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Queer Catholics as Living Human Documents: Henri J.M. Nouwen, Self-availability and the Therapeutic Turn in Dutch Catholicism

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**Queer Catholics as Living Human Documents:
Henri J.M. Nouwen, Self-availability and the
Therapeutic Turn in Dutch Catholicism**

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Abstract

This thesis reconstructs a missing part of queer history, particularly as it pertains to the Catholic Church in the Netherlands, and the part Dutch Catholic priest Henri J.M. Nouwen (1932-1996) played within it. In the 1950s and 1960s an alternative narrative emerged within Dutch Catholicism which contributed to the emancipation of homosexual men and women, helping them to integrate into Dutch society. Nouwen's own involvement in this movement is a story which has remained largely untold; few people are aware that Nouwen studied the topic of homosexuality in great detail. Nouwen's research led him to develop a therapeutic framework designed to revolutionise the pastoral care of homosexual men and women. These ideas were set within the context of a Dutch Catholic Church in transformation, and were inspired by a group of Dutch Catholic intellectuals, who increasingly turned to a psychoanalytical understanding of the human psyche. It was within this new paradigm that Nouwen situated his research and pastoral response to homosexuality, establishing him as a pioneering contributor to the therapeutic discourse found among LGBT+ theological and spiritual writings. Nouwen's contributions to this therapeutic discourse can be seen in a number of both published and unpublished research projects on homosexuality located in the archival papers at the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center. These writings culminated in Nouwen's 1971 published essay 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual,' where the concept of 'self-availability' was offered as way for someone to relate meaningfully to one's homosexual orientation. For Nouwen, the concept of 'self-availability' became the therapeutic means by which homosexual men and women could cultivate a sense of liberation and self-acceptance, in order to make right moral decisions for themselves. 'Self-availability' was a concept Nouwen borrowed from the writings of certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals where the concept of *innerlijke disponibiliteit* (inner availability or self-availability) was promoted as therapeutic qualities needed for mental health. From a political point of view, this thesis reminds the Catholic Church of its own history and the changes it embraced at one time in its pastoral approach towards homosexual men and women.

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To begin with, special thanks to go to several people. Firstly, to Dr Maggie Kappelhoff and Dr Micheál Loughnane of the University of Divinity who both encouraged me to begin my research into Henri Nouwen and the part he played as a pioneering Catholic in the LGBT+ theology and spirituality discourse. Dr Michael Carden of the University of Queensland was another who offered invaluable support as this project began. The support of long-time friend, Peter Trotman, who worked behind the scenes gathering together research materials for my consumption was also very much appreciated. And thanks to Dr Lexi Eikelboom of the Australian Catholic University, who helped review and critique my work. I was also grateful that she was able to arrange a study space for me for some of the time on the campus of ACU in Melbourne.

Four trips to Toronto, Canada to review archival material at the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center were made before international travel Covid restrictions were imposed on Australians. Help provided in finding the right materials by Simon Rogers, Archivist, and Liesl Joson, Library Technician were invaluable. Nothing ever seemed too much trouble for them and I am eternally grateful for their help and assistance. Monastic hospitality was provided by the Benedictine monks of Holy Cross Priory, High Park, Toronto. They provided me with a warm bed, delicious meals, and much prayer during my stays in Toronto.

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There are also three health care professionals that require special mention, without whose assistance this project may never have been completed. My GP, Associate Professor Ralph

Audehm, my Crohn's specialist, Dr Nik Ding, and my psychologist, Robert White. During my time at the University of Wollongong I was diagnosed with a rather debilitating illness: Crohn's Disease. This meant that there were times when 'putting my head down' to write could be particularly challenging. Their attention to my medical and mental health needs helped me through some rough patches, to emerge on the other side with renewed vigor.

Last and not least, much love and appreciation goes to my dear husband, Andrew Fisher, who painstakingly read draft after draft of this thesis, suggesting spelling and grammatical changes, and who had never heard of Henri Nouwen until I adopted him. In many respects this thesis is a reflection on our 32-year relationship and my ability to 'hang in there' when life in the Church as a gay man and a same-sex married person can sometimes seem rough. And we must not forget Tippi, our Jack Russell rescue, who provided unconditional love throughout.

Certification

I, Philip John Bewley declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Master of Philosophy from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Philip John Bewley

26th January 2022

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Introduction

The Research Question

This thesis reconstructs a little-known and missing part of queer history, particularly as it pertains to the Catholic Church in the Netherlands, and the part Dutch Catholic priest Henri J.M. Nouwen (1932-1996) played within it.¹ The 1950s and 1960s saw the plight of homosexual men and women begin to change in the Netherlands as an alternative narrative began to emerge within the Dutch Catholic Church which contributed to their emancipation and helped to integrate them into Dutch society. Nouwen's own involvement in this movement is a story which has remained largely untold; few people are aware that Nouwen studied the topic of homosexuality in great detail, particularly during his formative years in the academy, while studying psychology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. Nouwen's own research into homosexuality led him to develop a therapeutic framework designed to revolutionise the pastoral care of homosexual men and women. However, Nouwen's ideas were not produced within a vacuum, but as this thesis will show, are set within the context of a Dutch Catholic Church in transformation, inspired by the reforming spirit of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and its move towards dogmatic relativism (the acknowledgement that 'the expression and modelling of faith can and may differ according to time and place'²).

This thesis will establish that Nouwen's research into homosexuality is an example of the psycho-therapeutic discourse which arose in post-Second World War western society in order to solve the many problems its citizens faced. Some scholars refer to this phenomenon as the 'therapeutic turn.'³ It was promoted in the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s by a group of

¹ The term queer is used here and throughout this thesis to describe a broad spectrum of non-normative sexual and gender identities.

² Winkeler, Lodewijk. 'Opening Windows or Opening Doors? Catholic Intellectuals as the Bearers of Secularisation in the Netherlands, 1945-1970,' in Leo Kenis, Jaak Billiet & Patrick Pasture (eds). *The Transformation of the Christian Churches in Western Europe 1945-2000*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010, 98.

³ For a discussion on the therapeutic turn in Dutch Catholicism see Westhoff, Hanneke. *Geestelijke bevrijders: Nederlandse katholieken en hun beweging voor Geestelijke Volksgezondheid in de twintigste eeuw* [Spiritual Liberators: Dutch Catholics and their Mental Health Movement in the Twentieth Century]. Nijmegen: Valkhof

Dutch Catholic intellectuals, whose main therapeutic ideas are found among the literature of the Dutch phenomenological psychology and Dutch Catholic mental health movements.⁴ These movements increasingly turned to a psychoanalytical understanding of the human psyche, and their findings were endorsed by the Dutch Catholic episcopate. I will demonstrate that it was within this new paradigm under the influence of certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals that Nouwen situated his research and pastoral response to homosexuality, establishing him as a pioneering contributor to the therapeutic discourse found among LGBT+ theological and spiritual writings.⁵ This status is previously unacknowledged in the existing literature on the subject, a lacuna this thesis seeks to address.

In many respects, the reader of this thesis will be asked to question a commonly held misconception, namely that when it comes to the issue of homosexuality, Catholicism has always been doctrinaire and disciplinarian. This has not always been the case. Despite the fact that the official Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that homosexuals, by their very nature, are ‘intrinsically disordered,’ and that physical expressions of their orientation constitute ‘acts of grave depravity,’⁶ this research project presents a moment in history when not everyone within the Catholic Church held that view. Therefore, this thesis is a deliberate attempt to raid the past for its contemporary relevance. As Jeffrey Weeks puts it: ‘the past is called in to redress the difficulties of the present.’⁷ Within some quarters of the Catholic Church, the story which unfolds in this thesis may therefore seem discomforting, provocative and even challenging. For others, such as queer Catholics and their allies, hearing this story for the first time may even be a liberating experience.

Pers, 1996; for a similar discussion on the therapeutic turn in Finnish Lutheranism see Ratinen, Teemu. ‘Is It a Sin? The Therapeutic Turn and Changing Views on Homosexuality in the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1952-1984,’ *Pastoral Psychol* 66 (2017): 641-656; Peltomäki, Isto. ‘Therapeutic Turn: Pastoral Care in Finnish Lutheranism before and after the 1960s,’ *Studia Theologica: Nordic Journal of Theology* 73:2 (2019): 179-198. These articles highlight a parallel movement to that which occurred in the Dutch Catholic Church within the Finnish Lutheran Church occurring contemporaneously with the one discussed in this thesis, although the Catholic intellectuals who drove the therapeutic turn in Dutch Catholicism do not appear to have taken any direct inspiration from their Lutheran counterparts.

⁴ Dutch Catholic intellectuals were also active in the areas of ecumenism, the nature and function of ecclesiastical ministry, and discussions around the catholicity of certain organisations within Dutch society (known as the ‘K’ discussions).

⁵ LGBT+ is an acronym which stands for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other related communities.

⁶ ‘Catechism of the Catholic Church.’

⁷ Weeks, Jeffrey. *Making Sexual History*. Polity Press: Cambridge, 2000, 137-138.

Who was Henri J.M. Nouwen?

Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen was born in Nijkerk in the Netherlands in 1932, and said that he felt a call to the priesthood as early as the age of six. Having been raised in a devout Dutch Catholic family, and encouraged to follow his call to the priesthood in particular by his mother, Nouwen was ordained in 1957 as a diocesan priest in Utrecht Cathedral. As he had shown some academic ability during his training for the priesthood, his archbishop, Bernard Alfrink, wished him to continue his studies in theology at the Gregorian University in Rome. But Nouwen had other ideas, and presented his archbishop with an alternative plan: studying psychology at the Catholic University in Nijmegen. Alfrink granted permission and Nouwen began his studies with great energy and enthusiasm, as evidenced by the copious notes and assignments produced during this period found among the education records of the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center in Toronto. As Jurgen Beumer (Nouwen's first biographer) has pointed out, Nouwen 'immersed himself completely in psychology, not so much for its scientific value, but because he felt intuitively that the discipline of psychology dealt with issues that were of the utmost importance for the Church and for theology.'⁸ By theology, Beumer means pastoral theology, which came to the fore in the post-Second World War area as certain issues around human development and the human condition could no longer be pushed to the background. A fellow student and life-long friend of Nouwen's, Peter Naus, recalled that during their time at the Catholic University of Nijmegen they studied phenomenological psychology together; this was a form of psychology which studied the lived experience of a research participant.⁹

In 1964, Nouwen moved to the United States, taking further studies in psychology at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. It was during this time that he was introduced to the work of Anton Boisen (1876-1965), a Presbyterian minister and a major figure in the development of clinical pastoral education. Devoting much of his time to the study of this one figure, Nouwen learnt the concept of treating each and every person placed under one's pastoral care as a 'living human document.' Kevin Burns has explained what Boisen meant by

⁸ Beumer, Jurgen. *Henri Nouwen: A Restless Seeking for God*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997, 24.

⁹ Burns, Kevin. *Henri Nouwen: His Life and Spirit*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Franciscan Media, 2016, 7.

this term; traditionally the Church brought theology to the person under their pastoral care, but Boisen, on the basis of his own pastoral work, adopted the completely opposite approach. What he actually discovered in a person's life was something of 'the revelation of God.'¹⁰ Therefore, in pastoral situations, it was often the individual who brought theology to the Church, and not vice versa. Nouwen was so struck by this revelation, treating not only himself but others as 'living human documents,' that it became the basis of his own writing career;¹¹ it is an approach we see reflected in his research projects on homosexuality.

After completing his studies at the Menninger Clinic, in 1966 Nouwen taught psychology at the University of Notre Dame, returning to the Netherlands in 1968 to teach at the Joint Pastoral Institute in Amsterdam, and the Catholic Theological Institute in Utrecht while working on his Doctorandus of Theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. At these institutions Nouwen taught practical psychological techniques, such as clinical theory and the case study method in order to show students how they could integrate these methods into their pastoral counselling. Then in 1971 he moved to the United States, teaching at Yale Divinity School, and then finally at Harvard University. It was during his time at Yale that his career as a spiritual writer began to take off. He published 39 books in his lifetime (selling seven million copies), which covered topics such as pastoral psychology, spiritual theology, and spiritual autobiography.¹² Somewhat disillusioned by the academic world in the last decade of his life, Nouwen left academia altogether, and found a home as a pastor at the L'Arche Daybreak Community in Toronto. The L'Arche communities were founded by Jean Vanier (1928-2019) as homes for people with intellectual disabilities. It was here that Nouwen discovered a sense of community and belonging which had eluded him for most of his life. He died in 1996 while visiting his family in the Netherlands; as a priest, pastor, psychologist and philosopher, his whole life was spent in the service of others.

¹⁰ Burns, *Henri Nouwen: His Life and Spirit*, 9.

¹¹ Higgins, Michael & Kevin Burns. *Impressively Free: Henri Nouwen as a Model for a Reformed Priesthood*. New York: Paulist Press, 2019, 104.

¹² Higgins, Michael W. & Kevin Burns. *Genius Born of Anguish: The Life & Legacy of Henri Nouwen*. New York: Paulist Press, 2012, 17, 18. Higgins and Burns have noted these words of Gabrielle Earnshaw, one time archivist at the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center: 'Of his thirty-nine books, Nouwen wrote three in Dutch and left us, in addition to his primary texts, a database of more than eighteen thousand records representing over one hundred and fifty thousand individual documents and other items, and literally half a Canadian football field of archival boxes, More than seven million copies of his books have been sold worldwide. There are over thirty different language translations of his work. A veritable industry.'

