive new knowledge and insight from those who ask their help. When we can work for the poor in a spirit of receptivity and gratitude, our help can be accepted without shame.<sup>113</sup>

We can fill a vacant space with anything, but we cannot add anything to a room already filled with something. When our hearts are full of prejudice, worries, and jealousy, there is little space within us for others. Nouwen sees poverty of heart as a condition for building up a community through genuine communion. In other words, the poverty of hearts accepts other people's experiences as a gift. Their histories are grafted with ours in a whole new way, their lives give us a new meaning, and their God encounters ours in mutual revelation.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 104-5.

<sup>114</sup> Johannes Baptist Metz described this characteristic well: "Every *genuine human encounter* must be inspired by poverty of spirit. We must forget ourselves in order to let the other person approach us. We must be able to open up to the other person, to let that person's distinctive personality unfold-even though it often frightens or repels us. We often keep the other person down, and only see what we want to see; thus we never really encounter the mysterious secret of their being, only ourselves. Failing to risk the poverty of encounter, we indulge in a new form of self-assertion and pay a price for it: loneliness. Because we did not risk the poverty of openness (cf. Mt. 10:39), our lives are not graced with the warm fullness of human existence. We are left with only a shadow of our real self." Johannes B. Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, trans. John Drury (New Jersey, Paulist Press, 1998), 43-4.

In conclusion, hospitality asks for poverty, the poverty of mind, and the poverty of heart. According to Nouwen, true training for service demands a hard and often painful process of self-emptying: “training for service is not a training to become rich but to become voluntarily poor; not to fulfill ourselves but to empty ourselves; not to conquer God but to surrender to his saving power.”<sup>115</sup>

In this context, we can understand the words of St. Paul in 2 Corinthians: “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ, for when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10). Therefore, we must boast of our weaknesses. Our fulfillment is to be empty. By becoming useless, we become useful, and by becoming powerless, we become powerful. In the end, through all of these reversal movements, we become less and less fearful and defensive and more and more open to the other, even if it entails suffering and death.

In summary, Nouwen’s spiritual life showed that embracing one’s own wounds is finding the transforming power of God at work in them. The first movement he proposed through his life and contemplation is a process from loneliness to solitude, which involves reaching out to our innermost self. This inner mystery attracts us to each other and allows us to establish friendship and develop lasting relationships of love, respecting each other’s uniqueness. Nouwen stressed the solitude of the heart as an inner attitude that does not depend on physical isolation. In this solitude, we encourage each other to enter into the silence of our innermost being and discover there the voice that calls us beyond the limits of human togetherness to a new communion. In the solitude of heart, we can pay careful attention to the world and search for an honest response. The

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<sup>115</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 108.

movement from loneliness to solitude is indeed a movement by which we reach out to our innermost being to find our great healing powers, not as a unique property but as a gift to be shared with all human beings.

The second movement is from hostility to hospitality. He views hospitality as a cure to the alienation and disconnection of our time. Nouwen affirms that when our hospitality does not make a creative space, our fears, uncertainties, and hostilities fill our inner world with ideas, opinions, judgments, and values to which we cling as to a precious property. Thus, we have to recognize that emptiness is a blessing and a precious gift of a new life. Through this movement, we may become more sensitive to our inner movements and be more able to affirm an open attitude toward our fellow human beings. Hospitality is the creation of a free and friendly space where we can reach out to strangers and invite them to become our friends. In turn, it helps us to see that we are called to serve one another and to continue to create a space for others.

The third and, for Nouwen, the most important movement is the process of going from illusion to prayer. This movement structures our real relationship with God by living with the mystery of God, finding God's presence through the prayer of the heart, and living within God's presence. When our hearts belong to God, the world and its power cannot steal our hearts. When God becomes the Lord of our hearts, our original alienation is overcome. The prayer of the heart requires a gradual detachment from all false relationships and demands honest obedience to God from whom all goodness comes. Since prayer is the highest vocation that requires deep consideration and faithful patience, it cannot be left private. Not only is the community formed by prayer, but the community is also expressed through prayer. Therefore, without community, individual

prayer easily degenerates into egocentric and eccentric behavior, but without individual prayer, the community's prayer quickly becomes a meaningless routine. Individual and community prayer cannot be separated.

In the next chapter, I will look at the social situations that Nouwen sought to confront through his contemplative life. His thoughts still have a powerful force that can influence our time and the future generations to come.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TOWARDS AN INTEGRATION OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF PRIESTHOOD BASED ON THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE OF HENRI NOUWEN

The church is not purely an institution that promotes personal piety and moral life. From first to last, the church is “the sacramental presence” that proves God’s promise to the world, and it is a community that announces to the world that God’s self-gift is constantly offered to all despite our sinfulness.<sup>116</sup> In a time when faith is no longer supported by customary religious declarations or by general consensus of society, Rahner is steadily adamant that “the devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic,’ one who has ‘experienced’ something, or he [she] will cease to be anything at all.”<sup>117</sup>

What does this mean? And what is to be experienced? It is none other than God. Under the rubric of the specific Christian method of apprehending God, God is understood as the infinite holy mystery who comes near, and bestows Godself through grace and incarnation, namely, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. In there we find our calling. We are called to testify of God’s presence. Elizabeth A. Johnson summarizes Rahner’s description as follows:

People who courageously accept themselves, who accept their own life with all its quirks and beauty and agony, in point of fact accept holy mystery, who abides within them addressing them as self-offering love. This entails no loss of individuality but rather a growth in personhood that is liberated and fortified. For far from being a rival to human authenticity, holy mystery positively wills the world and ourselves in our finite worldliness. Rahner captures the noncompetitive nature of this relationship in his famous axiom, “nearness to God and genuine human autonomy increase in direct and not inverse proportion.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 44-7.

