

SPIRITUAL BOOK NEWS

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FEATURED SELECTION

March 2008 Selection

A RESTLESS SOUL

Meditations from the Road

Henri J.M. Nouwen

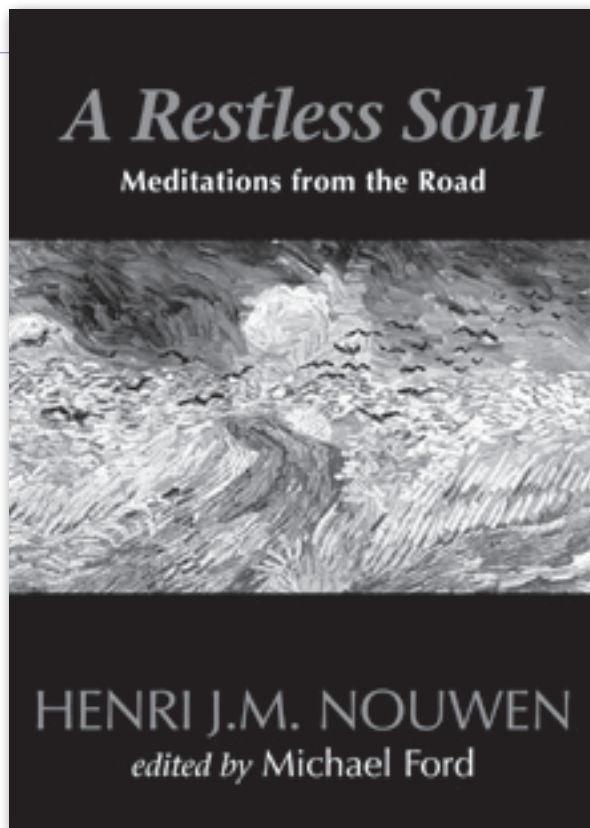
Edited by Michael Ford

Few modern writers have equaled Nouwen's gift for anchoring deep Christian truths within the lived experience of daily life.

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM

John A. O'Brien Professor of Theology
The University of Notre Dame

These engaging selections gathered from Henri Nouwen's travel writings offer new insights into the restless soul of a deeply spiritual man. Whether Nouwen was describing the Return of the Prodigal Son painting in St. Petersburg, mingling with senators in Washington, or meeting cocaine users in a South American prison, each situation tells a revealing story. Editor Michael Ford creates a journey from actual places Nouwen visited from Russia to Peru via Europe, Canada, and the United States that depicts Nouwen's world as one of striking contrasts—one minute rubbing shoulders with the affluent, the next walking through lands of poverty. At each destination, we discover a man whose endless search for intimacy and beauty resonates deeply with our own.



ISBN: 9781594711633 / 160 pages / \$11.95

APRIL 2008 SELECTION

AT SEA WITH GOD

A Spiritual Guidebook to the Heart and Soul

Margaret Silf

One of the most accessible and inviting Christian spiritual writers today.

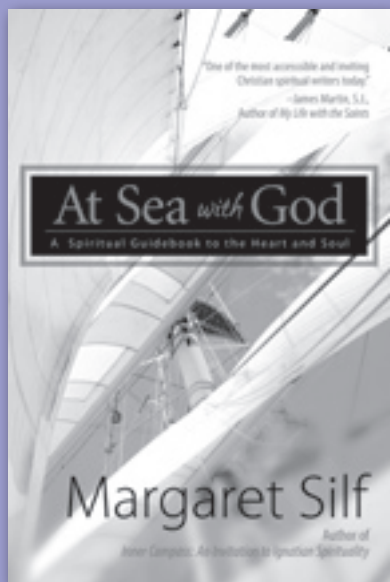
JAMES MARTIN, S.J.