It was not until Nouwen's death in 1996 that his homosexual orientation became a topic for discussion. Until then, little was known about it in the public arena. In 1999, Michael Ford was the first to refer to Nouwen's homosexuality in his biography, *Wounded Prophet: A Portrait of Henri Nouwen*.¹³ In light of this knowledge Nouwen's sexual orientation raises an interesting question for this thesis: are Nouwen's writings on homosexuality autobiographical in any way? Certainly, many of his writings were autobiographical in a general sense, but it has to be acknowledged that not once did Nouwen reveal his sexual orientation in his written works, whether published or unpublished. However, as one author has pointed out: 'his writings ... present subtle hints of a thirty-year-long process of self-acceptance, when re-read with the posthumous knowledge of his orientation.'¹⁴ Furthermore, many of Nouwen's works are marked by a sense of interiority even though he more often than not used the second person and plural pronouns in his writing, rather than the first person. Therefore, at first glance, his writings on sexuality do not appear autobiographical in character. As Michael Higgins and Kevin Burns point out in their biography of Nouwen: 'by eliminating the *dramatis personae*, he made ... [his] public work devoid of private disclosure,' thus freeing himself from confessional material which may have jeopardised his position as a priest within the Catholic Church or his writing career.¹⁵ However, with what we know posthumously about Nouwen's own homosexual orientation, it could be argued that his works on homosexuality possess 'in some sense' an autobiographical quality.

Aim and Significance of the Project

The World Health Organisation's suggestion that there can be 'no health without mental health' highlights one of the biggest challenges faced by humankind in the 21st century. It is reported that one in four people at some point in their lives experiences mental health problems.¹⁶ While the depathologisation of homosexuality as a mental disease occurred in

¹³ Ford, Michael A. *Wounded Prophet: A Portrait of Henri Nouwen*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, [1999] 2006.

¹⁴ Arthur, Mathew. *Daddy Issues: A Post-Queer Reading of Henri Nouwen*. Name/Unname 16 November 2013. Article in my possession, no longer available online.

¹⁵ Higgins & Burns, *Genius Born of Anguish*, 107.

¹⁶ WHO European Ministerial Conference. Mental Health: Facing the Challenges, Building Solutions. Report from the WHO European Ministerial Conference (2005): 1. Accessed July 7, 2021. https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/96452/E87301.pdf.

the 1970s, there is sufficient scientific evidence to establish that queer people have a higher instance of mental health problems (as distinct from mental illness) such as major depression, suicidal ideation, low self-esteem, anxiety disorders and addiction, than those with a heterosexual orientation,¹⁷ resulting from the effects of internalised homophobia and cultural victimisation.¹⁸ Many religious faiths, including the Catholic Church, have taken proscriptive action against queer people, condemned homosexual acts as sinful, barred openly queer people from positions of spiritual leadership, and refused to bless same-sex marriages.¹⁹ Despite protestations from Pope Francis (who said, while speaking to reporters on a flight from Brazil in 2013: 'If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?'),²⁰ in official Catholic Church teaching, homosexuality is still described as 'intrinsically disordered' and its physical expressions as 'acts of grave depravity.'²¹ Such condemnation brings with it significant challenges for queer people whose Catholic faith is a core part of their identity, presenting unnecessary obstacles to the full acceptance and integration of their sexuality, a necessary step in a person's psychosexual development.²²

Therefore, this thesis represents the study of an unfinished revolution, begun in the Dutch Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s, and one in which Nouwen himself became engaged. Much of the literature on LGBT+ theology and spirituality tends to present the subject from an Anglo-American point of view; this thesis seeks to present an alternative narrative from a Dutch perspective. From a political point of view, it will remind the Catholic Church of its own history, especially the relationship which developed between the Dutch Catholic Church and the emerging social sciences, and the changes it embraced in its pastoral approach towards

¹⁷ Mundle, Götz, Lieselotte Mahler & Dinesh Bhugra. 'Homosexuality and Mental Health,' *International Review of Psychiatry*, 27:5 (2015): 355.

¹⁸ Rosser, B. R. Simon, Walter O. Bockting, Michael W. Ross, Michael H. Miner & Eli Coleman. 'The Relationship Between Homosexuality, Internalized Homo-Negativity, and Mental Health in Men Who Have Sex with Men,' *Journal of Homosexuality*, 55:2 (2008): 188.

¹⁹ Barnes, David M. & Ilan H. Meyer. 'Religious Affiliation, Internalized Homophobia, and Mental Health in Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals,' *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 82:4 (2012): 505.

²⁰ BBC News. 'Pope Francis: Who am I to judge people?' July 29, 2013. Accessed February 2, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23489702>.

²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Accessed February 2, 2021. https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P85.HTM.

²² Cerbonne, Armand R. & Graham Danzer. 'The Case of Abel: Religion as Boon and Bane for a Catholic Gay Man,' *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 73: 8 (2017-18): 985.

homosexual men and women. It will explore a number of neglected themes, now largely forgotten in contemporary Catholicism.

Research Methodology

The chief methodology employed in this thesis is the contextual analysis of archival materials. As such, my first task is to identify the relevant material which provides the data to undertake this project. Several archival documents found among Nouwen's personal papers held in the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center have been selected because of their suitability and direct relevance to my thesis. These selected documents provide a valuable resource in determining Nouwen's own thoughts, ideas and reflections around homosexuality, and the Catholic Church's traditional teachings around such concerns.

Documents are never produced within a vacuum, but are either fashioned by groups or individuals who have particular aims, concerns or motives associated with their production. As Grace Davie and David Wyatt contend: 'documents should be considered in terms of their content, context, production and function in society.'²³ Furthermore, they believe 'they are fashioned for specific purposes for an intended audience, and often paint a picture of the author's understanding of reality.'²⁴ It will also be important to consider how certain texts are read and received by their recipients and who their intended audiences were meant to be. Thus, as Lindsay Prior has pointed out, certain documents are not just 'situated products' but 'social products,' often serving a particular function within our social lives.²⁵ This means I will need to undertake a contextual analysis of the documents concerned, as 'working with documents involves both the analysis of content and a careful consideration of production, use and function within a specific socio-historic context.'²⁶

As a method of enquiry, therefore, contextual analysis will serve this thesis well, as it has the ability to create a new kind of meaning of a given text. This method looks at broader

²³ Davie, Grace & David Wyatt. 'Document Analysis' in Stausberg, Michael & Steven Engler (eds). *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011, 151.

²⁴ Davie & Wyatt, 'Document Analysis,' 152.

²⁵ Prior, Lindsay. *Using Documents in Social Research*. London: SAGE, 2003, 153.

²⁶ Davie & Wyatt, 'Document Analysis,' 153.

perspectives at play, considering other frameworks which derive from historical, biographical, theoretical, cultural, social, and ideological information. Stephen Behrendt helpfully explains contextual analysis as simply “situating” the text within the milieu of its times, and assessing the roles of author, readers (intended and actual), and “commentators” (critics, both professional and otherwise) in the reception of the text.²⁷ This not only looks at the author’s intention in writing such a text, but also examines any occasion which may have led to the writing of the text, including who its intended audience was meant to be, or whether the text was a call for action, for consideration, or for reflection.

In this thesis, in order to avoid erroneous conclusions through the selective use of just one document, it will be important to triangulate archival finds with other primary and secondary sources.²⁸ Triangulation establishes a broader insight into the contextuality and historical actuality of a particular document.²⁹ This is to envisage Nouwen’s archival records as an ‘organic whole’ or even a ‘living organism.’³⁰ Thus, it will be necessary to frame and contextualise each of Nouwen’s writings on homosexuality with other documentary evidence. Jamie Lee describes this process using the camera as a metaphor: it is ‘the zooming out in order to make visible what is obscured in the frame – it is what is in the margins, the background, slightly out of focus in the foreground, and even on the cutting room floor.’³¹ In practice, this means that within this thesis each chapter will ‘zoom in’ on one aspect of Nouwen’s thought, then ‘zoom out’ in the final chapter into the broader context of Nouwen’s writings on homosexuality.

²⁷ Behrendt, Stephen. ‘Using Contextual Analysis to Evaluate Texts.’ 2008. Accessed February 2, 2021. <http://english.unl.edu/sbehrendt/StudyQuestions/ContextualAnalysis.html>.

²⁸ Gailet, Lynée L. ‘(Per)Forming Archival Research Methodologies,’ *Research Methodologies* 64:1 (September 2012): 50.

²⁹ Lutig, Jason. ‘Epistemologies of the Archive: Toward A Critique of Archival Reason,’ *Archival Science* 20 (2020): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09313-z>.

³⁰ Lutig, ‘Epistemologies of the Archive,’ 74.

³¹ Lee, Jamie A. ‘Beyond Pillars of Evidence: Exploring the Shaky Ground of Queer/ed Archives and their Methodologies.’ 2016, 10. Accessed February 2, 2021. https://www.academia.edu/10245479/Beyond_Pillars_of_Evidence_Exploring_the_Shaky_Ground_of_Queer_ed_Archives_and_their_Methodologies.

Nouwen's Archival Material

A major part of this research has involved archival fieldwork undertaken in the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center. Several manuscripts within these archives, together with other documents, show that Nouwen pursued his own research into homosexuality during the formative years of his academic training as a priest-psychologist. These materials, both published and unpublished, have remained understudied, or in some cases, not studied at all, a lacuna this dissertation seeks to address.

At the epistemological level, the analysis of Nouwen's archival material provides queer Catholics and other queer Christians with the necessary empirical evidence to establish their identity in the past. Caswell, Cifor and Ramirez speak of three levels of impact for queer people in this regard—'epistemological, ontological, and social [which] together undergird our conception of representational belonging'—and which are often accompanied by 'strong affective resonances' in those who find themselves in the archival record. In their words it affirms that 'we were here', and that we were important enough to be studied. Similarly, at an ontological level, it affirms that 'I am here.' On a social level, it asserts that 'you belong here.' It has the ability to reflect identity in the present, to see oneself existing for the first time, and promotes necessary feelings of inclusion.³²

Chosen for contextual analysis are a number of archival documents which display Nouwen's therapeutic approach. These include an unpublished thesis proposal (undated but likely written between 1959 to 1962) entitled *Homosexualiteit: Van vooroordeel naar oordeel* (Homosexuality: From Prejudice to Judgement), followed by the 1963 unpublished thesis itself, *Homosexualiteit, Een pastoraal psychologische studie over homoseksuele adolescenten* (Homosexuality: A Pastoral Psychological Study on Adolescent Homosexuals).³³ In addition,

³² Caswell, Michelle, Marika Cifor & Mario H. Ramirez. 'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives,' *The American Archivist* 79:1 (2016): 75.

³³ Nouwen, Henri. 'Homosexualiteit: Van vooroordeel naar oordeel [Homosexuality: From Prejudice to Judgement]' (Schema, Catholic University of Nijmegen, undated [between 1959 to 1962]). Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Education Series, Box 414/File 14299; Nouwen, Henri. 'Homosexualiteit: Een pastoraal psychologische studie over homoseksuele adolescenten [Homosexuality: a pastoral psychological study on homosexual adolescents].' (Thesis, Catholic University of Nijmegen, 1963). Nouwen Archive and Research Collection Archive, Education Series, Box 287/File 302.

two published essays found among the archival records on homosexuality will be studied: 'Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness?' published in 1967 in the *National Catholic Reporter*, and Nouwen's 1971 ground-breaking essay 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual,' which was contributed to an anthology entitled *Is Gay Good? Ethics, Theology and Homosexuality*, edited by W. Dwight Oberholtzer.³⁴ The final document to be examined is a series of lecture notes for an undergraduate university course Nouwen held at Yale Divinity School in 1973. The course was entitled 'Discipline and Discipleship.'³⁵

The Definition of a Term

Central to Nouwen's contribution is the therapeutic concept of 'self-availability'. It will be established in this thesis that this concept is first found among the literature of certain Dutch Catholic intellectual movements as outlined in chapters two and three. There we find the idea of *disponibilité* (availability), a term describing the state of being which is required in order to observe and describe human activity phenomenologically; and *innerlijke disponibiliteit* (inner availability, or self-availability), a similar psychological and spiritual notion, describing a certain therapeutic quality needed for mental health. These concepts find their origin in the philosophical writings of French Catholic existentialist Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), who described *disponibilité* in terms of human or spiritual openness, and designated it an important human virtue.³⁶ As *disponibilité* and *innerlijke disponibiliteit* are interrelated terms and form the basis for the central therapeutic concept found in Nouwen's 'Self-availability of the Homosexual' essay, it will be necessary for the reader to grasp a basic understanding of this terminology.

As a virtue, *disponibilité* is best described as an excellence of character and a human quality which is important in order to function fully as a well-adjusted individual - hence its therapeutic quality. It is also possible to think of *disponibilité* as a learned skill, or a trait of

³⁴ Nouwen, Henri. 'Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness,' in *The National Catholic Reporter*, 29 November 1967: 8; Nouwen, Henri, 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual' in W. Dwight Oberholtzer (ed). *Is gay good? Ethics, theology, and homosexuality*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971, 204-212.

³⁵ Nouwen, Henri. 'Discipline and Discipleship Course Material.' Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Teaching Series, Box 266/Item 2096.

³⁶ Bollnow, Otto F. 'Marcel's Concept of Availability' in Paul Schilpp & Lewis Hahn (eds). *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1984, 177-199.

character, one which fits us for life in general. We might also describe *disponibilité* in terms of human flourishing, a virtue which helps an individual live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

If *disponibilité* is the condition for human flourishing, its opposite, *indisponibilité* (unavailability), prevents flourishing. An individual who is indisponible to himself (and therefore to others) is at risk of various forms of psychic and spiritual harm.³⁷ Marcel says that to be *indisponible* is to live an impoverished ('poverty-stricken'³⁸) life; it is like bearing a load, 'which at critical moments becomes literally insupportable';³⁹ 'it is as though each one of us secreted a kind of shell which gradually hardened and imprisoned him';⁴⁰ the *indisponible* person is 'fundamentally in the dark about himself. He does not know his real needs'.⁴¹

Joe McCown's 1978 study, *Availability: Gabriel Marcel and the Phenomenology of Human Openness* has identified certain phenomena discussed by Marcel which express an attitude of *disponibilité* in one's life: namely self-presence and receptivity.⁴² Self-presence is an attitude of *disponibilité* towards oneself and is inextricably linked to the presence of the other. It is this kind of self-presence to which Nouwen is undoubtedly referring when he writes about the self-availability of the homosexual, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. Receptivity, on the other hand, is for Marcel analogous to the preparation of a physical room or space in which one is *disponible* towards others, and a space in which the other can feel welcome in one's presence. This is the idea that one needs to be 'at home' in order to receive others, at home with oneself, or present to oneself, in order to be *disponible* to others.

