

## Books depict leaders through their own words and those of followers

Wayne A. Holst | Jan. 29, 2009

### BELOVED: HENRI NOUWEN IN CONVERSATION

By Henri J.M. Nouwen with Philip Roderick

Wm. B. Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2007), 52 pp. plus CD \$20

The spiritual lives and teachings of Father Henri Nouwen and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta -- both of whom died more than a decade ago -- continue to inspire and produce a healthy literary legacy.

*Beloved: Henri Nouwen in Conversation* with the Rev. Philip Roderick and *What Mother Teresa Taught Me* by Maryanne Raphael weave together Catholic spiritual values with a broad ecumenical appeal. Both Nouwen and Mother Teresa are popular contemporary mentors of the Christian faith.

Nouwen and Mother Teresa were compassionate contemplatives who struggled constantly to creatively link "doing" and "being" into their spiritual vocations.

"Beloved" is the text of an interview that Rev. Roderick -- an Anglican priest and retreat master based in Oxfordshire, England -- conducted with Nouwen in 1992. It appears now in book and CD format, providing the options of reflective reading and listening.

The book conveys Nouwen's views on loneliness, busyness and living in the moment. Frequently throughout the interview he reminds us that we are God's beloved and that wisdom is the most important truth of our lives.

Nouwen, the author of more than 40 books on spirituality, reminds readers that instead of viewing personal problems like boredom as enemies they can be embraced as friends. This can unmask illusions hidden beneath the surface of our conscious awareness.

Rather than repressing or denying issues that are covered up by hyperactivity we can begin to confront things we really should be facing.

Both compassion and contemplation are important. "I'm very convinced of the significance of helping people, of doing things," says Nouwen. "But I want to say that if our activity comes from our own insecurity about who we are then it might not serve the kingdom (of God)."

Quickly our exertion can become the road to burnout. Burnout is essentially activity without faith as it refuses to be a free gift. Time for intimacy with God is needed to help us restore a balance between compassion and contemplation.

### WHAT MOTHER TERESA TAUGHT ME

By Maryanne Raphael

St. Anthony Messenger Press (Cincinnati, 2007), 206 pp. \$15.95

Raphael is a freelance writer who knew Mother Teresa from working beside her and her Missionaries of Charity

for many years in various parts of the world.

Her book presents Mother Teresa's life story and describes what the author has learned from her.

Among many currently available biographies, this is written in clear, accessible language and contains short thoughtful chapters that focus on significant aspects of Mother Teresa's life and teachings.

We learn of her family background; her vocational promptings to serve as a missionary teacher with the Loreto Sisters; the move to India; and her special call to minister among the poorest of the poor as a nun living outside the convent system.

The Missionaries of Charity emerge from humble beginnings and continue their basic commitments to help people die with dignity.

Mother Teresa's sisters, brothers, priests and lay co-workers have determined, after her death, to maintain their vocation to serve the poor. There are more than 4,500 nuns in 585 houses in 120 countries to perpetuate her work.

At the speed the Missionaries of Charity order is growing, says Raphael, the world can expect it to survive.

"While I began my book for young adults," says the author, "I decided to write it for people of all ages since Mother's spirit touches us all."

Raphael is often asked how working with Mother Teresa changed her life. "I went from a lukewarm cradle Catholic to a daily communicant with a radical faith in God. ... We need to trust God and know that he will see to all our needs."

The author writes with a respect for and an intimacy with her subject that fully engages the reader and adds a personal identification that is missed in other biographies.

Nouwen and Mother Teresa were mystics who learned to combine compassion and contemplation in exemplary ways and their witness proves ever more inspirational with time.

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