<sup>117</sup> Karl Rahner, “Christian Living Formerly and Today,” *Theological Investigations VII*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), 15; Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 44.

<sup>118</sup> Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 45.

Jesus Christ is at the heart of this form of mysticism. God's promise to the world in the crucified and risen Christ opened the way to victory. The fact that an incomprehensible mystery provides a blessed ending in the presence of an eternal God gives us an eschatological and irrevocable assurance. People who heard this and witnessed the truth in history became the community of believers, the church.

Hence, in church history, "a spirituality is a concrete way of living the gospel inspired by the Spirit and in company with others."<sup>119</sup> Especially in modern spirituality, the praxis of justice forms the core of a new spirituality. Contemporary Christian spirituality is characterized by concern for marginalized neighbors. In addition to prayer and spiritual exercises, it requires social analysis, actions, and strategies. In this regard, faith means dedication to discipleship in loving solidarity with all people, especially the poor and excluded in this world. In a true ecclesial sense, this praxis belongs to the church's core mission. To carry out this mission is to come to the God of life and show compassionate solidarity to those who suffer.

### **The Priest and Ministry as the Devout Christian of the Future**

Nouwen made a similar point to Rahner's. Nouwen said his book *In the Name of Jesus*, "I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. That is the way Jesus revealed God's love."<sup>120</sup> In a different place he wrote, "The leader of the future will be the one who dares to claim his irrelevance in the

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<sup>119</sup> Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 87.

<sup>120</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 17; Nouwen, *The Road to Peace*, xi.

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>121</sup> He continued, “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 gave us hope are the true saints.”<sup>122</sup>

In *The Wounded Healer*, Nouwen urged both mystics and revolutionaries to undergo the personal conversion and public struggle for justice that Jesus lived:

Every real revolutionary is challenged to be a mystic at heart, and one who walks the mystical way is called to unmask the illusory quality of human society. Mysticism and revolution are two aspects of the same attempt to bring about radical change. No mystics can prevent themselves from becoming social critics, since in self-reflection they will discover the roots of a sick society. Similarly, no revolutionaries can avoid facing their own human condition, since in the midst of their struggle for a new world they will find that they are also fighting their own reactionary fears and false ambitions.<sup>123</sup>

Jesus has made it undeniably clear that the transformation of the human heart and the changing of human society are not separate tasks, but interconnected like two pillars of the cross. Hence, mystics and revolutionaries must face the miserable conditions of themselves and the world around them.

Here, I have found the image of the priest for our time. Priests of the future will be mystics and revolutionaries. Priests as mystics will reveal God’s transcendence. They will not be stained by the world by pursuing a transcendent life from the world. Priests as

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<sup>121</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 22.

<sup>122</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 60.

<sup>123</sup> Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 19-20; Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader*, ed. Robert Durback (New York: Bantam, 1989), 159-60; Nouwen, *The Road to Peace*, xxxii.

revolutionaries will reveal God's presence in the midst of our world. They will be committed to peace by solidarity with the poor. The person who incarnates these two qualities in our time is the ideal figuration of the parish priest I have dreamed of and found in Nouwen. This priest will be a leader who is willing to choose a life with open arms and move downwards. He will be a person who prays because he knows his shortcomings. He will do not hesitate to be broken because he will say "No" to injustice. Nevertheless, he will trust in God and trust in fellow human beings. Through his unwavering attitude toward peace and justice, Nouwen became not only an image of Christian leader, but also one of the faithful saints as a prophetic voice for the truth, a light in dark times, and a sign of hope in an era of uncertainty.

In this chapter, I will address the circumstances on which Nouwen focused his attention and how he viewed and responded to them. At the end of the twentieth century, Nouwen began his writings directly against various social injustices, and his main concern was about peace in the world. I will note the works of this period when his social spirituality reached its peak.<sup>124</sup> Lastly, based on his spirituality, I will explore the direction of the spirituality and role of modern Korean priests.

### **An Urgent Request on the Road to Peace**

The Republic of Korea and North Korea have a common ancestor called Dangun, the legendary founder and god-king of Gojoseon. However, they are now separated into

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<sup>124</sup> I clarify in advance that this chapter focuses on the three books of Nouwen, who directly raised the prophetic voice on social issues: Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005); Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*, ed. John Dear (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998); Henri J. M. Nouwen et al., *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (1982; repr., Darton, London: Longman and Todd, 1983).

two different countries. There had been a painful history of Japanese occupation in the process of transitioning from a royal state called Joseon to a modern democratic state. When the Japanese occupation ended, they were again dominated and divided by the forces of the United States and the Soviet Union, and to this day, the situation of separation continues. The Korean Peninsula is a stadium where countries with different ideologies compete for strength. South Korea, the world's ninth-largest economic powerhouse, is the only country that does not even have wartime operational control authority.<sup>125</sup> For that reason, Korea is a country with the highest risk of a nuclear war. These external situations have instilled deep cynicism, hatred, enmity, and discrimination in Korea.<sup>126</sup> This division has led to discord of regions, classes, and ideas within Korean society. What is most needed in Korean society today is peace in a true sense.