As we will see in chapter three, it was André Snoeck, a Belgian Catholic intellectual and moral theologian, who appropriated this concept and first promoted it as a necessary psycho-spiritual tool for mental health. For Snoeck, the person who possessed *innerlijke disponibiliteit*

³⁷ McCown, Joe. *Availability: Gabriel Marcel and the Phenomenology of Human Openness*. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978, 11-17.

³⁸ Marcel, Gabriel. *The Mystery of Being I: Reflection and Mystery*. Translated by G.S. Fraser. London: Harvill Press, 1950, 163.

³⁹ Marcel, Gabriel. *Creative Fidelity*. Translated by Robert Rosthal. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1964, 52.

⁴⁰ Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*. New York: Citadel Press, Ninth Paperbound Edition, 1968 [1956], 41.

⁴¹ Marcel, Gabriel. *The Mystery of Being II: Faith and Reality*. London: Harvill Press, 1951, 8.

⁴² McCown, *Availability*, 17-21.

displayed an attitude of inner openness in which one's personality can express itself in a fully responsible way. This concept was further promoted by other intellectuals involved in the Dutch Catholic mental health movement, and later appropriated by Nouwen himself as the basis for his therapeutic approach to homosexuality.

Outline of the Thesis

As this thesis unfolds, chapters one to four will present various aspects of Nouwen's thought, providing the context which fuelled Nouwen's own pastoral approach to homosexuality. Chapter one will introduce the concept of the Catholic intellectual and explore the significant role such intellectuals held within Dutch society as educators and advisors to the Dutch Catholic population including priests and other pastoral care providers like Nouwen. Chapters two and three will undertake an analysis of a number of key ideas expressed by certain Catholic intellectuals in the phenomenological psychology and mental health movements respectively. For Nouwen, these ideas brought into creative dialogue a number of different academic disciplines, namely philosophy, sociology, psychology, and theology, but in particular, it was within these movements that Nouwen's therapeutic concept of self-availability first arose. Chapter four will explore this history of the Dutch gay emancipation movement and the crucial role the Dutch Catholic Church played in partnership with this movement. Together, these various movements provided Nouwen with a cultural environment, a research method, and a set of ideas in which to undertake his study on homosexuality, a vexed issue for any Catholic priest to undertake at that time. The fifth chapter will then undertake an analysis of Nouwen's research projects on homosexuality, both published and unpublished, culminating in his concept of 'self-availability' for the homosexual men and women. The critical analysis of these texts will show the extent to which Nouwen was influenced by these Dutch Catholic intellectual movements, at the same time establishing his rightful place as a pioneering LGBT+ theological and spiritual writer. The conclusion of this thesis will summarise the main points in the preceding chapters and its original contribution to the scholarship of Nouwen. I believe the findings of this thesis has implications for ongoing research into other religious and ecclesial communities who grapple with similar issues faced by minority groups judged negatively on their sexual or gender identity

Chapter 1

The Dutch Catholic Intellectual Movement

Introduction

As noted in the introduction, this thesis analyses a largely unexplored period in Nouwen's formative years in the academy, from the late 1950s to the early 1970s – a period not adequately covered in existing biographical and scholarly works devoted to him. Most of this period (apart from a four-year period in the USA) Nouwen spent in the Netherlands under the influence of the Dutch Catholic Church. During these formative years, Nouwen was exposed to the revolutionary ideas of various Catholic intellectual elite groups and their members, many of whom were personally known to him. At this time, from the 1950s through to the 1960s, a rapid change was taking place within the Catholic Netherlands. Catholic intellectuals played a significant role in the extraordinary cultural changes which took place during this period: a shift from conservative to progressive views, particularly in the area of moral theology. It is my view that it was this intellectual environment which provided Nouwen with the necessary means to write about homosexuality in an innovative and progressive way. In such an environment, Nouwen's own life and work became the product of an emerging 'Vatican II age.' Like those intellectuals who influenced him, Nouwen developed into a person who displayed, in particular, a knowing discernment, an intellectual flexibility, and importantly, a heightened social awareness.¹ Most certainly we see these characteristics displayed in his pastoral approach to the controversial subject of homosexuality.

A major sociological study of the Catholic intellectual groups which influenced Nouwen was undertaken by Ed Simons and Lodewijk Winkeler, published in 1987. It was based on printed archival material, existing research, and survey results collected from those who were either part of these elite social circles, or who had formed some kind of informal relationship with them.² Their research, which from time to time will be utilised in this and the subsequent two

¹ Higgins & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 71.

² Simons & Winkeler, *Het Verraad der Clercken*, 14.

chapters, will be helpful in our understanding of what constituted a 'Dutch Catholic intellectual' at that time. It will also assist the reader in understanding the cultural environment which enabled and generated their new and revolutionary ideas and theories, the role they played in the formation of theological and pastoral policy in the Netherlands, and, in general, how their opinions were brought to the attention of the Dutch Catholic community. Ideas and theories expressed by Dutch Catholic intellectuals often flowed through third parties, and these, more often than not, were the priests of the Dutch Catholic Church. Nouwen was one such individual, who, like so many of his peers, made these ideas and theories more palatable for the Dutch Catholic population. Nouwen, therefore, can be best described as a 'receiver', or better still, an 'interpreter' or 'translator' of the opinions found in the literature of the various intellectual circles under examination (to be addressed in the following two chapters). This goes to the very heart of what is involved in the reception of texts. As Ika Willis points out: 'the idea of 'reception' suggests a sender (an author), a message (a text), and a receiver (a reader), but it also implies that there must be a communications system which facilitates the sending and receiving of the message.'³ This chapter seeks to look at this system, laying the groundwork for the chapters to follow and assisting in the contextual analysis of Nouwen's research projects and published articles on homosexuality, in an effort to understand their production, use and function within a specific socio-historic context.

The Catholic Intellectual

The role of the Catholic intellectual, particularly as it pertained to the Dutch Catholic Church, was to analyse social reality, providing 'a reading of the signs of the times,' and interpreting the needs of Dutch Catholics in particular: 'to make faith intelligible for modern man in a modern world.'⁴ Furthermore, this knowledge was presented in such a manner that it brought about understanding, changed thinking, and importantly, inspired, in some, urgent action.⁵ Such ideas were often taken up at the grassroots level, among Catholic clergy in particular,

³ Willis, Ika. *Reception*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018, 5.

⁴ Winkeler, 'Opening Windows,' 97.

⁵ Simons, E.J. & A.J.A. Felling. 'De katholieke intellectual elite: 1946-1975 [The Catholic Intellectual Elite: 1946-1975],' *Mens en Maatschappij* 60:1 (1985): 27; Simons & Winkeler, *Het Verraad der Clercken*, 23.

but also among Catholic doctors and journalists. Nouwen does not qualify as a member of any Catholic intellectual circle at that time, and is better described as an 'enthusiastic interpreter' of their ideas and theories.⁶ Known to and taught by a number of Catholic intellectuals during his formative years at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, Nouwen was someone who was able to propagate their views in his research projects and his own published works on homosexuality.

Catholic intellectuals were university educated or held an equivalent qualification, and expressed their socially engaged ideas and opinions through academic lectures, church-related publications, or keynote addresses. Simons and Lodewijk identified four key areas on which Dutch Catholic intellectuals focused: ecclesiastical ministry; the catholicity of organizations or institutions; ecumenism; and morality and related mental health issues. It is the last of these which is of particular interest to this study.⁷

The Formation of Catholic Intellectual Social Circles

In order to provide the support structures for the cultivation of their new concepts and ideas, Catholic intellectuals formed like-minded social circles. Marit Monteiro refers to these as 'sub-cultures within the Catholic milieu, ... a community of communication, defined by an intricate, simultaneous relationship between confession, ideology and social relations.'⁸ These social circles became safe havens in which controversial theories could be shared and explored, further developed and, ultimately, promulgated among a wider audience. In such an environment, an individual intellectual could be strengthened in the views held, and was, importantly, supported by the group if such views were challenged by higher ecclesial authorities.⁹ As Simons and Felling note:

⁶ Winkeler, 'Opening Windows,' 107.

⁷ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 23.

⁸ Monteiro, Marit. 'Catholic Intellectual Elites in the Netherlands,' in Urs Altermatt, Jan De Maeyer & Franziska Metzger (eds). *Religious Institutes and Catholic Culture in 19th- and 20th-Century Europe*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014, 23.

⁹ Simons & Felling, 'Katholieke intellectual elite,' 28.

Relationship formation can be an important factor in answering the question why, in a given period, intellectuals succeed in developing new ideas and visions, holding them, possibly against the spirit of the times, thus expanding them further, and introduce them into a broader society.¹⁰

Pillarisation and Reverse-Pillarisation as Structures for Channelling Catholic Intellectual Information

The origin of these social circles can be found in the concept of *verzuiling* (often referred to as pillarisation or columnisation in English), whereby Catholicism was one social, religious, and political pillar among a number of other social components, including Calvinism, secularism, liberalism, conservatism and socialism. Pillarisation was a social phenomenon which reached its zenith in the Netherlands in the period following the First World War, but collapsed towards the end of the 1960s largely due to secularisation and individualisation. It has been studied by sociologists in depth in that country, but it was a social phenomenon also operating in other Western countries in varying degrees.¹¹ Sociologist Staf Hellemens has explained pillarisation in the following way:

In essence, pillarization theory is based on the socio-scientific exploitation of a metaphor, the image of the façade of a classical temple: a small number of columns or pillars, which support a triangular pediment. The pillars represent segregated population groups, the pediment represents parliament and the government.¹²

The Catholic pillar was one such segregated population group, representing a pervasive subculture which permeated many areas of Dutch society, maintaining professional and educational organisations, associations and institutes that were designed specifically to shape, protect and enforce orthodox beliefs and practices for the Catholic population in the Netherlands. The Dutch believed that every pillar within Dutch society had an inalienable right

¹⁰ Simons & Felling, 'Katholieke intellectual elite,' 28.

¹¹ Hellemans, Staf. 'Pillarization ('Verzuiling'): On Organized "Self-Contained Worlds" in the Modern World,' *The American Sociologist* 51 (2020): 124-147.

¹² Hellemans, 'Pillarization,' 126.

to exist, and that in their own way, they were an indispensable part of society, adding to its good functioning and to the maintenance of public order.¹³ As sociologist David Moberg further explains:

The nearest English cognates are the concepts of subcultures, pluralism, unity in diversity, special interest groups, and pressure groups. If somehow all of these were woven together and given, in addition, an ideological twist, we might come near an understanding of the term.¹⁴

Nouwen once spoke about the 'pillared' nature of Dutch society himself:

Holland has a very sophisticated communications system and things are organized much more along religious lines. For instance we have a Catholic radio and television station and Protestant and Socialist television stations. Also there are Catholic newspapers that don't just deal with religious issues but serve as regular daily newspapers.¹⁵

Paradoxically, these same channels of communication could also be used to communicate new and innovative ideas by Catholic Intellectuals at a rapid pace, a characteristic somewhat at odds with their intended purpose to maintain orthodox belief and practice. This is referred to by Simons and Lodewijk as the 'reverse pillar effect.'¹⁶ Thus, Dutch Catholics were accustomed to forming their own opinions on theological, ethical and pastoral matters, based on the flow of new information provided by Catholic intellectuals via numerous books, journals, magazines, pamphlets, and radio and television broadcasts. Increasingly, Catholic intellectuals began to tackle issues which had become more pressing within the Catholic population, in what is best described in terms of a *relativerende denken*, or a 'thinking in perspective.'¹⁷ Such issues included the explanation of mental health care, a broader and

¹³ Coleman, John A. *The Evolution of Dutch Catholicism 1958-1974*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1978, 64, 65.

¹⁴ Moberg, David O. 'Social Differentiation in the Netherlands,' *Social Forces* 39:4 (May, 1961): 333.

¹⁵ Brennan, Todd. 'A Visit With Henri Nouwen,' *The Critic* (Summer 1978): 47

¹⁶ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 249.

¹⁷ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 251.

more socially relevant curriculum at the major seminaries, a more ecumenically engaged church, and the expansion of Catholic higher education.¹⁸

As new information was channelled along these communication lines, certain ideas were also promoted by third parties or *doorvertalers* (translators), a term coined by Simons and Winkeler to describe Dutch Catholic priests, doctors, psychologists, sociologists and journalists (among others), who interpreted these new and innovative ideas, making them more palatable and accessible for the Dutch Catholic community.¹⁹ A priest like Nouwen could certainly be described as a *doorvertaler* in this context. As we will see in the fifth chapter, based on analysis of Nouwen's research and articles on homosexuality, he appears very familiar with the contents of a number of publications authored by Catholic intellectuals, and by those who existed on the fringes of these circles of influence.²⁰ Nouwen's apparent familiarity with their publications undoubtedly influenced his progressive views on a pastoral response to homosexuality among Catholics. This is in line with Simons and Winkler's findings that the 'reverse pillar effect' is, in their opinion 'the crucial factor in answering the question why such a rapid and far-reaching shift from conservative to progressive took place within the Catholic Netherlands.'²¹ Or 'why the Catholic Netherlands, practically overnight ... evolved from Rome's most obedient child to the progressive front yard of Catholicism.'²²

Catholic Intellectuals as Educators and Advisors

Catholic intellectuals not only used the Catholic media to disseminate their ideas, but, as pointed out earlier, they were often educators, particularly in Catholic universities and seminaries. Their role in Catholic scientific or semi-scientific education became particularly important. As educators, they were able to exert considerable influence over their students, particularly those priests, like Nouwen, who studied at the Catholic University of Nijmegen.²³

¹⁸ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 249.

¹⁹ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 17, 48, 172, 252.

²⁰ A series of brochures produced in the series *Geestelijke Volksgezondheid* (Mental Health), published by the Katholieke Centrale Vereniging voor Geestelijke Volksgezondheid (Catholic Central Association for Mental Health) in the Netherlands from 1952 to 1972 are of particular interest to my research and will be extensively analysed in the following chapter.