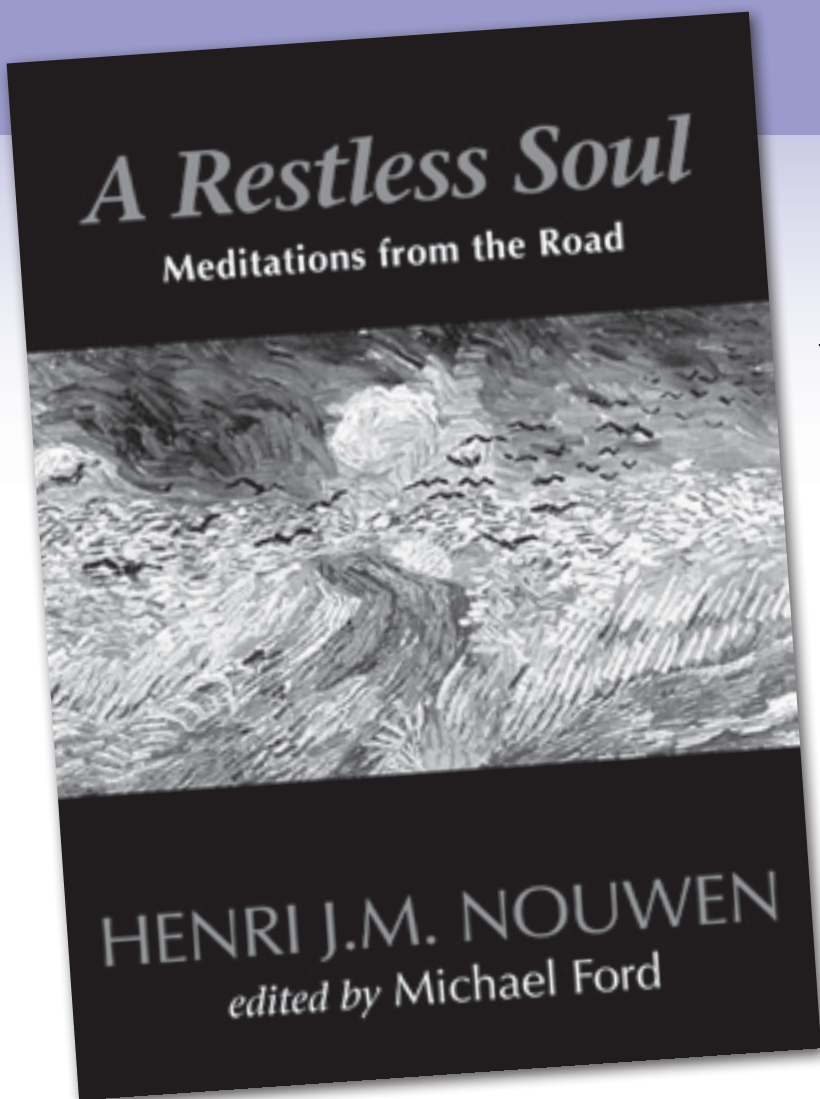
Author of *My Life with the Saints*

The art of sailing life's waters is explored with this delightful self-guided retreat. Silf uses seven aspects of sailing to explore the spiritual life: the boat, the cargo, setting sail, navigating uncharted waters, the perils of the deep, being adrift, and dropping anchor. Her creative use of scripture, reflection questions, journal starters, and real-life seafaring wisdom enables readers to reflect on their experience with fresh insight. This gentle spiritual guidebook unites ancient spiritual practices with contemporary experience in a compassionate, enlightening manner that Christians of all faiths will appreciate.

ISBN: 9781933495118 / 192 pages / \$15.95

We'd like to apologize for our error in the previous issue. *A Restless Soul* is the March selection, and *At Sea With God* is the April selection.





A RESTLESS SOUL

Meditations for the Road

Henri J. M. Nouwen
Edited by Michael Ford

After the long, tiring night on the train, I arrived at “the little convent” of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception at 7:30 a.m. I slept, went to the grotto where Mary appeared to Bernadette, celebrated the Eucharist of the Epiphany in the basilica and prayed. Why am I here? To give my life to Jesus. To make Jesus the very centre of my existence.

HENRI J.M. NOUWEN
 Lourdes, France

Life is a journey. We make discoveries, learn about the world around us, learn about ourselves, and learn about God. Along the way we encounter people who enlighten us. Life is a journey, but it is a relational one. We are relational beings as we journey, for even when we seek a solitary path we may find that others join us on our path for a time. Henri Nouwen traveled extensively, often alone, and yet we find in this collection of meditations while traveling that he was greatly impacted by the stories of and encounters with those he met. Michael Ford collects and arranges these keen reflections through which we acquire a sense of Nouwen's spirituality and where he is going.

In the journey he seeks rest—a paradoxical notion. He remains throughout rooted in prayer and that restless search for God. Nouwen refers to hesychastic prayer (see later section in this guide). An obsolete meaning of the adjective hesychastic is “soothing or calming.” This is what Nouwen seems to be seeking, a calming of his restless soul.

With Nouwen, we journey inward. We experience the tension he feels between the inner and the outer. Going out and seeking within are abundant throughout this collection of essays. He is able to hold these two seemingly opposite notions in a creative tension that brings revelations and life rather than paralysis. Look for other paradoxes that manifest as creative tensions in this restless soul.

All of this is rooted in story, and we see the importance of story in his spiritual growth and journey—concrete events and stories. Spirituality for Nouwen is not an abstract, solitary, independent act of piety. It is expressed in community, in this world. He encounters Jesus in these people throughout his journeys, and it is the encounters with Christ we read in his stories that reveal powerfully who God truly is. Over the course of the book, and a life, we can put together as a patchwork quilt an image of God incarnate.

This spirituality comes out particularly in everyday things—out of the natural world, encounters with people, and celebrating moments in life. He travels the world and yet through his eyes we discover that the exotic is not necessary to find deep, moving experiences.

Read carefully for lessons to apply to our own lives and for compelling stories, like Christmas in San Diego. His lesson learned here is that we must be centered on the spiritual life in order to be fully in this world. The last part of the journey is possibly the most powerful and the most difficult, in that it deals with forgiveness and making the city of God a reality amidst the poverty of South America. In their small ways the poor have done it large. They show to the rest of us in the so-called developed world the way to live like Christ.