“Nobody can be a Christian without being a peacemaker.”<sup>127</sup> Nouwen's phrasing sounds like a powerful declaration. His declaration comes from Jesus' command to love one another, which is not a part-time obligation but requires our total investment and

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<sup>125</sup> Min-Seo Kwak, “The Korean economy recaptures the world's tenth despite the world coronavirus disease... Can the ninth place be possible?”, Yonhap news Agency, last modified March 15, 2021, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20210314033200002>; Korea International Trade Association, “Korea's GDP, ranked 9th among OECD,” Yonhap news Agency, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://www.kita.net/cmmrcInfo/cmmrcNews/cmmrcNews/cmmrcNewsDetail.do?pageIndex=1&nIndex=59451&sSiteid=1>.

<sup>126</sup> Sun-Young Bae, “The May18 Memorial Foundation urges the Pope's Ambassador to Korea to take strong measures against the Maeil Shinmun,” Catholic news, last modified March 25, 2021, <http://www.catholicnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=31396>; Even a prominent local media company, run by a diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, was not free from ideology. The press reported in the newspaper a cartoon that undermined the spirit of the 5.18 democratization movement. Because of that, the press was protested by several civic groups; see <http://pastoralin.cbck.or.kr>. If you want to see the level of social consciousness of Catholics, refer to the survey of the Korean Pastoral Institute. You can use the data of my parish. Its username is 48685, and the password is 111111.

<sup>127</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 16.

dedication.”<sup>128</sup> For the same reason, Jesus’ call to make peace is also unlimited, unconditional, and uncompromising. Without peace, there will be no life. Thus, Nouwen stipulates that peacemaking is a full-time vocation of God’s whole people.

Nouwen rightly refers to Jesus’ sermon on the mount to suggest a conversion of our whole person so that all of our thoughts, words, and actions can become the urgent callings to be peacemakers. The sermon on the mount can no longer remain in the background of Christian consciousness. It is to come into our lives urgently to let us know that now is the time when we should all support peace. Nouwen says that in a world poised for self-destruction, the choice is no longer between peace and war but between peace and the end of history.

### **Prayer in Nouwen’s *Peacework***

Prayer is an essential part of a Christian’s life, but it is treated as something personal. Hence, we assume that prayer cannot have a direct impact on social transformation. However, Nouwen insists that “prayer is the beginning and the end, the source and the fruit, the core and the content, the basis and the goal of all peacemaking,” because “peace is a divine gift, we receive in prayer.”<sup>129</sup> The logical basis for Nouwen’s argument lies in the promise of Jesus in his farewell discourse, “Peace I leave to you, my own peace I give to you; a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you” (John 14:27).<sup>130</sup> Therefore, prayer is the first step into the house of God who offers us peace.

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<sup>128</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 16-7.

<sup>129</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 25.

<sup>130</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 26.

### *The Wounds in the Most Hidden Recesses*

Praying at all times is the first step to peacemaking. However, this is not easy because human nature desires to be recognized as a valuable being above all else. According to Nouwen, “we have to confess that much of our behavior—even our so-called good behavior—is an anxious, though perhaps unconscious, attempt to advance our own cause, to make ourselves known and to convince our world that we need to be reckoned with. This is the goodness of sinners that Jesus so fiercely criticizes.”<sup>131</sup> Our needs are anchored in old and often very deeply hidden wounds. These wounds are the result of experiences of being hated, unappreciated, or even rejected. These wounds make us doubt that we are worthy. It drives us to anxious self-esteem that quickly makes us very egocentric and destructive.

Needs anchored in wounds are not easy to explain because we are also part of the chain of wounds and needs that are hidden in the depth of our beings. This is a tragedy that is prevalent in humans, and it is a tragedy that passes from one generation to the next. The vicious repetition of wounds and needs provides an environment for those who hate peace. Nouwen says that “it is the dwelling place of demons, and it is the place that lures us precisely because we all are wounded and needy.”<sup>132</sup>

According to Nouwen, the great irony is that Satan finds his safest place to hide where we are involved in the work of the kingdom of God. The name of God is used for numerous demonic actions. Therefore, first of all, it is important to detect the dark works in our daily struggles for peace. This is an area that requires discernment through

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<sup>131</sup> “And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same” (Luke 6:33); Nouwen, *Peacework*, 27.

<sup>132</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 29.

contemplative life. Nouwen indicates that it can be easy to detect the forces of darkness that surround us, but it is very difficult to admit that the forces of darkness are embedded in our own good works.

Even when we work for peace, we can only fully understand the difficulties of making peace when we confess that we also have unclean hands. That is, we should recognize that our biggest spiritual tragedy is that numerous cruel and inhuman acts are committed in the name of serving God. We also see here the solidarity of sins. The wounds and needs that lie behind the war we curse are all the wounds and needs we share with humanity. We also can be part of the evil we resist. Here we get a glimpse of human's sinful nature. People who hate peace live in a world that is very familiar to us, where peace is still mocked, where individuals, groups, and nations are likely to continue to choose war rather than peace by their entangled wounds and desires. To resist this dark and fearful background, Nouwen presents prayer as the first characteristic of peacemaking.