²¹ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 320.

²² Simons & Felling, 'Katholieke intellectual elite,' 39.

²³ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 240.

As a Catholic institution, it was a centre of Catholic intellectual life. Nouwen's time at Nijmegen gave him maximum exposure to Catholic intellectuals, where he rubbed shoulders over a number of years with those involved in the social sciences.

Employment in advisory roles in Catholic institutions and on editorial boards of Catholic publications were other important channels for Catholic intellectual influence. At times these intellectuals were even involved in direct advisory roles to the Dutch episcopate. As advisors to boards and institutions, Catholic intellectuals were free to theorise, unhindered by the more mundane aspects of the administrative positions that other intellectuals were engaged in. They were often employed to propose alternative viewpoints based on their expertise on a given socially engaged subject.

Dogmatic Relativism within Catholic Intellectual Circles

Even before the extensive reforms of the Second Vatican Council, opened by Pope John XXIII in 1962, there was in the Dutch Catholic intellectual movement an increased awareness of relativity in regards to matters of belief, or what is often referred to as 'dogmatic relativism.'²⁴ This concept acknowledges that 'the expression and modelling of faith can and may differ according to time and place.'²⁵ This laid the foundation for the innovative ideas which Dutch Catholic intellectuals began to express in the 1950s. This was based on a growing recognition of modern sciences, which had taken firm root in Western society and were now impossible to overlook.²⁶ Nouwen himself studied the social sciences at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, believing in their importance for a church attempting to re-connect with a modernising world.

The promotion of new developments in German and French theology within Dutch Catholicism, known as *Verkündigungstheologie* (preaching theology) and *nouvelle théologie* (new theology) respectively, provided a further framework for dogmatic relativism. During the 1950s, Dutch seminaries increasingly introduced these new theologies into their

²⁴ Winkeler, 'Opening Windows,' 98; Simons & Winkeler, *Het Verraad der Clercken*, 206.

²⁵ Winkeler, 'Opening Windows,' 98.

²⁶ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 236, 237.

curriculum.²⁷ In particular, these ‘new’ theologies laid the foundations for reformed thinking in the Second Vatican Council, which advocated *ressourcement*, or a ‘return to the sources’ (as in a return to the holy scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers), in order to restore Catholic theology to its original purity of thought and expression.²⁸ The Council advocated an openness to dialogue with the modern world, which, in turn, made it more palatable for emerging theologies in pastoral care. As a theological system, it fitted perfectly with the *relativerende denken* (‘thinking in perspective’) adopted by the Dutch Catholic intellectual movement. Few records have survived in the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center from Nouwen’s years in seminary training, so it is difficult to assess to what extent these theologies influenced Nouwen’s thinking at that time; what can be said with certainty is that Nouwen was excited by the Vatican Council’s renewing vision and that he can be described as ‘a son of the Council.’²⁹

The ‘Spirit’ of Vatican II Supports Catholic Intellectual Thought

By the 1960s, Catholic intellectuals felt supported by the reforming spirit of Pope John XXIII, and what came to be known as ‘the spirit of Vatican II.’ In Catholic Netherlands, opinion was often expressed that they were even ahead of the Council.³⁰ As Winkeler has noted: ‘When John XXIII opened Vatican II in 1962, he said in his opening address: “For the substance of the ancient deposit of faith is one thing, and the way it which it is presented is another.”’³¹ Cardinal Bernard Alfrink, the bishop who ordained Nouwen, and to whom Nouwen showed ecclesial obedience, was a staunch ally of Pope John XXIII, someone who took a lead in the proceedings of the Council, and who was very much inspired by ‘the spirit of Vatican II.’³² It was his intention to adopt two defining principles of the Council for the Dutch Catholic Church, namely *aggiornamento* (updating), and the aforementioned *ressourcement* (returning to sources). Such notions found their origin in the aforementioned new theologies, and legitimised dogmatic relativism, so favoured by Dutch Catholic Intellectuals. Church

²⁷ Winkeler, ‘Opening Windows,’ 99, 100.

²⁸ O’Malley, John. *What Happened at Vatican II*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, 40-43.

²⁹ Higgins & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 71; see also Higgins & Burns, *Genius Born of Anguish*, 27.

³⁰ Winkeler, L. ‘Opening Windows,’ 97.

³¹ Winkeler, L. ‘Opening Windows,’ 97.

³² Higgins, & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 70, 71.

historians John W. O'Malley explains the meaning of *aggiornamento* and its application for a church in reform mode:

Three aspects were special about the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II. First, the changes done in the name of *aggiornamento* were sometimes obvious reversals of what had broadly been considered normative. Second, no previous council ever took the equivalent of *aggiornamento* as a leitmotif, as a broad principle rather than as a rare exception, with its implication that the Church should change in certain regards to meet the times rather than the times change to meet the Church ... Third, the council took as axiomatic that Catholicism was adaptive even to the 'modern world.'³³

As for *ressourcement*, O'Malley defined this as 'a return to the sources with a view not to confirming the present but making changes to conform it to a more authentic or more appropriate past, to ... a more profound tradition.'³⁴ The Council itself had inspired a cultural change in the way it operated, which became the hallmark of Dutch Catholicism in the 1960s. Again, O'Malley offers an important insight into this cultural shift, which had a profound effect upon the Catholic intellectual movement of the 1960s, indicated by the sort of vocabulary adopted by the Council. It reads like a litany:

From commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to conversation, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical and top-down to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from static to changing, from passive acceptance to active engagement, from prescriptive to principled, from defined to open-ended, from behavior modification to conversion of heart, from the dictates of law to the dictates of conscience, from external conformity to the joyful pursuit of holiness.³⁵

³³ O'Malley, John W. 'Vatican II, Did Anything Happen?' in David G. Schultenover (ed). New York: Continuum, 2007, 63, 64, cited in Higgins & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 68, 69.

³⁴ O'Malley, John W. *What Happened at Vatican II*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, 40, cited in Higgins & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 69.

³⁵ O'Malley, 'Vatican II,' 81, cited in Higgins & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 67, 68.

Alfrink's Support for the Catholic Intellectual Movement

Cardinal Alfrink was more than on board with these sentiments of the Council, and inspired within the Catholic Church under his care a spirit of reform and change. As Higgins and Burns explain, for Alfrink, 'change was a bulwark against the ossification of truth, the deadening of the Spirit, the debilitating fear that accompanies ... intellectual hostility to malleability, to adaptation.'³⁶ As a supporter of the Council's policy for 'dialogue and accommodation over the more normative approach of judgment and anathema,'³⁷ Alfrink provided the ecclesial environment, and the means for the ideas and theories of Catholic Intellectuals to flourish, unhindered, as they traditionally were, by an inflexible and rigid ecclesial authority.³⁸ Relevant to my argument, therefore, are those Catholic intellectuals who allowed their thoughts to run free, particularly those who held advisory roles in the various committees of both the Dutch Catholic Mental Health Movement and the Catholic Pastoral Centre in Amsterdam for homosexual men and women.

Ecumenism's Influence on Catholic Intellectual Thought

We also see a growing interest among Dutch Catholic intellectuals in the ecumenical movement. Although dialogue among the various Dutch Christian denominations was confined at first to private conversations between individuals, we see the emergence of discussion groups between Protestant ministers and Catholic priests during the 1950s and 1960s. These were very much 'talk-fests,' and were not designed to reach agreement on doctrinal or moral issues; but they provided the space for open and honest discussions about each other's beliefs, delivered in an unprejudicial environment. Winkeler has noted that during this period, many influential Dutch Catholic intellectuals were members of these discussion groups.³⁹ An important feature of these study groups was the tackling of pastoral issues important to both sides of the ecclesial divide. An example of these joint endeavours, is the 1968 study day held between the Katholiek Nationaal Bureau voor Geestelijke

³⁶ Higgins & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 69.

³⁷ Higgins & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 69.

³⁸ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 34.

³⁹ Winkeler, 'Opening Windows,' 101.

Gezondheidszorg (Catholic National Office for Mental Health Care) in Utrecht, and the Nationaal Protestants Centrum voor Geestelijke Volksgezondheid (The National Protestant Centre for Mental Health) in The Hague. The introductory keynote address was conducted by a leading Dutch Catholic intellectual in the field of mental health (C.J.B.J. Trimbos) before 300 Catholic and Protestant caregivers. Those who addressed the crowd dealt with a number of recent views and developments in the pastoral ministry of homosexuals.⁴⁰ Such discussion groups provided the opportunity for Catholic Intellectuals, and those involved in their wider networks, to share ideas and information with other Christian groups with similar concerns. Nouwen's own ecumenical proclivities have been well documented,⁴¹ and as we will see in chapter five, were particularly evident in his research projects and articles on homosexuality. And it will emerge that Nouwen most certainly became a translator of the many ideas and theories expressed by intellectuals in these discussion groups.

The Pastoral Council and the Changing Role of the Clergy

Reviewing the history of the Dutch Catholic Church, Coleman describes the period in which certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals exercised their greatest influence as its 'brainstorming' phase. But by the mid 1960s Dutch Catholicism was ready to progress beyond this, entering a new era of experimentation and the implementation of new ecclesial structures, designed to 'encourage new ideas to handle dissatisfactions.'⁴² The most important of these was the Dutch Pastoral Council, opened by Cardinal Alfrink in 1966 in response to the reforming spirit of the Second Vatican Council; such brainstorming was coming to fruition. Best described as a national church parliament, its purpose was twofold: to 'deliver valuable information about the life of the faithful, in order to better adapt the exercise of their pastoral care,' and, for the faithful, 'to make the whole community and each individual personally aware of his Christian responsibility for the good of the Church in today's world.'⁴³ The members who made up the Pastoral Council consisted of laity, priests, members of religious orders,

⁴⁰ Brussaard, A.J.R., H. Faber, J.B.F. Gottschalk, J.Grubben, A. Klamer, W.J. Sengers & C.J.B.J. Trimbos. *Pastorale zorg voor homofielen* [Pastoral Care for Homophiles]. Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1968.

⁴¹ Penkett, Luke. 'Finding One Another in Christ: Ecumenism in the Life and Writing of Henri J.M. Nouwen' (PHD Thesis, The Archbishop of Canterbury's Examination in Theology, 2013).

⁴² Coleman, *Evolution of Dutch Catholicism*, 149, 150.

⁴³ FSSPX News. 'The Synodal Path to a German Church (2).' Accessed November 7, 2021. <https://fsspx.news/en/news-events/news/synodal-path-german-national-church-2-51641>.

theologians, sociologists, diocesan curia specialists and bishops, all meeting on equal terms and voting on issues affecting pastoral policy. This involved many social issues including birth control, the celibacy of clergy and matters of peace and justice, among other internal ecclesial concerns. The Council provided a collegial model for the undertaking of church operations and was unprecedented in the life of any national church within Catholicism. In-depth study of the workings and intricacies of this new social movement within Dutch Catholicism is beyond the scope of this study; suffice to say it was a sign of a church on the move. When Nouwen returned to The Netherlands in 1968 to teach and undertake his doctoral studies at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, this was the kind of ecclesial environment in which he became immersed. This was a church in motion, constantly searching, and not afraid to take risks or experiment with new ideas.⁴⁴

Within Dutch Catholicism, the role of the clergy in particular was changing. Clergy members were now called upon to be a ‘prophetic critic’ in a world of change.⁴⁵ This was made particularly evident in the report of the fifth session of the Dutch Pastoral Council which is worth quoting at length; I believe it goes some way towards explaining why a priest like Nouwen would feel compelled to publish on the subject of homosexuality. It was indeed a subject close to his own heart, but, as the report notes, the role of the priest was to ‘put into words how the faithful understand the gospel in the midst of contemporary reality’:

The minister shall try in word and gesture to express *what there is to be found alive and at work* in the values among the faithful in the midst of whom he works. He shall try to formulate what we understand by the terms “holiness,” “redemption,” “being made free.” He shall try to put into words how the faithful understand the gospel in the midst of contemporary reality. The minister’s task is to give a name to this experience ... More than anyone else, the minister has the duty to bring a corrective voice to the occasions when the community does violence to the best sense of the gospel.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Coleman, *Evolution of Dutch Catholicism*, 155.

⁴⁵ Coleman, *Evolution of Dutch Catholicism*, 205.

⁴⁶ Coleman, *Evolution of Dutch Catholicism*, 205.

Indeed, as we will see, Nouwen offered a 'corrective voice' when it came to the pastoral provision for homosexual men and women within the life of the Church.

Conclusion

The influence on priest 'translators' like Nouwen of certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals, many of whom will be discussed in the following two chapters, cannot be overestimated. Their intellectual input on a range of subjects which affected the Dutch Catholic population brought about renewed understanding, changed thinking among many, and inspired, in some, urgent action. When Nouwen returned to the Netherlands from the USA in 1968 he found a Church which 'exhibited an élan, enthusiasm, intensity, and self-confidence which clearly set those years apart both from what went before and what came after.'⁴⁷ Coleman has described these cultural changes as 'nothing less than startling,'⁴⁸ but the input of Dutch Catholic intellectuals in the preceding years and the channelling of their *relativerende denken* (thinking in perspective) through the pillared nature of the Dutch society, goes a long way towards explaining how such a change was able to take place.

As educators in seminaries and Catholic universities, Dutch Catholic intellectuals were able to promote the new sciences and encourage scientific investigation, thus holding considerable influence over the formation of their students. As we will see in the following chapters, Nouwen's years as a student at the Catholic University of Nijmegen brought him into contact with a number of Catholic intellectuals. It was the social and intellectual environment they provided, unprecedented in the life of the Church outside the Netherlands, which gave Nouwen permission to investigate the varied pastoral issues faced by homosexual men and women of his day - matters which were for him as much personal as they were universal.

⁴⁷ Coleman, *Evolution of Dutch Catholicism*, 153.

⁴⁸ Coleman, *Evolution of Dutch Catholicism*, 152.

