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The reality of celibate life: Reflections from Henri Nouwen

A.W. Richard Sipe | Oct. 1, 2010

Henri Nouwen (Taken from the cover of Jurjen J Beumer's book *Henri Nouwen: A Restless Seeking for God*.)

Recently I was in the process of cleaning out some files and ran across a July 1991 letter from Henri Nouwen. He and I had spent a year together during the mid 1960s in Topeka, Kansas at the Menninger Foundation?s training programs for clergy counselors. We had kept in casual contact afterward. He moved on to professorships at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard and traveled the troubled world while I settled into clinical practice, married life, and part time work at a Catholic seminary, college, and medical school in Baltimore.

By the time Henri wrote this letter he had already become a huge spiritual resource through his writings, retreats, lectures, teaching, and personal contacts. Most of his 40 books had been published. In contrast I had just recently (in 1990) published my first book, *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*.

...

During our last days together Henri shared the spiritual-emotional crisis that descended upon him a year and a half before. The content -- or rather the empty abyss -- of his depression was clear: the loneliness of celibacy.

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