### ***Prayer and Peace as the New Language***

Nouwen insists that the invitation to the prayer life is an invitation to a life that does not fall into the net of wounds and needs in this world. The word "prayer" means to completely cut off the vicious chain of wounds and needs that lead to violence and war and lead to an utterly different dwelling place. To this end, Nouwen discovers in the Gospels images related to the dwelling that can be shed without intention. He confesses, "These images bring me to think of the peacemaker as one who has found a new home

where peace resides and from which peace is brought into the world.”<sup>133</sup>

According to John the Evangelist, Jesus “pitched his tent among us” when he was born (John 1:14). Also, when the first disciples met Jesus, they asked where Jesus was staying, and Jesus invited them to stay where He was staying. Here we realize that “following Jesus means changing places, entering into a new milieu and living in new company.”<sup>134</sup> Likewise, on the evening before his death, Jesus spoke to his disciples. “Make your home in me, as I make mine in you... Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty” (John 15:4-5). This divine dwelling place enables us to live as peacemakers in a hostile world, as sheep among wolves. Nouwen draws the following conclusion: if prayer is the foundation and key to peacemaking, then peace is “the new language that belongs to the new house.”<sup>135</sup> Panic, fear, and anxiety do not belong to peacemaking because “peacemaking is the work of love.”<sup>136</sup> This statement is based on John’s first epistle: “In love there can be no fear, but fear is driven out by perfect love” (1 John 4:18). When we gain “the intimate knowledge of being loved” through contemplation, we can freely cross the fence of death without fear and speak and act for peace.<sup>137</sup> In that respect, prayer is the way to experience love. Prayer is entering into communion with God, who loved us before we even loved God (1 John 4:19). This “first love” is revealed to us in prayer. The deeper we enter into the house of God, where prayer is the language, the more freely we are able to fill ourselves with the first love.

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<sup>133</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 33.

<sup>134</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 33.

<sup>135</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 34.

<sup>136</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 35.

<sup>137</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 36.

Evagrius notes that contemplation help us see our world as a transparent world, to point to the other side of the world we face, so we can see its true essence. Further, In Theophan's vision, the essence of the prayer of the heart is to stand in the presence of God with our mind in our heart, which is realizable when we stay in solitude. Evagrius accentuated the necessity of spiritual discipline, the *praktikos*, to attain such a vision. The hesychastic tradition also suggests that prayer is a way of spiritual discipline to attain such a vision.<sup>138</sup> Stated differently, prayer makes us realize that we belong to God, who gives us peace. The paradox of peacemaking is that we can only speak of peace in this world only when we are realized that we are no longer part of this world yet we exist in this world. Prayer, a life in God's presence, is the most thorough act of peace we can imagine.

### ***Prayer as an Act of Martyrdom***

Many people think prayer is something very different from action. This kind of thinking is built on the misconception that very little is done in prayer, and prayer at best is ultimately a waste of time and evasion of reality or secondary importance. However, Nouwen insisted prayer belongs to the essence of peacemaking, and prayer itself is a praxis of action.<sup>139</sup> He emphasized that we come to the realization of our true self in prayer and through prayer. If that is the case, prayer helps us realize our vocation as peacemakers. However, when people face an urgent situation, they say they do not have

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<sup>138</sup> The prayer of the heart's deepest expression in the hesychastic tradition is found in the Jesus prayer, consisting of the simple words: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me"; Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 141.

<sup>139</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 38.

time to pray because they need to act immediately. Yet, such an attitude contradicts Jesus' command: "Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

If we realize that we find the true self in and through prayer, prayer will give us the light of Christ's healing, as Nouwen emphasizes. However, finding our true selves requires martyrdom. Prayer is meaningful only "when it is an act of stripping oneself of everything, even of our own lives, so as to be totally free to belong to God and God alone."<sup>140</sup> This point explains why we yearn for prayer and, at the same time, reject it. We want to draw closer to God, the source and goal of all peace. However, the closer we get, the more intensely and urgently we feel that we need to break up with the familiar way we have lived our lives. Prayer is a radical act because it asks us to lay down our old self and accept the new self, Christ. When the apostle Paul wrote, "I live now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20), it was a testimony to the apostle's own life and death experience in prayer. In conclusion, the greatest mystery of prayer is that "even now it leads us already into the house of God and thus offers us anticipation of life in the divine kingdom."<sup>141</sup>

Here, the necessity and importance of solitude emerge. Prayer in solitude is a testimony to the power of God's love that embraces and heals all. When we enter solitude, we often hear two different voices that lead us in different directions—the voice of the world and the voice of the Lord. But if we do not forget to return to our place of solitude, the voice of the Lord will grow more robust, and we will realize and understand

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<sup>140</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 41.

<sup>141</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 42.

in our hearts and minds the peace we seek. We need to stay in solitude before God. Solitude will provide us with a house where we can hear the word of God and obey God's word, in which we will be able to act freely and courageously.

### **Resistance in Nouwen's *Peacework***

Nouwen thought that peace in the world and peace of heart could never be separated because he tried to engage the world through living and applying the values of the Gospels. He presented the language of love, healing, and peace in the face of pain and violence. He never separated prayer from action. He wrote, "Prayer and action, therefore, can never be seen as contradictory or mutually exclusive. Prayer without action grows into powerless pietism, and action without prayer degenerates into questionable manipulation. If prayer leads us into a deeper unity with the compassionate Christ, it will always give rise to concrete acts of service."<sup>142</sup> For him resistance was not only a prayer, but also a liturgy. He describes, "Resistance means saying 'No' to all the forces of death, wherever they may be and, as a corollary, saying 'Yes' to all of life in whatever form we encounter it."<sup>143</sup>

### ***Deadly Judgments***

Nouwen was most afraid of the danger of abstraction of violence. He takes the Holocaust as an example. The Nazis reduced the Jews into abstraction and treated them

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<sup>142</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen et al., *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983), 116-7.