Chapter 2

The Dutch Catholic Phenomenological Psychology Movement

Introduction

Of the various biographies of Nouwen published since his death in 1999, Higgins and Burns were one of the first to draw particular attention to the phenomenological approach taken by Nouwen in much of his pastoral theology.¹ Nouwen's devotion to a phenomenological attitude in his pastoral work can be directly linked to his studies in psychology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen between 1957 and 1964.² This period in Nouwen's life has been described by Higgins and Burns as years of great 'growth and discovery.'³ Nouwen was taught a particular form of phenomenological psychology founded by Frederik J.J. Buytendijk (1887-1974).⁴ Buytendijk, a Dutch Catholic intellectual *par excellence*, was considered the central pioneering figure of the phenomenological movement in the Netherlands, and of the Utrecht School (as it came to be known) of phenomenological psychology.⁵

In this chapter I will identify a number of Dutch Catholic Intellectuals, and others who held advisory roles within their intellectual circles, and who were involved in the Dutch phenomenological psychology movement. We can find the ideas, theories and methods of these major figures utilised in Nouwen's research projects and publications on the topic of homosexuality. Some of these intellectuals taught Nouwen at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, but all those to be identified were published academics whose writings were widely circulated among, or easily accessible to, Dutch Catholic clergy such as Nouwen at that time. Anton Boisen (not a Dutch Catholic intellectual but someone promoted by them), who

¹ Higgins & Burns, *Genius Born of Anguish*, 29.

² A number of large files, containing course notes and assignments associated with Nouwen's Psychology Degree, are found in the 'Education Series' among the fonds (papers) at the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center which confirm the findings of Higgins and Ford.

³ Higgins & Burns, *Impressively Free*, 72.

⁴ Simons & Winkeler, *Het Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Buytendijk is listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

⁵ Spiegelberg, Herbert, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry: A Historical Introduction*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972, 281-300.

was the subject of two incomplete doctoral dissertations by Nouwen, was another who had a profound effect upon his pastoral approach. Boisen's phenomenological approach to pastoral care, which treated those ministered to as 'living human documents,' was a method which Nouwen incorporated into his own pastoral ministry. This led to a particular attitude we find among his writings on homosexuality; that homosexual men and women were 'worthy of intensive study and as capable of revealing profound new religious insight as the Bible or any theological textbook or tome.'⁶ Buytendijk, too, taught that this personal, sympathetic form of encounter could be revelatory, opening new meanings within the phenomenal world, and contributing to one's knowledge of existence. Indeed, these findings have the potential to challenge pre-conceived Christian doctrines and offer the opportunity to expand existing paradigms, described later in this chapter as a form of 'spiritual seeing.'

Nouwen and Phenomenology

Using interviews with people who knew Nouwen, in their 2012 biography Higgins and Burns highlighted the phenomenological approach taken by Nouwen in much of his work. They interviewed Peter Naus, an old friend of Nouwen's who also studied psychology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen around the same time as him. Naus met Nouwen during his first year of studies in 1957, while Naus himself was in his third year; this marked the beginning of a life-long friendship and a common interest in phenomenology. As Higgins and Burns noted:

Neither was inclined to a quantitative, empirical methodology, nor to an abstract philosophical paradigm that neglected the concrete and the personal. They were both keen on phenomenological psychology, an approach dependent on the insights of the philosopher Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology ... They both came not only to be enthralled by the methodology but to incorporate it in their professional work.⁷

⁶ Dykstra, Robert. 'Classic Images of Care' in Robert Dykstra. *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings*, St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005, 16.

⁷ Higgins & Burns, *Genius Born of Anguish*, 29.

Naus recalled to Burns and Higgins the influence he believed Nouwen's phenomenological training had on his pastoral theology:

Henri understood the motto of phenomenology – “go back to the thing itself” – as a summons to retrieve, relive, the original experience. His writings betray his phenomenological bias as he tries to get into the experience of anxiety, the experience of being in a competitive relationship, etc. He thinks and feels as a phenomenologist and not as a behaviorist; as a clinical psychologist he was trained to get into the experience of the patient ...⁸

In Burns's 2016 solo biography of Nouwen, Naus further described Nouwen as 'major[ing] in psychology from day one,' implying that it was something which informed his whole life and ministry.⁹ Furthermore, Higgins has noted that Nouwen's introduction to phenomenological psychology was 'an approach that appealed to his immense capacity for empathy, and would define his spiritual writing, interlacing Scripture and prayer with psychological insight and practice.'¹⁰ This ability of Nouwen's to get into the experience of the patient and map out that experience from the inside is important to note when we explore later in this thesis Nouwen's direct contact with homosexual persons.

Edmund Husserl and his Phenomenological Method

As noted earlier by Higgins and Burns, phenomenological psychology is based on the insights of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Originally set out in his 1913 publication *Ideas*, and subsequently expanded upon during the course of his life, Husserl's phenomenology is best described as a qualitative research method.¹¹ Using a procedure called an *epoché*, an ancient Greek term describing an abstention or suspension of judgement from influences which could potentially short-circuit or bias description, it is a return 'to the

⁸ Higgins & Burns, *Genius Born of Anguish*, 29.

⁹ Burns, *Henri Nouwen, His Life and Spirit*, 7

¹⁰ Higgins, Michael. 'Priest, Writer, Mentor, Misfit; Understanding Henri Nouwen,' *Commonweal* 143:20 (2016): 13. Accessed April 16, 2021.

https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=mission_pub.

¹¹ Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, [1913] 2012.

thing itself.’ In this process, prior scientific assumptions or naïve beliefs are set aside or bracketed; the concept simply suspends received science or theory for the sake of fresh research access to the matter being investigated. Importantly, as Maurice Natanson explains, ‘the *epoché* is the clue to phenomenological method to the extent that it points to the kind of descriptive neutrality phenomenology encourages. Presentations and not interpretations become the central object of concern.’¹² The *epoché*, therefore, is a necessary precursor in all phenomenological research, as described by Dorian Cairns:

No opinion is to be accepted as philosophical knowledge unless it is seen to be adequately established by observation of what is seen to be itself given “in person.” Any belief seen to be incompatible with what is seen to be itself given is to be rejected. Toward opinions that fall in neither class – whether they be one’s own or another’s – one is to adopt an “official” philosophical attitude of neutrality.¹³

The ‘*epoché*,’ ‘bracketing,’ ‘suspension of a received science or theory,’ ‘a philosophical attitude of neutrality’ all describe the Husserlian method of ‘getting back to the thing itself.’ This methodological approach was well known to Nouwen, as is evidenced by his copious notes on the phenomenological method found within his class notes held at the Henri Nouwen J.M. Archive and Research Center.¹⁴

Frederik J.J. Buytendijk

Surprisingly, although Buytendijk became the central figure of Utrecht school of phenomenological psychology, he had no formal training in psychology, being an animal biologist by profession. Certainly, Buytendijk’s background in animal biology and interest in philosophical anthropology had a considerable impact on his development of a phenomenological psychology and its application. Roger Smith recalls that Buytendijk

¹² Natanson, Maurice, ‘Introduction’ in Maurice Natanson (ed). *Essays in Phenomenology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, 11.

¹³ Natanson, ‘Introduction,’ 11.

¹⁴ See files under ‘Education Series’ among the fonds (papers) at the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center.

wanted to know human beings in what he called their 'innerness'; similarly, he wanted to observe animals as they express themselves in their distinctive ways of life, and this, he argued, requires studying natural habitats not experiments. Knowledge of animals, he thought, presupposes our own experience of the human situation. Animal studies must have a foundation in general psychology, and general psychology must address the human condition – the meaning being in the world has for each person.¹⁵

Buytendijk, therefore, as the central figure in a circle of Catholic intellectuals which met regularly for mutual support and discussion, encouraged a united resistance to the positivist deterioration of psychology. They distanced themselves from scientific and non-phenomenological forms of psychology, believing these did not address the human condition, nor the 'innerness' of a person; they were deemed 'brutal and superficial' forms of psychology.¹⁶ Comparing natural scientific psychology with their form of phenomenological psychology, Buytendijk described the difference as follows:

The living creature, owned by no one but himself, does not need to become the prey of the psychologist that he tears apart and digests or conserves and pins down in solid concepts. The inner, like everything living which encounters us, can also become beloved, be looked at and cared for tenderly.¹⁷

Max Scheler

This personal approach to phenomenology, as adopted by Buytendijk and the Utrecht School of Catholic intellectuals, was largely derived from Max Scheler, the German intellectual, philosopher and phenomenologist. Buytendijk's friendship with Max Scheler had a lasting

¹⁵ Smith, Roger, *Between Mind and Nature, A History of Psychology*. London: Reaktion Books, 2013, 158.

¹⁶ Dehue, Trudy. *Changing the Rules: Psychology in the Netherlands, 1900-1985*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 65.

¹⁷ Buytendijk, F.J.J., *Het Kennen van de Innerlijkheid* [Knowing the Innerness] (inaugural lecture at Utrecht) (Nijmegen and Utrecht: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1947), 18, cited in Dehue, *Changing the Rules*, 65.

effect on his phenomenological thinking.¹⁸ Scheler had impressed Buytendijk because his form of phenomenology was unique, based upon an ethical personalism, and emphasised the concrete lived experience. Importantly for Scheler, this was an experience which involved the whole person, involving not only one's emotions, but the need for sympathy towards others, avoiding the will to impose or dominate subjective opinions in the process. For Scheler, 'the phenomenologist attends to the personal way of viewing things and hence must purify his own heart before he can attend properly to intuiting things.'¹⁹ Scheler, due to his interest in personalism, also held an on-going interest in ethical matters, which highlighted in particular the importance of the *person*, something which he believed was missing in Husserlian phenomenology.²⁰ Another aspect of Scheler's work which impressed Buytendijk was his unique approach to phenomenology. Moran and Mooney explain that Scheler 'championed the notion of phenomenology as an *attitude* rather than a method, a *moral attitude* of radical honesty – a return to living intuition – specifically, an "attitude of spiritual seeing".'²¹

More Attitude than Method

This notion of a phenomenological attitude rather than a method has been highlighted in a study of Buytendijk and the Utrecht School by Trudy Dehue. Discussing the methodological basis of the identity of the Utrecht School, she reports that in lectures, students were taught that 'one does not just "become" a phenomenological psychologist, but that it required a process of maturing; the students were the chosen few who would belong to a select group bearing great responsibilities.'²² For Buytendijk and the Utrecht School, therefore, the phenomenological process was more a state of mind than a systematic research method. This 'state of mind,' which undoubtedly students like Nouwen were encouraged to adopt, is described by Dehue, and is worth quoting at length:

¹⁸ Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology*, 282; Dehue, *Changing the Rules*, 73.

¹⁹ Moran, Dermot & Timothy Mooney. 'Max Scheler (1874-1928) Introduction,' in Dermot Moran & Timothy Mooney (eds). *The Phenomenology Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2002, 201.

²⁰ Moran & Mooney, 'Max Scheler,' 201.

²¹ Moran & Mooney, 'Max Scheler,' 201. The term an 'attitude of spiritual seeing' appeared in Scheler's 1913 essay 'Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition.'

²² Dehue, *Changing the Rules*, 65.

According to the Utrecht School, one did not become a phenomenological psychologist with the help of manuals on methods and techniques, but rather by becoming a more mature type of person, with a natural insight into and an unforced choice for the good. In this way one acquired the capacity to really understand. That capacity does not express itself in the gathering of data but is characterized by a loving participation in what exists and, in the case of psychology, in the existence of other human beings. In this context, the other arrives at self-knowledge and full humanity through dialogue with the psychologist. Liberation from fears and feelings of guilt should encourage people no longer to transgress morality out of incompetence, or keep rules out of blind obedience, but to choose freely that which is the purpose of life.²³

Thus, the ultimate goal of the Utrecht School of psychology was always to lead a person towards their full humanity. Full humanity, in this instance, was defined as ‘the capacity to choose freely for the good, without the duress of guilt and punishment through the internalization of morality,’²⁴ a theme that we will meet later in this chapter and which dramatically influenced the Dutch Catholic mental health movement.

Phenomenology of the Encounter

This concept of ‘loving participation’ adopted by the therapist in his approach to the client can be explained by Buytendijk’s phenomenological approach to ‘the encounter.’ Herbert Spiegelberg has described this phenomenology of the encounter as ‘almost the hallmark of Buytendijk’s entire enterprise,’ and certainly a book which was dedicated to Buytendijk in honour of his seventy-fifth birthday, entitled *Rencontre/Encounter/Begegnung*, attests to this view.²⁵ This concept of the ‘encounter’ became an important motif among the Utrecht School of phenomenologists, and was a theme which gained much popularity in the 1950s. For

²³ Dehue, *Changing the Rules*, 68.

²⁴ Dehue, *Changing the Rules*, 70.

²⁵ Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology*, 293; See Langeveld, M.J. (ed). *Rencontre/Encounter/Begegnung: Contributions a une psychologie humaine dédiées au Professeur F.J.J. Buytendijk* [Encounter: Contributions to a Psychology of Human Behaviour Dedicated to F.J.J Buytendijk. Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1957.

Buytendijk, it was through the encounter that one was able to gain an authentic knowledge of the 'innerness' of the other.²⁶

In his *Phénoménologie de la Rencontre* (Phenomenology of the Encounter), Buytendijk attributes the origin of the idea of the encounter to the writings of the Swiss existential psychiatrist, Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966), and the French existentialists Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973).²⁷ It appears Buytendijk was inspired by Binswanger's concept of *Daseinsanalyse*, based in turn on the anthropological phenomenology of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). *Dasein* (German: *da* 'there'; *sein* 'being') or 'being-in-the-world' was a fundamental concept in the philosophy of Heidegger. Being-in-the-world describes human existence as contextual; one is embedded in a world, with human existence consisting of engagement with that world. For Heidegger, the very essence of psychology was 'to study the characteristic modes of a person's being-in-the-world,' because he believed that 'if people are estranged from their own being, they go through life alienated and psychologically fragmented, ultimately falling into a psychotic existence.'²⁸ For Buytendijk, therefore, in order to gain knowledge of someone through the encounter, it was necessary to start from the relationship of being, which connects our own *Dasein* with the *Dasein* of the other. This, he states, involves an 'engaged consciousness' (as envisaged by Merleau-Ponty), and 'being-in-a-situation' (as developed in the thought of Gabriel Marcel).²⁹

But most importantly, it is within *Phenomenology of the Encounter* that we first meet the term *disponibilité* (used in a philosophical sense) among the writings of the Dutch Catholic intellectual movement; a concept originally attributed to Gabriel Marcel, and to be discussed in more detail in the following chapter within the context of the Dutch Catholic Mental Health Movement.

