MS 3P1420 SYLLABUS
The Pastoral Theology of Henri Nouwen Winter 2026

McMaster Divinity College
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Winter Term 2026
Asynchronous Online Course

Specializations: PS, CC

Biography:
Dr. Phil Zylla is *Professor of Pastoral Theolog*y at McMaster Divinity College. His research interests include pastoral theology, congregational studies, theology of suffering, preaching, and Christian spirituality. His current book project, *Spiritual Formation of the Congregation* seeks to develop a communal approach to the spiritual formation of a Christian community. He lives in Ancaster with his wife Melodie.

Course Description:
Henri Nouwen published over 40 books and is notably one of the most important and widely read spiritual writers in recent years in North America. He taught at Notre Dame, Yale Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School but spent the last decade of his life as the pastor of the *Daybreak Community* of *L'Arche* in Toronto. Nouwen was influenced by early pioneers in pastoral theology including Anton Boisen and Seward Hiltner. These roots allowed him to integrate spiritual ideas with their counterparts in pastoral psychology and psychology of religion. He had extensive training in the field of pastoral theology though little is written on his explicit methods of exploring pastoral theological themes. This course seeks to mine the writings of Henri Nouwen for his approach to pastoral theological exploration as it pertains to contemporary issues in the field.

Course Objectives:
Knowing
1. To become familiar with the root ideas and integrative pastoral theology of Henri Nouwen's works.
2. To explore the pastoral theological themes introduced by Henri Nouwen's corpus.
3. To deepen resources for the expansion of pastoral theology in the 21st century.

Being
1. To be shaped in the inner person through spiritual integration of course materials.
2. To cultivate a personal sense of mission and calling to the work of integrative pastoral theology.
3. To experience the themes and ideas expressed by Nouwen through spiritual practices.

Doing
1. To evaluate and use methods developed in the pastoral theology of Henri Nouwen.
2. To develop new themes in pastoral theology that can inform contemporary Christian ministry.

Required Course Textbooks:

Higgins, Michael W. and Kevin Burns *Genius Born of Anguish: The Life and Legacy of Henri Nouwen*. New York: Paulist Press, 2012.

Books by Henri J. M. Nouwen:

_____. *Can You Drink the Cup? Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1996.*

_____. *Here and Now: Living with the Spirit. New York: Crossroad, 1994.*

_____. *Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom. New York: Doubleday, 1996.*

_____. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership. New York: Crossroad, 1989.*

_____. *Intimacy: Pastoral Psychological Essays. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1969.*

_____. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life. New York: Doubleday, 1975.*

_____. *Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journal. New York: Doubleday, 1988, 1990.*

_____. *Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry. New York: Seabury, 1981.*

_____. *Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society. New York: Doubleday, 1972.*

Required Video: rent or purchase online. *Journey Of The Heart: Henri Nouwen https://vimeo.com/ondemand/journeyhearthenrin*

Recommended Supplemental Texts:
Nouwen, Henri. *A Spirituality of Caregiving*. ed. John S. Mogabgab, Nashville: Upper Room, 2011.

_____. *Following Jesus: Finding Our Way Home in an Age of Anxiety. ed. Gabrielle Earnshaw. New York: Convergent Books, 2019.*

Nouwen, Henri with Donald P. McNeill and Douglas A. Morrison. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1982.

Mode of Delivery:
Asynchronous learning occurs through online channels without real-time interaction. This course is delivered as an asynchronous online course. Each week there will be asynchronous module (we will not meet at a specific time, but there will be an online activity and instruction to participate at some point during the week of that module). Course participants in professional degrees or certificates should expect to commit 4-5 hours/week on the course.

Course Reading Schedule:
Each module has specific books that are part of Nouwen's corpus. These are designated at the beginning of each module description. If possible, students should try to acquire the books ahead of time (or find them in an online library) in order to have these materials at hand going through the course module.
n.b. **Works in brackets [-----] are not required but are supplemental readings on the topic for these weeks.**

Module 1 Week of January 5-11, 2026
Course Introduction and Themes

Activities for this module:

a. View online primer lecture.
b. Prepare: an introduction of yourself that includes the following:

i. basic information of who you are: family, current position, degree program and year
ii. exposure you have had to Henri Nouwen's thought and any comments on why you chose this course
iii. one interesting thing about yourself (disclosure and authenticity are celebrated in this course) *Post to group discussion thread provided.

Optional Synchronous Getting Acquainted session: While this course is asynchronous, it is valuable to have opportunity (if possible) to meet together to get acquainted. Dr. Zylla will be hosting a live, ***synchronous Zoom session on Wednesday, January 7th, 2026 @ 3 p.m. EST***. See A2L module for details.