<sup>143</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 50.

as a problem.<sup>144</sup> They used many abstract dehumanization stages before putting the Jews in the gas chamber, such as isolation from non-Jews and migration to distant concentration camps. First of all, Nouwen points out the problems of psychological violence before physical violence. “These abstract creations of the mind are the first products of the powers of death.”<sup>145</sup> He refers to moral killing as an example. We label our fellow human beings, divide them into categories, place them at a certain distance from ourselves, condemn, and judge. Later, we divide our world into those who are good and those who are evil. In this way, we become a judge and play the role of God. Judging others implies that we stand outside of the place where weak, wounded, and sinful human beings dwell. It is an arrogant and exaggerated act that reveals ignorance not only of others but also of ourselves. God became a man who is “sent into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved” (John 3:17). Therefore, another name for God’s judgment is mercy. Rejecting a violent judgment creates a nonviolent peace that embraces everyone we share my life with, such as our brothers and sisters.

With the central message of the Gospel, Nouwen deals with spiritual suicide caused by feelings of self-rejection and abhorrence. That is the process of seeing and realizing the powers of death that are active within ourselves as peacemakers. Looking back at his own spiritual struggles, Nouwen confesses that the most brutal battle was accepting himself, affirming his own identity as a beloved being, and celebrating his own being. So, Nouwen defines this self-loathing is as one of the greatest enemies of the

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<sup>144</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 59.

<sup>145</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 60.

peacemaker, and a voice that seduces us to commit spiritual suicide. God sent his beloved Son into this world to forgive our sins, to make us new people, and to live in this world without being paralyzed by self-rejection, remorse, and guilt. Thus, resistance against self-loathing through Christian identity is an essential element of peacemaking, and a person must reach the deepest part of his or her heart to see and confront the deadly force of self-loathing.

### ***Love Your Enemy***

Resistance to the powers of death is meaningful only when we anchor ourselves to the forces of life. Nouwen quotes an ancient piece of wisdom from the fourth-century monks of the Egyptian desert, “Do not combat the demons directly.”<sup>146</sup> This is because only the sinless Christ was able to overcome death. Also, instead of paying so much attention to the ruler of darkness, we can indirectly and invisibly overcome death by focusing more on the Lord of light. Eve’s first mistake in committing the original sin was to listen to the serpent and think that she was worth dealing with it. Therefore, those who make peace should not be victims of evil forces they strive to overcome. For Nouwen, what was ultimately important was not that we overcome death but that we celebrate life.<sup>147</sup> One of the compelling reasons that many have withheld participating in the peace movement is that they have not found the peace they seek through peacemakers.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who treat you badly” (Luke 6:27-8). These words of Jesus are a test for

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<sup>146</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 68.

<sup>147</sup> He said, “the first and foremost task of the peacemaker is not to fight death but to call forth, affirm, and nurture the signs of life wherever they become manifest.” Nouwen, *Peacework*, 72.

those who make peace. Because of our fear of others, loving our enemies becomes our greatest challenge. Fear makes us discriminatory people in this world. In other words, it is the distinction between those who agree with us and those who disagree, between those who love and those who hate, and between friends and enemies. This distinction is based on the illusion that the very happiness of our existence depends on the words, thoughts, and actions of our fellow human beings. The distinction between a friend and an enemy is made only by our fearful humanity, not by God. Thus, what is essential for peacemakers is to be deeply rooted in the love of God who embraces all. God does not “break the crushed reed, nor quench the wavering flame” (Isaiah 42:3).<sup>148</sup> Therefore, having a heart that constantly affirms life and rejects death without being corrupted becomes a way to resist evil. On the other hand, for Nouwen, resistance to evil always includes resistance to evil within oneself. Because “the world as pure object is something that is not there. It is not a reality outside us for which we exist.”<sup>149</sup> Nouwen notes, “The evil that needs to be confronted and fought has an accomplice in the human heart, including our own. Therefore, each attempt to confront evil in the world calls for the realization that there are always two fronts on which the struggle takes place: an outer and an inner front. For confrontation to become and remain compassionate, these fronts should never be separated.”<sup>150</sup> For Nouwen, resistance to evil should begin with oneself and in one’s daily life.

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<sup>148</sup> In the Gospel of Matthew, it expressed of that “a bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory” (12:20).

<sup>149</sup> Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 125.

<sup>150</sup> Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 125-6.

Nouwen reveals the affirmation of life as an act of resistance. He emphasizes three aspects of life as an act of resistance: humility, compassion, and joy. First, Nouwen found a clear victory to overcome death through his encounter with a baby. When he was hugging a baby of an acquaintance, he suddenly realized the seeds of life within the baby. Death is solid, uniform, and unchangeable, but life is vulnerable. Life needs protection because it is very fragile. Those who resist death are called to search for life anywhere and everywhere. As Nouwen confessed, “the search for this tender and vulnerable life is the mark of the true resister, and I have learned this from friends who have dedicated themselves to resistance.”<sup>151</sup>

According to Nouwen, humble people experience a very deep connection in their lives with others. They have a consciousness that all human beings are connected to each other and accept the weaknesses of all human beings, including their own. This humble attitude leads to solidarity with all the poor in the Gospel. Nouwen describes God’s compassion through God’s merciful love to human beings that embraces all their wounds and weaknesses with the wounds of Jesus Christ.

Second, “Issues do not save us, people do.”<sup>152</sup> Through his words, his compassion can be understood as person-centered compassion based on personal relationships. He says that it is essential to keep in mind the pain of a specific person. Namely, it is vital to know about individual hunger within the particular country one knows, not the hunger that many people experience in so many countries. We must continue to identify the main causes of poverty, hunger, homelessness, oppression, and war. But we are so

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<sup>151</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 72.