²⁶ Smith, *Between Mind*, 158.

²⁷ Buytendijk, F.J.J. *Phénoménologie de la Rencontre* [Phenomenology of the Encounter]. Translated into French by Jean Knapp. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1952, 11.

²⁸ Brennan, James, *History and Systems of Psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982, 309.

²⁹ Buytendijk, *Phénoménologie*, 11.

Loving Encounter and *Disponibilité*

The condition for an authentic encounter, Buytendijk writes, 'can be circumscribed, in an approximate way, as a *disponibilité* (as an availability),' qualified by him further as 'an intervention, a notification, a source of obligations for oneself and others, in the representation of existence within the human community.'³⁰ Importantly, Buytendijk believes that an

in-depth analysis of this condition may help us to distinguish genuine encounters from those which are only apparent ... An in-depth study of the encounter must have as its object the rich variety of encounters that occur every day in the human community, whether intended or due to chance, and must seek the meaningful contents of these events.³¹

For Buytendijk, therefore, the encounter is not 'a fact capable of being observed and described by a disinterested spectator of human activity.' By implication, and in the context of his use of the term *disponibilité* in the aforementioned sentence, the concept of *disponibilité* becomes the state of being required in order to observe human activity and describe it phenomenologically. As such, Buytendijk goes on to speak of the personal, sympathetic encounter being the vehicle by which the phenomenal world is opened up to new meanings, contributing to our knowledge of existence.³²

Admittedly, Buytendijk's phenomenology of the encounter is not always an easy concept to grasp. R.H.J. ter Meulen has provided a helpful summary of Buytendijk's theories about this matter. He notes Buytendijk's view that an authentic encounter must not remain on the surface but can only take place 'by completely displacing oneself in the *Dasein* of the other,' and that he attaches great importance to the role of the body in the encounter. For Buytendijk, 'every relationship between people takes place through their body, which is why he believes that the phenomenology of the encounter should start with an investigation into

³⁰ Buytendijk, *Phénoménologie*, 8.

³¹ Buytendijk, *Phénoménologie*, 8, 9.

³² Buytendijk, *Phénoménologie*, 9.

the way in which a human being relates to the other in their body.’ Furthermore, ter Meulen notes:

Buytendijk considers the most fundamental characteristic of the encounter to be the fact that in this relationship a human being comes to the full development of their existence. In dialogue with the other, a human being is confronted with themselves and their design of existence, through which they can reclaim themselves and grow into full humanity. In the loving dialogue and the accompanying physical communication of gesture and body posture, the *Dasein* of the other is awakened and stimulated to self-realisation.³³

A further explanation of Buytendijk’s ‘self-realisation’ is provided in a lecture he gave entitled *Persoon en Ontmoeting* (Person and Meeting) published in 1954. In it he states that the psychologist’s job is to attempt to build a bridge to the innermost being of their client in order to assist them with their own self-discovery. This encounter, therefore, helps establish a free response from the client, making them aware of their existential choices in a spirit of and responsibility. In such an existential encounter, a human being is brought to self-knowledge in order to establish a sense of authentic existence. As Buytendijk explains: ‘The inner self is only knowable when it chooses to express itself freely,’ when it arises ‘from the darkness of sorrow, lack of freedom and guilt, to a new and full life, in order to return to the community in which its personhood was formerly hidden.’³⁴

Carl Rogers and the Utrecht School

For some Catholic Intellectuals involved in the Utrecht School, ideas around the phenomenology of the encounter offered the ideological background for the introduction of Carl Rogers’ (1902-1987) non-directive, client-centred approach in psychology. The archival records show that Nouwen first writes about Carl Rogers in his 1963 unpublished minor thesis

³³ ter Meulen, R.H.J. *Zeil en Zaligheid: De receptie van de psychologie en van de psychoanalyse onder de katholieken in Nederland 1900-1965* [Soul and Salvation: The Reception of Psychology and Psychoanalysis Among Catholics in the Netherlands 1900-1965]. Nijmegen: Katholieke Studiecentrum, 1988, 210, 211.

³⁴ Buytendijk, F.J.J. ‘Persoon en Ontmoeting [Person and Meeting],’ *Tijdschrift voor Strafrecht*, 1954. Cited by ter Meulen, *Zeil en Zaligheid*, 211.

Een Onderzoek Betreffende de Pastorale Vorming van Legeeraalmoezeniers (An Investigation Concerning the Pastoral Training of Army Chaplains) noting his role in the development of the American pastoral training movement.³⁵ Rogers was an advocate of humanistic psychology, a form of American psychology closely aligned with Dutch phenomenological psychology and sharing its phenomenological approach. Nouwen noted that the aim of non-directive, client-centred psychotherapy was to release 'the healing powers that lives in man.' The motto of client-centred therapy, he stated, was: 'To help the patient to be himself.' He observed the 'striking eagerness' with which Rogers' theories were taken up by theologians and pastoralists involved in pastoral psychology and training.³⁶

In his 1949 article 'The development of clinical psychology in America', D.J. van Lennep (1896-1972), a colleague of Buytendijk's at Utrecht University, championed Rogers' client-centred therapy in the Netherlands after coming into contact with the technique. He noted that the goal of this therapy was to bring the client 'to an independent solution of their conflicts, to a freer and more autonomous attitude to life, and to an acceptance of themselves and the environment.' For van Lennep, this was a paradigmatic example of a 'phenomenological attitude who hardly has an equal.'³⁷ A student and later colleague of van Lennep, Benjamin J. Kouwer (1921-1968) was also an advocate for Rogers' client-centred approach, believing its emphasis on self-discovery was a marked improvement on the more subjective approach found in much clinical psychology. He noted that in Rogerian therapy, the onus is on the client to find and implement the solution to their own problems; it was not the therapist's job to pronounce some kind of salvific message, thus relieving the client of any responsibility. In this way the client was in charge of building their own existence with the support of the therapist, but in such a way that the client was provided with a non-judgemental environment to gradually gain self-insight and find their own way out of their difficulties. According to Kouwer, this path of self-discovery is superior to other forms of psychotherapy because the client has ownership of the solution, learning to accept what they have chosen as 'their'

³⁵ Nouwen, Henri. *Een onderzoek betreffende de pastorale vorming van legeraalmoezeniers* [An Investigation Concerning the Pastoral Training of Army Chaplains]. (Thesis, Catholic University of Nijmegen, 1963). Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Education Series, Box 286/File 301.

³⁶ Nouwen, *Een onderzoek betreffende*, 62, 63.

³⁷ van Lennep, D.J. 'De ontwikkeling van de klinische psychologie in Amerika [The Development of Clinical Psychology in America],' *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor de Psychologie en haar Grensgebieden* 4 (1949): 216, 217, quoted in ter Meulen, *Zeil en Zaligheid*, 212.

solution, which they take responsibility for.³⁸ As a form of psychotherapy, it can be argued that Rogers' client-centred therapy, in many respects, lacks a coherent method, but this would explain precisely why it was favoured among some members of the Utrecht circle. Once again it resembles more an attitude than a method, an attitude one adopts in the personal encounter.

Rogers and Availability

Like Buytendijk, Rogers also spoke of the concept of availability in his 1961 publication *On Becoming a Person*.³⁹ In Rogers' opinion, and based on his extensive research with clients in clinical therapy, availability is closely aligned with the condition of congruence, a state of being that must be adopted by a therapist, who ought to maintain a genuine, open and integrated authenticity during client interactions. This offers the client the freedom to be himself or herself, facilitating change and self-realisation. As Rogers writes:

We have coined the term "congruence" to try to describe this condition. By this we mean that the feelings the therapist is experiencing are *available* to him, *available* to his awareness, and his is able to live these feelings, be them, and able to communicate them if appropriate ... [T]he more he is able to be the complexity of his feelings, without fear, the higher the degree of his congruence. [Italics mine].⁴⁰

For Rogers, a sense of availability on the part of the therapist facilitates a change of attitude in the client, because the therapist is able to communicate effectively who they are themselves, and in so doing, create an environment of mutual trust and acceptability. We can say, therefore, that a therapist's availability creates a sense of availability also in the client. Availability, in this sense, although initially directed inwardly towards oneself, is ultimately directed outwards towards the other, in the hope of cultivating another's self-availability. It becomes, therefore, a reciprocal action. As described further by Rogers:

³⁸ ter Meulen, *Zeil en Zaligheid*, 213.

³⁹ Rogers, C. *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. London: Constable, 1961.

⁴⁰ Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 61.

The reactions of the client who experiences for a time the kind of therapeutic relationship which I have described are a reciprocal of the therapist's attitudes. In the first place, as he finds someone else listening acceptantly to his feelings, he little by little becomes able to listen to himself ... As he becomes more open to what is going on within him he becomes able to listen to feelings which he has always denied and repressed.⁴¹

This importantly enables clients to become more accepting of themselves, able to express their more hidden aspects through the therapist 'showing a consistent and unconditional positive regard for him and his feelings.' In Rogers' opinion, the concept of availability allows someone 'to move forward in the process of becoming,' to achieve a greater sense of congruence, to come out from behind their facade, to drop their defensive behaviour, and to become more truly what they truly are. 'As these changes occur,' Rogers writes, 'as he becomes more self-aware, more self-acceptant, less defensive and more open, he finds that he is at last free to change and grow in the directions natural to the human organism.' Essentially, what happens in client-centred therapy is that the client is encouraged to change, to reorganise the concept they have of themselves, moving away from notions of unworthiness, unacceptability, and instead moving towards the idea that they are a person of worth, self-directing, and able to form standards and values based on their own experience. Furthermore, psychological maturity is established, tension and anxiety are reduced, and 'the discrepancy between the self that he is and the self that he wants to be is greatly diminished.'⁴²

Like Buytendijk, Rogers' client-centred therapy, in a methodological sense, supports the idea of a phenomenological attitude one takes, which, I believe, is akin to Scheler's 'attitude of spiritual seeing,' and is distinct from the type of clear-cut method common in phenomenological investigations. This would explain why it was keenly adopted as a phenomenological approach by certain Utrecht School intellectuals and their colleagues.

⁴¹ Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 63.

⁴² Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 63-65.

Anton Boisen and the Pastoral Turn

As Rogers' client-centred approach caught on in the Netherlands, so too did the clinical pastoral movement (a form of education which taught pastoral care to clergy and other pastoral workers), adopted from the United States with rising popularity in the late 1950s and into the 1960s. Its approach was championed by Han Fortmann (1912-1970),⁴³ a Catholic intellectual who taught at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, and who was a highly influential figure in Nouwen's early academic training as a pastoral theologian.⁴⁴ In a 1957 article published in the journal *Dux*, Fortmann considered pastoral counselling an important means of restoring order for individuals in social chaos believing that 'every priest must master the mentality of counselling and in particular the attitude of "giving space to the other."' Pastoral counselling's core wisdom, in his view, was that 'people learn to solve their own problems.'⁴⁵ Pastoral counselling soon formed an important part of the curriculum at the Catholic University of Nijmegen under the leadership of Fortmann, with the implementation of a Master's program in pastoral theology in 1964. The study of Anton Boisen (1876-1965), generally considered the father of the clinical pastoral education movement, became the topic of Nouwen's two incomplete doctoral dissertations while he was living in the Netherlands.

Nouwen's unpublished research found its way into two published articles which he authored: 'Anton T. Boisen and Theology through Living Human Documents' (based partly on an interview Nouwen had with Boisen in August, 1964), and 'Boisen and the Case Method.'⁴⁶ These alone offer a particular insight into the unique impact Boisen's research (as a psychiatric chaplain) had upon Nouwen's own pastoral theology.

Boisen's own life was characterised by periods of mental illness, which at the age of forty-four led to his hospitalisation in a psychiatric facility at Westboro State Hospital. Some fifteen

⁴³ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Fortmann is listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

⁴⁴ Beumer, *Henri Nouwen*, 24.

⁴⁵ ter Meulen, *Zeil en Zaligheid*, 169.

⁴⁶ Nouwen, Henri. 'Anton T. Boisen and Theology through Living Human Documents,' *Pastoral Psychology* September (1968): 49-63; Nouwen, Henri. 'Boisen and the Case Method,' *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 67:1 (Winter 1977): 12-32.

years later, in 1936, he published his first book, *The Exploration of the Inner World*, and towards the end of his life in 1960, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience*, both theological memoirs which give us an insight into the origins of his pastoral theology. Boisen became convinced that his own struggles, and indeed those experienced by other mental health patients, were spiritual in origin. Therefore, he believed that successful treatment of psychiatric patients was only made possible by taking their spiritual and philosophical concerns into account.⁴⁷ As Higgins and Burns have noted: 'Boisen entered Nouwen's bloodstream,'⁴⁸ becoming hugely influential in his life and work. It was Boisen's particular pastoral approach which Nouwen found compelling.

The Living Human Document

Due to his belief in the spiritual nature of his own struggles, and those of his fellow mental health patients, it was Boisen's conviction that appropriately trained and theologically educated ministers were needed in pastoral care situations, to explore with the patient their confusing inner world in order to make sense of it. It was in this sense that every patient had the potential of becoming a 'living human document,' someone who was 'worthy of intensive study and as capable of revealing profound new religious insight as the Bible or any theological textbook or tome.'⁴⁹ As Boisen once said: 'Theological students should have the opportunity to go to firsthand sources for their knowledge of human nature. I want them to learn to read living human documents as well as books.'⁵⁰

In his first book, *Intimacy: Pastoral Psychological Essays*, Nouwen acknowledges the need for an 'empirical theology' and the debt he owes Boisen for this insight. As he explains, pastors find 'one of the main sources for their theological understanding' in those they work with every day. For Nouwen, 'the priest is confronted every day with living human documents, and if he is able to read and understand them and make them a constant source for his theological

⁴⁷ Nouwen, 'Boisen & Living Human Documents'; Nouwen, 'Boisen & the Case Method.'