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Module 2 Week of January 12-18, 2026
Introduction to Henri Nouwen's Pastoral Theology
Module Course Reading: *Intimacy,* [*Lifesigns*; *Our Greatest Gift*]

Activities for this Module:

a. View online primer lecture
b. Identify key areas of the early thought of Henri Nouwen and participate in an online discussion thread remarking about aspects of his early thought that you notice in the readings

Module 3 Week of January 19-25, 2026
The Use of the Bible in Henri Nouwen's Pastoral Theology
Module Course Reading: *In the Name of Jesus, [With Burning Hearts]*

Activities for this Module:

a. View online primer lecture
b. Participate in posted discussion thread for module.

Module 4 Week of January 26- February 1, 2026
Spiritual Theology and Pastoral Theology – Synergies and Conflicts
Module Course Reading: *Reaching Out,* [*Here and Now*]

Activities for this Module:

a. View online primer lecture; view *The Life of Henri Nouwen* video.

b. Participate in posted discussion thread for module.

The Life of Henri Nouwen. Video: *Journey of the Heart: The Life of Henri Nouwen https://vimeo.com/ondemand/journeyhearthenrin*

Module Course Reading: [O'Laughlin, Michael. *Henri Nouwen: His Life and Vision*].

Module 5 Week of February 2-8, 2026

The Emotional Life and the Pastoral Theology of Henri Nouwen

Module Course Reading: *The Inner Voice of Love*; *The Wounded Healer*.

Activities for this Module:

a. View online primer lecture.
b. Participate in posted discussion thread for module.

Module 6 Week of February 9-15, 2026

The Catholic Roots of Henri Nouwen's Pastoral Theology

Module Course Reading: *Can You Drink the Cup?*

Activities for this Module:

a. View online primer lecture.
b. Participate in posted discussion thread for module.

Reading Week Week of February 16-22, 2026

Module 7 Week of February 23-March 1, 2026

The Integrative Nature of the Spiritual Life in Nouwen's Pastoral Theology

Module Course Reading: *The Way of the Heart*; *Here and Now*.

Activities for this Module:

a. View online primer lecture
b. Participate in posted discussion thread for module

Module 8 Week of March 2-8, 2026

The Use of Autobiography and Journaling in Pastoral Theology

Module Course Reading: *The Road to Daybreak*

Activities for this Module:

a. View online primer lecture
b. Participate in posted discussion thread for module

Module 9 Week of March 9-15, 2026

Spiritual Practices and Henri Nouwen's Pastoral Theology

Module Course Reading: *Here and Now*.

Activities for this Module:

a. View online primer lecture
b. Participate in posted discussion thread for module

Module 10 Week of March 16-22, 2026

. ***First Round Presentations: Core Themes in Henri Nouwen's Pastoral Theology***

Activities for this Module:

a. Post PowerPoint or video presentation for group engagement (March 16th).
b. Participate in discussion thread on posted class presentations.

Module 11 Week of March 23-29, 2026

Second Round Presentations: Core Themes in Henri Nouwen's Pastoral Theology

Activities for this Module:

a. Post PowerPoint or video presentation for group engagement (March 23rd).
b. Participate in discussion thread on posted class presentations

Module 12 Week of March 30-April 5, 2026 Holy Week

Guided Personal Spiritual Retreat

A key event of the course will be a guided personal spiritual retreat for a 6 hour period during this week (it can be a block of time or one hour/day for 6 days of Holy Week). The participants of the course will use this time to identify an area of discernment, prayer, or gratitude to focus on. The instructor will provide the overall structure and plan for the guided retreat. See online module for details

Final Module Week of April 6-10, 2026

Reflections and Meditations

The class will come together in an a time of reflection and meditation. You can contribute a short prayer, poem or a brief spiritual reflection. **The session will be live Synchronous for those who would like (or are able) to participate in that way on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 @ 3 p.m. EST.** If you are not able to join synchronously, please submit your creative contribution by video, powerpoint, or MS Word document to dropbox. The session will be recorded for viewing by all.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Professional Student Assignments

Assignment 1 and 2:

Two annotated book reviews on Nouwen's Pastoral Theology - selected works of Henri Nouwen Sign up online for selections.

15% each X 2: **30%**
1st Annotated Book Review Due: January 29, 2026
2nd Annotated Book Review Due: February 26, 2026

Select from any of Nouwen's books beyond the course textbooks. The focus of this annotation should be to open up categories of pastoral theological import revealed in the text. The assignment should include the following information:

a. Can you identify key pastoral theological insight at the focal center of this book?
b. Summary of key ideas, primary themes and foci of the book.
c. When was it written and in what context?
d. How are the ideas of this book relevant to contemporary pastoral ministry?
e. How did you benefit from reading this book?