<sup>152</sup> Nouwen, “L’Arche and the World,” *The Road to Peace*, 166.

overwhelmed by abstract matters that we need to pay attention to the specific daily sufferings of children. If we do not take this into account, we have already fallen into the evil of death. Finally, “The fruit of humility and mercy is joy... Joy is one of the most convincing signs that we work in the Spirit of Jesus.”<sup>153</sup> Nouwen’s peace and spirituality point out the grace enjoyed through contemplation of God. The peace he claims is achieved by witnessing the peace that belongs to God. “But the joy of the Gospel is a joy born on the cross... It is a joy of knowing that evil and death have no final power over us, a joy anchored in the words of Jesus: ‘In the world you will have trouble, but be of good cheer; I have conquered the world.’”<sup>154</sup> In conclusion, the resistance comes from Christ’s victory already achieved. A life of witness to Christ leads to a life of service based on God’s compassion for humanity.<sup>155</sup>

### ***Resistance as Liturgy***

Nouwen is convinced that we can fully grasp the meaning of peacemaking only when we recognize that prayer is a form of resistance and that resistance is a form of prayer. “Resistance is not only a prayer but also liturgy.”<sup>156</sup> He realizes that “the word *liturgy* comes from the Greek phrase *ergos to lao*, which means *the work of the people*. It is the communal work of worship by the people of God.”<sup>157</sup> Truly, “the liturgical year

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<sup>153</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 79.

<sup>154</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 81.

<sup>155</sup> “Here we are touching the profound spiritual truth that service is an expression of the search for God and not just of the desire to bring about individual or social change.” Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 31.

<sup>156</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 88.

<sup>157</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 88-9.

must proclaim in all its celebrations the peace of Christ which is not of this world but was brought to this world for its salvation.”<sup>158</sup> Through worship we create a new heaven and earth together and lay the foundation for the kingdom of God within us. Therefore, through liturgy, we incarnate God’s word of peace and invite those who live in darkness to enter with us into God’s love. Therefore, whatever we do to resist the forces of death, must first be an expression of worship of the living God. If we want to be faithful to our new self that we have received from Jesus, we cannot remain silent or passive about the forces of death. Silence in the face of injustice becomes a companion to injustice, and this means that we lose the gift of peace given to us. Therefore, the way to proclaim peace is a renewed expression of ourselves and an act of true prayer.

Christian resistance is non-violent. Because the peace we want is not of this world. Jesus showed it through the way of the cross of His Passion. The way of Jesus is without curses, weapons, violence, or power. His love is not made manifest in power but in powerlessness. Jesus challenges all who follow him to take this way: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”<sup>159</sup> Thus, the resistance disarmed through love becomes possible when we see this world no longer with the eyes of fear, doubt, and anxiety, but with the eyes of God, who loves all humans unconditionally and endlessly. God’s way is the way of disarming, and it was made known to the world through the death of Jesus. Therefore, when we follow this path of love, the path of peace, and the path of the cross, we become children of God.

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<sup>158</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 89.

<sup>159</sup> Nowen quotes Martin Luther King Jr. wrote the following in his exploration of non-violence: “Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Nouwen, *Peacework*, 94.

Jesus proclaims, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). They will be the true children of God in this era of nuclear holocaust.

Resisting hatred, division, conflict, war, and death is divine worship. However, even testimony through non-violence is not welcome in this world. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said, “Men will seize you and persecute you; they will hand you over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and bring you before kings and governors because of my name” (Luke 21:12). Moreover, in another place in the Gospel of John, he gave his disciples a strict warning, “If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you.... If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too” (John 15:18, 20). Therefore, those who come to know God and belong to God must make themselves a foreigner because the message of peace is not welcome in this world. Yet, those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord must go this way. Hence, resistance to peace requires a community of faith because peacemaking can be possible only when we live with the community and work together.

### **Community in Nouwen’s *Peacework***

According to Nouwen, peacemaking inevitably requires a community. This is because, first, prayer and resistance without a community quickly regress into the form of individual heroism. Second, individual peacemaking might contain the arrogance of those who believe that peace can be achieved through strength and battle. Third, when the work of making peace ceases on a purely personal level, there is a great risk that it will deteriorate. Therefore, there needs to be a community that provides more than just a protective background for prayer and resistance. Community marks the first realization of

the new heaven and new earth. It is not simply a means of achieving peace; the community is where the peace we seek in God takes its first shape.

### ***Confession of Sins and Forgiveness***

The greatest tragedy of our era is isolation. It is into our isolated world where Jesus brings his peace. He sent us his Holy Spirit, which brings us together in one body, a body of very different people, united by the same promise and set free for the same work of peace. The new body is the Body of Christ Himself and has been present at all times and all places. This is the great mystery of the Christian community. When peacemakers are not part of this community, they are not part of the living Christ, and their peace becomes a false peace. Community, the living body of Christ, is not limited to places, organizations, meetings, clubs, dioceses, and denominations. “What makes a Christian community is a life of mutual confession and mutual forgiveness in the name of Jesus.”<sup>160</sup> Confession and forgiveness reveal the power of Christ and establish communion with the weak. It is a spiritual place to confirm that Jesus Christ is their Lord.

Hence, the forgiveness of sins is a sign of God’s forgiveness through Christ. Willingness to forgive one another is a sign of God’s forgiveness, the presence of Christ. Wherever he went, Jesus gave God’s forgiveness, even to those who killed him. Then what is required for forgiveness? The answer is *repentance*. Repentance is a humble confession of our sins. The first words Jesus said was “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Jesus said when he appeared to his disciples in Jerusalem: “repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all the nations” (Luke 24:46-7).