READER'S GROUP GUIDE

HESYCHASM

Greek ἡσυχασμός *hesychasmos*,

From ἡσυχία *hesychia*, “stillness, rest, quiet, silence”

Hesychasm is an eremitic tradition of prayer in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and some other Eastern Churches of the Byzantine Rite. Based on Christ's injunction in the Gospel of Matthew to “go into your closet to pray,” hesychasm in

tradition has been the process of retiring inward by ceasing to register the senses, in order to achieve an experiential knowledge of God through which the entire person is enlightened and sanctified.

Wikipedia contributors, "Hesychasm," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hesychasm&oldid=186683785> (accessed February 6, 2008).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Each section is a large sampling. Find selections within each section that speak to you for your book group discussion or journaling.
- Where is life's journey taking you? Where has life's journey taken you? Reflect on your geographical journey, your emotional journey, and your spiritual journey.
- In the early section of the book we see Nouwen encountering people wherever he goes and being exhausted by it in a fruitful way. What happens when you leave the comfort of your home and allow yourself to be exhausted by encountering others? What happens when you encounter the other? What happens when you venture outside of your own culture?
- What stories have moved me on my journey?
- He writes, “Most of the labels by which we pigeonhole people are ways to cope with our own anxieties and insecurities.” How do we judge people and what does that say about ourselves? What insecurities are lurking beneath the surface for me? What makes for the value of each person?
- Why do you think the editor chose this particular arrangement of travel diaries? What difference would a chronological arrangement have made to the feel of the book?
- What does solidarity mean to you and how have you come to practice solidarity with the least of these?
- Recall his encounter with Henry Kissinger. In the midst of power he had to stay focused on his spiritual center, that place where he was centered. Explore this with your group. Can a spirituality grounded in Christ keep power from running amok?
- A litany of forgiveness...what would your litany look like? Who do we need to ask for forgiveness, and for what trespasses?
- In “South America” we read of a powerful moment of international forgiveness on the border of Jalapa, Nicaragua. Discuss what consequences this has for us on the levels of nation, Church, and individual.
- We see several stories in which he struggles with the reality of the chasm between the rich and the poor, the very idea of such radically different worlds. How does one navigate these two worlds? What helps us see others through God's eyes?
- What story from his life touched you the most this reading? What part of you did it touch?
- What does it all mean? Nouwen asks that question again and again. How do you answer (or add to) that question now? How has your response evolved?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Henri Nouwen began his life journey in Holland in 1932. He was ordained a priest in 1957 and began studies in psychology. His journey took him to the United States, where he taught at the University of Notre Dame and Yale and Harvard Divinity

schools. After living with the Trappist monks in the Abbey of Genesee and the poor in Peru, he came to stay at the L'Arche Daybreak community near Toronto, Canada. Although he died September 21, 1996 while traveling to his native Holland, he is buried in Ontario, Canada.

ABOUT THE EDITOR



Michael Ford, Ph.D., is a writer and broadcaster who studied theology at The University of Bristol in England. He is the editor of *Eternal Seasons: A Liturgical Journey with Henri J. M. Nouwen* (Sorin, 2004) and the author of several books

including the award-winning *Wounded Prophet: A Portrait of Henri J. M. Nouwen* (Doubleday, 1999) and *Song of the Nightingale: A Modern Spiritual Canticle* (Paulist Press, 2005).

WEBSITES OF INTEREST



Henri Nouwen Society www.henrinouwen.org/home/home/

Visitors can subscribe to a daily meditation via e-mail, become a friend of the society, learn about his life and books, view a schedule of Nouwen related events, and more. This extensive website contains a wealth of resources. You can even find an online spiritual director.



L'Arche International www.larche.org

From 1986 until his death in 1996, Henri Nouwen taught and ministered to physically and mentally challenged men and women as a member of the L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto, Canada.

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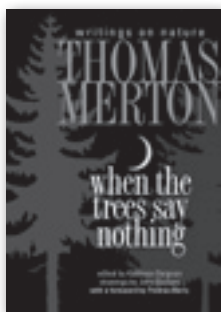
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When the Trees Say Nothing

Writings on Nature

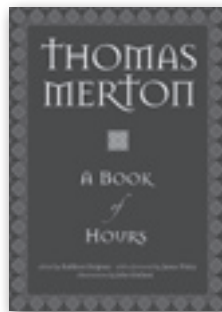
Thomas Merton

Edited by Kathleen Deignan

The collection of Merton's writings on nature serves as a primer on eco-spirituality, revealing Merton's approach to ecology as a spiritual issue that exposes the degree of

human alienation from the sacredness of the planet. "This splendid volume by Kathleen Deignan evokes the sense of the sacred . . . a handsome book for all seasons."—**Brother Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O.**, General Editor, *The Journals of Thomas Merton*

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