Assignment 3:
Write **a spiritual retreat** based on Nouwen's works.
You can draw from course textbooks or other books by Nouwen, but the retreat should draw from at least five (5) volumes of Nouwen's corpus.

a. Outline a one day spiritual retreat that is informed by Nouwen's writings.
b. Plan activities including: workshop sessions, spiritual exercises, worship, prayer, etc
c. Outline the key aims of the spiritual retreat.
d. Identify a key audience for the spiritual retreat.
e. Write spiritual exercise for each session.

15%

Due: March 12, 2026

Assignment 4:
Weekly Online Discussion Thread - class readings
Participate in weekly discussion threads

15% weekly as assigned

This course is a collaborative research course on the pastoral theological insights of Henri Nouwen. In order to generate the most critical advancement of this goal it is imperative that participants READ all of the required texts for each module and review carefully the modular primer lecture. Grading for the weekly discussion threads will be based on these criteria:

a. Careful reading of modular textbook
b. Insight from interaction with primer lecture and readings
c. Pastoral theological imagination

Assignment 5 and 6:
Essay and Course Presentation on ***Core Themes in the Writings of Henri Nouwen***
Part A: powerpoint outline (10-15 slides); Part B: Essay 13-15 pages
Use at least 5 Nouwen volumes (in addition to the course textbooks) and five other sources (not Nouwen). This assignment is meant to be developed in two parts:

Course Presentation (15%) Due: March 16, 2026 or March 23, 2026 **15%**
The first part will be an outline and presentation of key themes to course participants. A sign up list will be made available for a course presentation to peers on either Monday, March 16th or Monday, March 23rd. Review posting information on Avenue to Learn.

Essay (25%) Due: April 8, 2026 **25%**
Integrating feedback from the course participants, the presentation will be polished into a final essay of 13-15 pages (double-spaced). The essay should focus on a key pastoral theological insight(s) of Henri Nouwen based on a critical reading of his work. The criteria for the essay evaluation include:

a. Pastoral theological imagination

b. Key supporting information from Nouwen primary sources
c. Supporting arguments using scholarly literature
d. Ministry application
e. Theological reflection and biblical analysis of core themes
f. Form and Style (careful application of the MDC Style Guide will be rewarded)

Late Papers: Late assignments will be docked 1% each late day. (Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances such as extended illness, etc.)

Spacing and Style guide: All assignments are to be double-spaced and follow the McMaster Divinity College Style guide.

Submission: All assignments are due by the end of day (MS Word or PDF) (11:59 p.m.)

MS 5P 1390 DPT Syllabus Supplement:

DPT students who wish to take this course for five-unit credit must contact the professor to obtain the DPT syllabus supplement. This supplement involves additional reading requirements and assignments appropriate to the doctoral level study of the subject. Contact Professor: zyllap@mcmaster.ca requesting the syllabus supplement.

Contacting the Professor: Dr. Phil C. Zylla
E-mail: zyllap@mcmaster.ca
Consultation with Professor: Zoom or in person by appointment. Contact me directly by email: zyllap@mcmaster.ca

***College Style for Submission of Written Work*:**

All written work—unless informed otherwise by the professor—is to be submitted in accordance with the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guide for Essays and Theses*, available on the McMaster Divinity College web-site.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and

then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Policy on Illness

Every effort should be made to attend and participate in every class. If a participant is ill on the day of class (especially a presentation day), she/he should make arrangements with the course GA to post their presentation online for review. All sessions of the course are recorded and posted on A2L for review. If a class has been missed, it is required that the student review the posted material from that week. If the professor is ill, the course GA or a suitable colleague will conduct activities for the session; presentations will continue uninterrupted.

Inclement Weather Policy

While there may be closures on campus for inclement weather, this does not directly impact the asynchronous courses. The course will meet regardless of the weather conditions. In the rare case of a power outage that prevents participants from joining the course, presenters will be rescheduled. If the faculty member's power is also out, the course lecture will be posted in a video format and is required viewing for all course participants.

Bookstore

All required textbooks for this class are available from the *Hurlburt Family Bookstore* located beside the entrance to the *Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel* of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. *The Hurlburt Family Bookstore* also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Disclaimer: This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up until the first day of class.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY
The Pastoral Theology of Henri Nouwen

Books by Henri J. M. Nouwen

_____. *A Cry for Mercy: Prayers from the Genesee*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981.

_____. *A Letter of Consolation*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982.

_____. *A Sorrow Shared: A Combined Edition of the Nouwen Classics In Memoriam and A Letter of Consolation*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 2010.