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<sup>160</sup> Nouwen, *Peacework*, 102.

Confession of sin is a concrete form of repentance. Jesus said that, first of all, we must admit that we need forgiveness. Therefore, only those who are willing to consider themselves a sinner can openly receive God's gift of forgiveness. Thus, confession and forgiveness are spiritual pillars upon which the Christian community relies. They are God's way of breaking down the many fear barriers that separate us and isolate us within our own shields. The manifestation of God's forgiveness in the community is the moment when peace indeed arises. The power of Christ becomes present in people through confession and forgiveness, overcoming distrust and fear of others and the outside world, and forms a genuinely loving community.

### ***Community in Christ's Presence***

If Jesus' incarnation is a sign of God's promise to forgive all people, then his crucifixion and resurrection are a sign of the actual realization of God's forgiveness. After he ascended, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so we can worship in spirit and truth. The church presents the body of Christ as a true subject who is present in the world, and can resist evil. Nouwen says that we will witness a new place every moment we choose to forgive and confess to each other. The new place here is not physical or geographic. It is a space where multiple good wills are revealed. That is why "the new heaven and the new earth" that we have been waiting for through mutual confession and forgiveness becomes the first reality in our being.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> In the Bible, the word "the new heaven and the new earth" appears four times: Isaiah 65:17, Isaiah 66: 22, 2 Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21:1. And all four symbolize the eschatological ideal community through the Second Coming of Christ.

Nouwen explains that the Christian community begins at the very place where wounds and torn hearts are shared, especially at the place where the confession and forgiveness of sins take place.<sup>162</sup> He clarifies it in more detail in his other book, *The Wounded Healer*.<sup>163</sup> Therefore, Christian community is a community of hope based on faith. Jesus presented hope based on God's promise to forgive all people. This hope becomes solid and evident in the community of those who believe in God's forgiving power to the world.

### ***Community of the Eucharist***

The characteristics of a Christian community are deeply related to the Eucharist. The word *eucharist* means gratitude.<sup>164</sup> The eucharist belongs to the center of the communal life of peacemakers. Thus, the community of peacemaking is a Eucharistic community. According to Nouwen, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, humans only express a little gratitude using a part of what they have by an offering, but God accepts it and transforms it into the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, we come to realize that life is simply a gift to be grateful for. This is because the love of God revealed through Christ in the Eucharist is intensively revealed, and the meaning of human life is reestablished. In this process, infinite gratitude springs up. Indeed, helping the poor is just a response to

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<sup>162</sup> "The church is always born out of the broken heart from which water and blood flow"; Nouwen, "Our Story, Our Wisdom," *The Road to Peace*, 180.

<sup>163</sup> "A Christian community is therefore a healing community, not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision. Mutual confession then becomes a mutual deepening of hope, and shared weakness becomes a reminder to one and all of the coming strength"; Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 100.

<sup>164</sup> "Wherever peacemakers speak and act, their words and actions announce the good grace (*eu* = good, *chairs* = grace) of God"; Nouwen, *Peacework*, 118.

our gratitude for the unconditional love—the first love—that we have received from God.<sup>165</sup>

### **Evaluation of Nouwen's Spirituality**

Peace cannot be achieved only within a purely human realm. To attain peace, one must follow God's method, not human calculations and methods. This fact is based on Nouwen's reflection that human existential situations cannot be free from wounds and needs. Human conditions, incapable of being free from wounds and desires, form the structure of a vicious cycle that is inevitable in history. It is consistent with the church's traditional doctrine of original sin. There are no fundamental measures to get out of this situation with human strength alone. Since peace essentially belongs to God, Nouwen tries a new approach.

First, he suggests prayer. Through prayer, human beings can escape from the false self-obsessed with others' recognition, and realize themselves as the beloved children of God, and walk a path free from the structure of temporal wounds and desires. Through prayer, human beings are freed from the fears of the world's problems, reflect on themselves, and find solutions in their free state. Through prayer, human beings can confront themselves and be humble before God, freeing themselves from the illusion of controlling everything.

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<sup>165</sup> Notice Nouwen's description of the Eucharist. "The breaking of the bread is the celebration, the making present, of Christ's story as well as our own. In the taking, blessing, breaking, and giving of the bread, the mystery of Christ's life is expressed in the most succinct way... When we eat bread and drink wine together in memory of Christ, we become intimately related to his own compassionate life. In fact, we *become* his life and are thus enabled to re-present his life in our time and place. Our compassion becomes a manifestation of God's compassion lived out through all times and in all places. The breaking of the bread connects our broken lives with God's life in Christ and transforms our brokenness into a brokenness that no longer leads to fragmentation but to community and love. Wounds that are the beginning of the process of decay must remain hidden, but wounds that have become gateways to new life can be celebrated as new signs of hope. Precisely for this reason, compassion, suffering together, can be celebrated in communal prayer"; Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 112-15.