⁴⁸ Higgins & Burns, *Genius Born of Anguish*, 33.

⁴⁹ Dykstra, Robert. 'Classic Images of Care', 16.

⁵⁰ Boisen, Anton. 'The Living Human Document' (1936) in Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care*, 29.

reflection, his life can always be new, surprising, inspiring and creative.’ This means the parish becomes ‘a field of research for the priest as the hospital is for the doctor.’⁵¹

In the fifth chapter, when we analyse Nouwen’s studies on homosexuality, we will see his research method in action. For now, it is appropriate to say that the subjects of Nouwen’s pastoral research were indeed respected and treated as ‘living human documents.’ Nouwen’s interest in Boisen gave him the means to implement the phenomenological approach he loved so much, learnt during his time at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. This has been strongly argued by Higgins and Burns in their Nouwen biography:

Nouwen found in Boisen’s use of the case method a way of deploying his own phenomenological approach (appropriated during his Nijmegen years), of inserting himself into the experience of others, of attending to the living human documents in a way that brought into a creative symbiosis the psychological needs and the spiritual needs of his clients.⁵²

Petrus J.A. Calon and Joseph J.G. Prick

While Nouwen undertook his post-graduate studies at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, he was taught a unique form of psychology which called for the humanisation of sexuality by two prominent professors and Catholic intellectuals, Petrus J.A. Calon (1905-1973) and Joseph J.G. Prick (1909-1978), who worked closely together for much of their career.⁵³ Calon taught a form of developmental psychology which incorporated a number of elements borrowed from depth psychology, neo-Thomistic philosophy, phenomenological psychology, existentialism and personalism.⁵⁴ Buytendijk’s influence upon Calon’s approach to psychology is evident. Hanneke Westhoff described him as a thoroughly engaging speaker, whose meticulously prepared lectures and tutorials were considered instructive and revelatory.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Nouwen, Henri. *Intimacy: Pastoral Psychological Essays*. Notre Dame, IND: Fides Publishers, 1969, 137, 138.

⁵² Higgins & Burns, *Genius Born of Anguish*, 32.

⁵³ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Calon and Prick are listed as two of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

⁵⁴ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 282.

⁵⁵ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 284.

The contents of his lectures were frequently discussed among his students, particularly by those who were also involved in the activities of the Dutch Catholic mental health movement, and were often viewed as real eye openers.⁵⁶ One topic which caught their imagination in particular was Calon's belief that certain forms of religious education which involved rigid moral beliefs could cause serious psychological damage, even neurotic tendencies in some individuals.⁵⁷ This was most evident, in his opinion, in the area of sexual morality, where a religious education which deliberately set sexuality apart from other aspects of the self could play a disturbing role in one's development. Calon would outline in his lectures why certain events and situations in one's developmental phases (what he referred to as the 'psychological life curve of man') could hinder the healthy growth of the human personality. His attack on the rigidity of Catholic moral teaching was controversial, but his presentation of the facts was difficult for many to ignore. Such an attitude, he believed, was not only apparent in Catholic education, but could also be found among the works of spiritual writers and moral textbooks.⁵⁸

As Westhoff reports, for many clergy, Calon's approach 'offered them a way out of a pastoral dilemma, which they and their colleagues constantly encountered in the practice of pastoral care, and with which they personally struggled in many cases.'⁵⁹ Matters regarding sexuality remained among the most significant subjects mentioned in the confessional, including homosexual behaviour, and it was Calon's own form of developmental psychology which gave his priest-students a solution to their problem. Rather than focus exclusively on behaviour and outward actions as a source of psychological problems when assessing the moral culpability of a person, one was to take into account the development of the person, and the important effect this would have had on their moral behaviour.

Prick, who was Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the medical faculty at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, also taught Nouwen, and would become the examiner of his major 1963 thesis *Homosexualiteit, Een pastoraal psychologische studie over homoseksuele*

⁵⁶ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 284, 287.

⁵⁷ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 284.

⁵⁸ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 284.

⁵⁹ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 285.

adolescenten (Homosexuality: A pastoral psychological study on adolescent homosexuals), to be discussed in chapter six.⁶⁰ Like Calon, with whom he often collaborated and co-published a number of works, he synthesised a phenomenological approach within his psychiatry. He too did not shy away from discussions involving the negative psychological effects of a rigid Catholic moral theology.⁶¹ Of particular note was his approach to Freudian psychology, and his attempt to place it within a Catholic framework. Although he appreciated much of Freud's psychoanalytical discoveries, he felt that in his psychology, in particular, sexuality had been granted too autonomous and imperative a role. Instead, Prick argued for an approach in which 'all' influences involved in the development of one's sexuality ought to be weighed in upon. Prick, therefore, saw one's sexuality as a developmental process, but importantly regulated by one's intellect and also involving one's free will.⁶² In order to understand sexuality more fully, Prick taught his students the importance of a person's biographical history in determining the reasons for any psychological problems.⁶³ It is evident that Calon's form of developmental psychology played a part in Prick's thinking.

Prick's developmental perspective on sexuality was able to bring the subject to the fore, removing many of the taboos which existed around the subject and bringing a more positive approach. For Prick, sexuality was something which must be integrated into the whole of one's personality, which ought to be 'humanised' in all respects (certainly an approach taken up by Nouwen).⁶⁴ As Pieterman points out, in Prick's opinion:

Sexuality is a typically human value, and in education, children should be guided in such a way that they find their ideal path that leads to self-realisation. If this

⁶⁰ The original typed version of this thesis is held at the *Katholieke Documentatie Centrum* (Catholic Document Centre) Radboud University, Nijmegen (formerly the Catholic University of Nijmegen). It was sent to Prick for examination and forms part of his archival collection (File PRIC-33).

⁶¹ Keijser, Antoine. 'Grensverkenningen in de Geneeskunde: Een thematische inleiding tot de bibliographie van prof. dr. J.J.G. Prick [Frontier Explorations in Medicine: A Thematic Introduction to the Bibliography of Prof. Dr. J.J.G. Prick]' in Antoine Keijser, *Prof. dr. J.J.G. Prick (1909-1978): Een werkzaam leven* [Prof. Dr. J.J.G. Prick: A Working Life]. Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2009, 18, 22.

⁶² Keijser, 'Grensverkenningen,' 23; Pieterman, A.P.J. 'Een volmenselijke psychiatrie: perspectieven op het leven en werk van professor J.J.G. Prick neuroloog-psychiater te Nijmegen van mei 1940 tot juli 1978 [A Fully Human Psychiatry: Perspectives on the Life and Work of Professor J.J.G. Prick neurologist-psychiatrist in Nijmegen from May 1940 to July 1978]. (Thesis at University of Groningen, 2001), 114. Copy held at the *Katholieke Documentatie Centrum*, Radboud University, Nijmegen.

⁶³ Keijser, 'Grensverkenningen,' 31.

⁶⁴ Pieterman, 'Volmenselijke psychiatrie,' 117.

process goes well, they will later be able to take care of themselves. Instead of following an authoritarian standard, they will be able to choose freely for themselves.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The kind of phenomenological approach taught by the Utrecht School intellectuals is more akin to an attitude which one chooses to adopt, rather than an empirical research method. This leaves us with a rather interesting question: in reality, how might Nouwen, who is said to ‘think and feel’ as a phenomenologist, have practiced the kind of phenomenology he was taught during his Nijmegen years? Certainly, maintaining a phenomenological attitude while conducting research projects is part of it; Nouwen’s approach is perhaps better described in Scheler’s terms as ‘an attitude of spiritual seeing.’⁶⁶ Treating subjects being researched as ‘living human documents’ is obviously another. But more importantly I believe we witness in Nouwen’s research projects on homosexuality the concept of *disponibilité* (availability) in action, present in Buytendijk’s concept of ‘the loving encounter’ and Rogers’ ‘client-centred therapy.’ Buytendijk believed that *disponibilité* became the state of being required in order to observe human activity and describe it phenomenologically. This, then, is more than just an attitude of mind, and is best described as a virtue, or human quality (in the sense in which Marcel uses the term), which one needs not only to become a well-adjusted person, but in order to be open to oneself and others, so that they too are offered the space to be open to themselves and others. This attitude in turn, when we consider Rogers’ concept of availability, allows a person to move forward in the process of becoming, achieving a greater sense of congruence, and importantly leading a person to full humanity in a spirit of freedom and responsibility.

In addition, we learn that as a student of Professors Calon and Prick, Nouwen was taught a unique form of psychology, one which called for the humanisation of sexuality, where sexuality needed to be integrated into the whole of one’s personality in order to maintain

⁶⁵ Pieterman, ‘Volmenselijke psychiatrie,’ 117.

⁶⁶ Although outside the limitations of this thesis, within Nouwen’s archival papers there is certainly potential for further research regarding the effect of this attitudinal shift within the therapeutic space, particularly as it pertains to Nouwen’s final years working as a chaplain at the L’Arche Daybreak Community, Toronto, Canada.

psychological health. This involved the rejection of certain forms of rigid moral beliefs due to the serious psychological damage they could cause. Priests were called upon in their pastoral deliberations to take into account the development of a person, and the important effect certain events and situations had on their moral behaviour. This pastoral approach most certainly called for a phenomenological attitude. As we will see in the following chapter, other Catholic intellectuals involved in the Dutch Catholic mental health movement were to adopt a similar approach, whereby the concept of *innerlijke disponibiliteit* (inner availability or self-availability) and *innerlijke vrijheid* (inner freedom) became a central theme to address the mental health needs of the Catholic population of the Netherlands.

Chapter 3

The Dutch Catholic Mental Health Movement

Introduction

As we will see in more detail in Chapter 5, an analysis of Nouwen's research projects and published essays on homosexuality reveals that they display ideas and theories which were prevalent in the writings of certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals working in the Dutch Catholic mental health movement, the concept of *innerlijke disponibiliteit* being the most important. It is my premise that these writings, to be identified and evaluated in this chapter, gave Nouwen the necessary theoretical framework to undertake his own studies in such matters. This framework, I believe, provided Nouwen with the ontological and epistemological tools to understand the human phenomenon of homosexuality: ontological, because the framework relates to the nature of reality and the 'way things are'; and epistemological, because the framework relates to 'how things work' in an assumed reality.¹ The following identification and analysis of these ontological and epistemological tools will help us to understand how by using them, Nouwen was able to move beyond existing studies of homosexuality and related pastoral issues. In addition, the findings of a particular pastoral care seminar held in 1970, a year before Nouwen published 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual,' will yield a further insight into the possible immediate origin of Nouwen's ideas contained within that essay.

From the outset it is important for me to acknowledge the extensive research undertaken by Hanneke Westhoff, whose 1996 published thesis *Geestelijke Bevrijders* ('Spiritual Liberators') has been the most comprehensive study of the Dutch Catholic mental health movement to date.² Her findings provided me with an appropriate and helpful inroad into the movement's copious publications, enabling me to identify and evaluate the material which places

¹ Jabareen, Yosef, 'Building a Conceptual Framework,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8:4 (2009): 51.

² Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*.

Nouwen's own research into homosexuality within a certain socio-political context. Importantly, she highlighted the prominent and extensive role played within this movement by several Catholic intellectuals, including Fredrick Buytendijk, Han Fortmann and André Snoeck, who are the three significant figures to be studied here. The term 'spiritual liberators,' coined by Westhoff, is an apt title to describe their role in the spiritual emancipation of Dutch Catholics. As we will see, certain ideas developed by these three men, in particular, appear to have played a major role in the formation of Nouwen's pastoral approach to homosexual men and women.

During the 1950s, Dutch Catholicism witnessed a changing attitude towards mental health care, best described as a 'therapeutic turn' in its pastoral provision. These changes, gradual to begin with, gained momentum as the decade advanced. Certain Catholic intellectuals or 'spiritual liberators' emerged: men like Buytendijk, Fortmann and Snoeck became the main Catholic opinion leaders in mental health care; they were instrumental in influencing many of the moral developments and innovations which emerged within Dutch Catholicism in the 1950s and 1960s. Their influence upon the Dutch Catholic clergy was profound. Two concepts in particular arose within the work of these Catholic intellectuals and spiritual liberators, and were repeatedly emphasised by them as essential for good mental health. These same concepts were also recognised by Nouwen as lacking in many homosexual men and women at that time; namely *innerlijke disponibiliteit* (inner availability or self-availability) and *innerlijke vrijheid* (inner freedom), two closely related terms.

Within the therapeutic space, those who maintained *innerlijke vrijheid* and *innerlijke disponibiliteit* were persons who had the ability to reach their full human potential. This involved within an individual a sense of balance, well-being, flexibility, adaptability, and strength in resistance; humanising positive possessions which led to a state of moral freedom. However, when these virtues were lacking, then mental health issues could proliferate. These findings (by the aforementioned Dutch Catholic intellectuals) had a profound effect on the way pastoral care was offered, where the forced observance of narrow moralism was replaced by the transformative sense of one's inner freedom and one's own moral responsibility.