_____. *A Spirituality of Caregiving*. ed. John S. Mgoabgah. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2011.

_____. *A Spirituality of Fundraising*. ed. John S. Mogabgah. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2011.

_____. *A Spirituality of Living*. ed. John S. Mogabgah. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2011.

_____. *Adam: God's Beloved*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997.

_____. *Advent and Christmas: Wisdom from Henri J.M. Nouwen*. Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 2004.

_____. *Aging*. with Walter J. Gaffney. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974.

_____. *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 1987.

_____. *Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Death and Life*. New York: Crossroad, 1990.

_____. *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*. San Francisco: Harper, 1997.

_____. *Can You Drink the Cup?* Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 1996.

_____. *Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, and Contemplation*. Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1979.

_____. *Community*. ed. Stephen Lazarus. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021.

_____. *Compassion, a Reflection on the Christian Life*. With Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982.

_____. *Creative Ministry*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971.

_____. *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*. New York: HarperOne, 2013.

_____. *Encounters with Merton: Spiritual Reflections*. New York: Crossroad, 2004.

_____. *Finding Our Sacred Center: A Journey to Inner Peace*. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2011.

_____. *Gracias!: A Latin American Journal.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983.

_____. *Heart Speaks to Heart: Three Prayers to Jesus*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 1989.

_____. *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*. New York: Crossroad, 1994.

_____. *Home Tonight: Further Reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son*. With Sue Mosteller. New York: Doubleday, 2009.

_____. *In Memoriam*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 1980.
_____. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York: Crossroad, 1989.
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_____. *Jesus & Mary: Finding Our Sacred Center*. Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1993.
_____. *Letters to Marc about Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.
_____. *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. New York: Crossroad, 1992.
_____. *Lifesigns: Intimacy, Fecundity, and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective*. Garden City. N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986.
_____. *Love in a Fearful Land: A Guatemalan Story*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 1985.
_____. *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
_____. *Ministry and Spirituality*. New York: Continuum, 1996.
_____. *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*. San Francisco: Harper, 1994.
_____. *Our Second Birth: Christian Reflections on Death and New Life*. New York: Crossroad, 2006.
_____. *Out of Solitude; Three Meditations on the Christian Life,*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 1974.
_____. *Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005.
_____. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975.
_____. *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. New York, Crossroad, 1998.
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_____. *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.
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_____. *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

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Edited Books of Nouwen's Writings

Durback, Robert. *Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader*. Bantam Books, 1989.

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Ford, Michael, ed. *Eternal Seasons: A Liturgical Journey*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003.

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Greer, Wendy W. ed. *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life.* New York: Crossroad, 1999.

Johna, Franz. *Show Me the Way: Readings for Each Day of Lent*. Crossroad, 1992.

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Olfson, Lewy. *The Primacy of the Heart: Cutting from a Journal.* St Benedict Center, 1988.

Books about Henri Nouwen:

Bengtson, Jonathan and Gabrielle Earnshaw eds. *Turning the Wheel: Henri Nouwen and Our Search for God*. Orbis, 2007.

Beumer, Jerjen. *Henri Nouwen: A Restless Seeking for God*. Crossroad, 1997.

De Vink, Christopher ed. *Nouwen Then: Personal Reflections on Henri*. Zondervan, 1999.

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Martin, James. *Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self from Thomas Merton and Other Saints*. Hidden Spring, 2006.

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O'Rourke, Michelle. *Befriending Death: Henri Nouwen and a Spirituality of Dying*. Orbis, 2009.

Porter, Beth, Susan M.S. Brown and Philip Coulter eds. *Befriending Life: Encounters with Henri Nouwen.* Doubleday, 2001.

Roderick, Philip. *Beloved: In Conversation with Henri Nouwen*. Book and CD. Canterbury Press, 2007.

Twomy, Gerald S. and Claude Pomerleau eds. *Remembering Henri*. Orbis, 2006.

Waldron, Robert. *Walking with Henri Nouwen: A Reflective Journey*. Paulist Press, 2003.

Website

www.henrinouwen.org

Dissertations and Theses on Henri Nouwen

Henderson, Kyle. *The Reformation of Pastoral Theology in the Life and Works of Henri Nouwen*. Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994.

Huang, Hui-Chueh. *Spiritual Life and Educational Ministry in the Life of Henri Nouwen*. Ph.D. diss., Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 1995.

Yang, Byung-Mo. *A Study of Pastoral Identity in Light of the Works of Henri J.M. Nouwen and its Implication for the Korean Pastoral Context*. Ph.D diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002.

Video

Journey of the Heart: The Life of Henri Nouwen.
https://vimeo.com/ondemand/journeyhearthenrin

Special Events:
May 14-16 St. Michael's College, TST, Toronto is hosting a conference at the 30th anniversary of Nouwen's passing. See details here:
https://henrinouwen.org/2026-30th-anniversary-conference/