Second, the true Christian identity found in prayer is revealed in the form of resisting injustice. The reason that peace is so strongly demanded in our time is that it is fundamentally linked to the problem of human salvation. Salvation from all sins that originated from original sin is possible only by Christ. Nouwen begins with the solidarity of sin and proceeds to the solidarity of humankind. He strongly urges Christians to be apostles of peace. Here, the importance of community comes into play. A Christian community should be a place where the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed. In that community, the presence of Christ as forgiving love must be revealed. Such a community is a eucharistic community.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked, what is the church today? Then I wondered who the priest of our era was. Now, through Nouwen's spirituality, I have found an answer to the form of priesthood that should be embodied in our time, especially in Korean society. A priest must be a thorough follower of Christ. Priests of the future will be "mystics" and "revolutionaries." Priests as mystics will reveal God's transcendence. They will not get stained from the world because they pursue a transcendent life. Priests as revolutionaries will reveal God's presence in our world. They will be committed to peace by practicing solidarity with the poor. However, they should never forget that these two—the contemplative life and practice to peace—are the cross' horizontal and vertical axes that support each other.

## CONCLUSION

Various titles appear in front of Henri J. M. Nouwen's name—priest, theologian, professor, mystic, writer, artist, poet, counselor, etc.; but his name is not well known to Korean readers. He was both a mystic and an activist at the same time. He was deeply concerned with social justice and did not hesitate to take concrete action in the journey towards peace. He was a praying man and acting man, and he was a man who loved to be alone but sought solidarity. He was a wounded healer who had pursued the path to the heart all his life, but he was more than that. He was a prophet of our time. He was deeply concerned with personal spirituality and social justice. He was a serene but intense revolutionary who devoted his life to the direction in which this era should go: Peacework.

Many of his spiritual writings came from the wounds he had suffered within himself. He used to say that the most important factor in a person's life is his or her wounds, and that is why the most important thing in understanding a person is to understand that person's wounds. From his inner wounds, he found the path from loneliness to solitude, practiced a life of hospitality even to his enemies, and proceeded to restlessly seeking for God.<sup>166</sup> His whole life was the contemplative life for God, which made him one of the greatest mystics ever given to humankind in the twentieth century along with Thomas Merton and Mother Teresa. As a spiritual writer, his writings were influenced not only by the Catholic Church where he was born and raised but also by Protestants and other religions. His spirituality is rooted in a universal spirituality that anyone can relate to even though he is a thorough Catholic priest.

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<sup>166</sup> He observed that "spiritual life is a reaching out to our innermost self, to our fellow human beings and to our God." Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 14.

Through his spirituality, I learned that Christian faith has the power to transform society. Christianity has a deep connection with social transformation. The church itself moves in tension between already and not yet toward the final destination of the kingdom of God. However, the church without social participation is a non-Christian church. Members of the church are also members of the state and society. Therefore, the crisis in the world that surrounds us is also a crisis for Christians. One of the most valuable contributions that Christianity can make to the world is to awaken the attitude of bearing one's cross without avoiding this crisis. Christianity is basically not a system of doctrinal documents, but a *methodos*, a road, that tells the world the direction to go.

In the introduction, we looked at various worrisome phenomena occurring in modern Korean society and the churches and ministers who have lost their direction. Henri Nouwen, a contemporary mystic and diocesan priest, points the church in the right direction and suggests the role of the pastor in Korean society on the journey towards peace. The faith of Christians is aimed at the salvation of human beings in a holistic sense. It means that the faith in Christ cannot be confined to a realm that is purely religious and mystical. Instead, faith reinterprets and engages in all areas of human life in terms of faith. In other words, it requires explicit action to change the group, community, society, and country to which they own belongs. Such an action should be a journey towards peace, especially in Korean society.

Therefore, I found the answer in Nouwen that a priest should be both a mystic and a revolutionary at the same time. Priests as mystics constantly contemplate God. Their contemplation and prayer lead to an explicit rejection of all death and a clear acceptance of all lives, representing the revolutionary aspect of a priest. In other words, priests are to

willingly resists injustice, proceed with the community, and find the right path toward peace in prayer.

I want to present the spirituality and direction of Korean priests' duties by organizing the knowledge gained through Nouwen's spirituality into six categories. First, the Korean church should further strengthen the awareness that we are all connected—awareness of solidarity—while emphasizing the collective view of the salvation of the Christian faith. To this end, the Korean church needs to deeply internalize solidarity as part of its identity as a community of repentant sinners and forgiven sinners. When the church finds a situation of social injustice, it must engage with the world in a humble and collective struggle against sin. Second, Christians must deeply internalize the rejection of all sins. In other words, from the perspective of spiritual struggle, it is essential to our faith to face social injustice and make the world a better place. Third, the Korean church must provide a religious interpretation of social issues and services that can enhance people's spiritual insight and discernment so that believers themselves can interpret social phenomena based on the teachings of the magisterium. One of the influential powers of faith is seeing through the essential meaning behind social phenomena. Fourth, the Korean church should further emphasize and develop the mystical elements of faith. According to Nouwen, the mystical and revolutionary paths are essentially inseparable and can only be complete with each other. Fifth, above all, the church should become an eschatological community full of life that can perceive the new world within itself. A community of faith can experience the presence of Christ and envision a new world. Lastly, the Korean church should participate more profoundly in the lives of the poor. It means that we should learn from the poor first and become more involved in their lives.

In conclusion, the church must be reborn as an authentic Christian community with deep personal relationships. Also, the church should focus all of its strength on peacemaking that comes from Christ's command. In so doing, the church itself will be broken, trampled, and empty so that the world people will experience the presence of Christ and find true humanity. That is the way the church regains its identity in our time. This research allowed me to glimpse an enormous legacy of Nouwen's faith and rediscover the great values it holds for us today. The response to the demands of this age will lead the world to a revolution of peace by overcoming despair with the rediscovered vision of the faith in Christ and a new community.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

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