The Catholic Central Association for Mental Health

The emergence of Buytendijk as a leading intellectual in the Dutch Catholic mental health movement had far-reaching consequences for the renewal of Catholic mental health care. Originating in the United States at the turn of the last century, mental health care spread to Europe during the First World War. Dutch Catholics were at the forefront of the movement, founding the *R.K. Charitatieve Vereniging voor Geestelijke Volksgezondheid* (R.C. Charitable Society for Mental Health) in 1930.³ Its primary goal was to offer help and assistance to the mentally ill, starting from the view that the practice of one's faith and one's mental health were co-dependent phenomena; in its view, correct religious observance of laws and doctrines guaranteed mental health.⁴

In 1949, this approach to mental health was about to change. As the recently appointed chairman of the newly named *Katholieke Centrale Vereniging voor Geestelijke Volksgezondheid* (Catholic Central Association for Mental Health, known as the KCV), Buytendijk set about establishing his own unique approach to mental health care, inspired by his studies in anthropology and phenomenological psychology. Buytendijk believed that the primary goal of mental health care was the promotion of mental health in healthy people (as distinct from mentally ill people), and therefore that its primary mission ought to involve preventive measures. From the outset, Buytendijk established his core belief that mental health involved 'the highest dignity of a person'; such dignity was described psychologically, in terms of a person having possession of 'his or her freedom.'⁵ By 1952, at the annual meeting of the KCV, Buytendijk believed there was an urgent need (he described it as a 'state of emergency') for an extensive, in-depth and well-organised health care plan for the spiritual lives of Roman Catholics in the Dutch population. He called upon all priests, teachers, and general practitioners to gain a thorough knowledge of the mental health needs among the Catholic population, and to find the means to alleviate their suffering.⁶

³ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 643.

⁴ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 644.

⁵ Westhoff, Hanneke & Jan Roes. 'Seelische versus geistliche Fürsorge [Mental Versus Spiritual Care], *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 7:1 (1994): 146.

⁶ Buytendijk, F.J.J. 'De noodzak van de geestelijke gezondheidszorg voor het R.K. volksdeel [The Necessity of Mental Health Care for the Roman Catholic Part of the Population]' *R.K. Artsenblad* (July 1952) 171-176.

In the years that followed, Buytendijk would often expand on this psychological concept of 'freedom,' many of these reflections being published in a series of brochures sponsored by the KCV. Such brochures became the principal means by which the KCV educated and supplied information on mental health to Dutch Catholics.

KCV Brochures

Between 1952 and 1972, under the ongoing leadership and influence of Buytendijk, 41 KCV brochures were published through the Catholic publishing house, *Het Spectrum*. Their impact on Catholic thought was significant, especially when one considers that brochures were sent free of charge to members of the KCV, who numbered nearly 4,000 by the end of the 1950s, with an additional 1,000 copies sold in Dutch bookshops. Brochures were said to be eagerly received and read, particularly among the Catholic clergy.⁷ Topics for publication were drawn principally from papers delivered at KCV study days, in-house meetings and discussions, and keynote addresses given at annual general meetings, which by 1960, for example, involved in excess of 2,000 participants; Catholic intellectuals such as Buytendijk and Fortmann were the main contributors. The meetings generally involved discussions around the relationship between mental health, Christian salvation, and the Catholic faith, and often included topics such as sexuality and morality which had not been openly discussed in Catholic circles before. A recurring theme within these brochures, and of particular interest to this thesis, was the subject of *innerlijke vrijheid* and *Innerlijke disponibiliteit*.

Buytendijk and Inner Freedom

KCV brochures authored by Buytendijk often elaborated on the theme of inner freedom as the primary condition for mental health. *De Zin van de Vrijheid in het Menselijk Bestaan* (The Meaning of Freedom in Human Existence), published in 1958, was a collection of essays published as a KCV brochure, mostly based on Buytendijk's lectures, offering important observations on the subject of inner freedom and mental health. Another essay of interest is

⁷ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 61-264.

found in the 1967 brochure, *Vorming tot Vrouw* (The Formation of Woman), in which Buytendijk offered an essay entitled *De Vorming tot Vrijheid* (The Formation of Freedom).

In *De Zin van de Vrijheid in het Menselijk Bestaan*, Buytendijk established a connection between many of society's norms, an individual's lack of freedom, and a variety of mental health issues. He held that mental health was reliant on a number of anthropological categories, including 'influences arising from one's environment and education, the demands of social and family life, the moral norms that religion proposes, the way in which all this takes place, and the way in which each individual responds to this in the design of his or her world view.'⁸ As he now saw it, Buytendijk believed that the task of the Catholic mental health movement was to examine in detail the sociological background of someone suffering from a mental health issue; such situations were, in his opinion, often 'characterised by a tension between authority and compliance,' and thus resulted in an 'unfree submission.'⁹

The conflict which may exist within a person between authority and compliance, and the subsequent threat it entails to one's inner freedom, is a constant subject in this brochure. This involved none other than the question of one's moral freedom. Buytendijk explained that in his experience, many mental health issues could be traced back to one's childhood, perhaps as a result of a failed education. Children could often grow up experiencing 'morality as a hindrance to their freedom of movement,' and, as a result, this could lead to 'a caged existence.'¹⁰ For Buytendijk, moral freedom was founded on one's initiative through one's freedom of choice: 'In this act [of free choice] the I completes itself and confirms itself as a person in its human dignity.'¹¹ Thus, if receiving the right kind of education, the child could use his or her own initiative to move from an unbridled lived freedom into a state of moral freedom, a transformation involving one acknowledging the 'whole reality of one's environment.' Buytendijk argued that 'freedom is the only climate in which the mind is able

⁸ Buytendijk, F.J.J. *De zin van de vrijheid in het menselijk bestaan* [The Meaning of Freedom in Human Existence]. Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1958, 48.

⁹ Buytendijk, *Menselijk bestaan*, 5, 6.

¹⁰ Buytendijk, *Menselijk bestaan*, 8.

¹¹ Buytendijk, *Menselijk bestaan*, 20.

to develop to its fullness' where life itself will be humanised, and where morality can be vitalised.¹²

The Conflict between Authority and Compliance

Buytendijk also identified this same conflict between authority and compliance as an issue felt by many women of his time. He referred to women as having an 'objective lack of freedom' due to the 'limitation of [their] social possibilities,' and 'traditional subjugation,' requiring a 'deliverance from a condition which is intolerable, because it is inhumane.' Buytendijk held firmly to the view that the 'desire for freedom finds its deepest origin in the experience of dissatisfaction with the dimensions of existence.'¹³ It is worth quoting his thoughts on this matter at length:

The desire for freedom as a mighty, imaginative movement upwards toward an exalted human existence, proceeds from the lived physical heaviness of our corporeality. But the physical heaviness of our body is only a symbol of a more essential inner heaviness, the heaviness of all our thoughts, our feelings and our aspirations, and the inability to elevate them. One can avoid the abysses of the earth, but not the abysses within ourselves ... All these feelings of heaviness, of abyss, of impotence, are so-called existential experiences, and thus experiences of one's own existence as such in the world. From there, a person passionately shouts the word "freedom." He shouts this without knowing what he means.¹⁴

However, Buytendijk reflected that a lack of freedom can also come from an incorrect understanding of oneself; when 'false self-reflection' occurs, there is no freedom. Quoting from Gabriel Marcel, someone to whose writings he often turned, he exclaims: 'Freedom can only be realised in so far as one transforms the he or she in himself or herself into the real

¹² Buytendijk, *Menselijk bestaan*, 23, 24.

¹³ Buytendijk, *Menselijk bestaan*, 26.

¹⁴ Buytendijk, *Menselijk bestaan*, 28.

I.¹⁵ For Buytendijk this is not some passive experience of transformation, but involves a proactive response from an individual.

Untruths and Slavery

In the 1967 essay, *De Vorming tot Vrijheid* (The formation of freedom), Buytendijk continues his reflection on inner freedom, emphasising the many 'untruths' that often lie beneath this mental health issue. Untruths, he believed, led to a kind of 'slavery' for an individual.¹⁶ For Buytendijk, such slavery manifests itself easily, due to the mechanism which society imposes upon each person. Importantly, this allows people to hide even their own freedom from themselves. 'It is necessary for all of us to know', Buytendijk explained, 'that the social role we play is usually fulfilled thoughtlessly, and thus becomes a reason to alienate ourselves from our freedom.'¹⁷ This, he believed, could cause neurotic disturbances whereby 'one isolates oneself and designs an imaginary situation in which one imagines having to play a role ... [where] one has made oneself unfree by isolating and binding oneself to an imagined reality.' And most consequentially, he noted that 'we should be aware that any erosion of self-esteem provokes a chain reaction, whereby no one can predict the magnitude of the spiritual destruction wrought.'¹⁸

For Buytendijk, the pursuit of inner freedom was seen as something always 'militant', because it provides the means and the legitimacy for a person to reach full human potential. If such a realisation is obstructed in any way, Buytendijk held, then it should be no surprise that 'a desire for liberation should well up' in a person.'¹⁹ However, as we are about to see, for the Flemish Jesuit and moral theologian André Snoeck, the pursuit of inner freedom involved the possession of a certain quality he described as an *innerlijke disponibiliteit*.

¹⁵ Buytendijk, *Menselijk bestaan*, 31.

¹⁶ Buytendijk, 'De vorming tot vrijheid [The Formation of Freedom]' in F.J.J. Buytendijk (ed). *Vorming Tot Vrouw* [Formation into Woman]. Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1967, 13.

¹⁷ Buytendijk, 'Vorming tot vrijheid,' 16, 17.

¹⁸ Buytendijk, 'Vorming tot vrijheid,' 28.

¹⁹ Buytendijk, 'Vorming tot vrijheid,' 22.

André Snoeck, Spiritual Hygiene and Catholicism

Snoeck, a Belgian Catholic intellectual, had the honour of being the inaugural author of the KCV series of mental health brochures. Entitled *Geesteshygiëne en Katholicisme* (Mental Hygiene and Catholicism), this brochure was based on a speech he delivered in 1952 on the occasion of the foundation of the Katholieke Vereniging voor Geesteshygiëne (Catholic Association for Mental Hygiene) in Belgium, a sister organisation to the KCV. As the contents of this speech suggest, the goal set by Snoeck for the Catholic mental health movement in Belgium was analogous to that proposed by Buytendijk for the same movement in the Netherlands. This would explain, above all else, why Buytendijk chose this address, in particular, for this first KCV publication, duly setting its mood and tone for years to come. Buytendijk, in an effort to endorse Snoeck's findings, offered the Preface for this brochure. He is gratified to see that Snoeck insists in the strongest of terms on the need for the Catholic Church to utilise the new insights that psychology and psychiatry in particular can offer, a task that requires cooperation between both priest and doctor.²⁰

In *Geesteshygiëne en Katholicisme*, Snoeck endorses Buytendijk's concerns that the goal of the mental health movement was the preservation and protection of mental health in healthy people. Most importantly, Snoeck defined the role of mental health movement as 'the science and the living concern for the conditions which protect or promote the mental health of individuals.'²¹ In his speech, Snoeck used the World Health Organisation's definition of health: 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.'²² Snoeck believed that when one spoke of mental health, one was speaking in such terms as 'balance,' 'well-being,' 'flexibility,' 'adaptability,' and 'strength in resistance.'²³ For Snoeck, therefore, health was more than just about 'an absence of disease,' it also denoted 'a positive possession.'²⁴ Furthermore, he believed that 'mental health almost always touches on problems of a spiritual nature, which are closely intertwined

²⁰ Snoeck, André. *Geesteshygiëne en Katholicisme* [Mental Hygiene and Catholicism]. Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1952, 5, 6.

²¹ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 11.

²² Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 13.

²³ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 14.

²⁴ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 13

with a person's conception of value and philosophy ... it thus encroaches on areas subject to the sanctions of religion, ethical systems and social conventions.'²⁵ These were further defined as 'problems of a moral and religious nature,' but he believed that 'anything that can usefully secure the cause of true peace is sure to meet the encouragement and support of the Church.'²⁶

Innerlijke Disponibiliteit

Snoeck endorsed Buytendijk's view that many mental health issues can often be traced to a lack of 'inner freedom.' As Snoeck explained, a healthy individual was someone who could handle his or her relative freedom, not one who was 'overly controlled by mental determinisms that would blind them to a particular line of conduct.'²⁷ When such inner freedom was lacking, then mental health issues could abound. However, Snoeck takes Buytendijk's concept of *innerlijke vrijheid* one step further, and describes a mentally healthy person as one who is in possession of a certain *innerlijke disponibiliteit*;²⁸ as we previously saw, this is the same term (*disponibilité*) used by Buytendijk as the condition for an authentic encounter. As previously shown, for Buytendijk, *disponibilité* becomes that state of being required in order to observe human activity and describe it phenomenologically; it opens up one's own knowledge of existence to the flow of new meanings. Snoeck defines the concept of *innerlijke disponibiliteit* in much the same way, describing it as the way one must 'arrange oneself in order to make a living contact with the order of things and of beings.'²⁹ For Snoeck, therefore, *innerlijke disponibiliteit* is an attitude of inner openness. However, within the realm of mental health, Snoeck advanced Buytendijk's original concept of *disponibilité*, and takes it one step further, believing that there can be no *innerlijke vrijheid* for a person without one possessing the quality of *innerlijke disponibiliteit*, a notion adopted by Nouwen in his 1971 essay, 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual.' Thus, in the mind of Snoeck, the concept of *innerlijke vrijheid* and *innerlijke disponibiliteit* went hand in hand.

²⁵ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 12.

²⁶ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 13

²⁷ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 14

²⁸ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 17.

²⁹ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 17.

As to how this concept of *innerlijke disponibiliteit* functions in a person's day to day life, Snoeck used it to explain the difference between a healthy and diseased psyche. Firstly, the psyche is described as someone's 'deeper mind,' it being 'the associative structure of more or less fixed mental activities: insights, feelings, moods, tendencies, habits and attitudes, which form the foundation of one's personality, which help it find its way in relations to other beings and things without much effort.'³⁰ Secondly, when this psyche is *disponible* (available), one can be described as healthy, but when there occurs a disturbance within the psyche, disease of the mind becomes apparent. As Snoeck explains: 'When the psyche is *disponible*, one's personality can express itself in a fully responsible way; if the psyche is unbalanced, one's personality can become hindered or even hidden behind actions and relationships that become determined by it.'³¹ This in turn creates a form of bondage within the inner life of the individual concerned, leading to an incapacity of the will, the restricting of freedom, and feelings of upheaval and confusion. Thus, in the field of mental health, Snoeck builds on the foundations laid down by Buytendijk, believing that it revolved around supporting the balance and well-being of the psyche, in which one's personality is allowed to move freely.

Certain Laws Resist Inner Freedom

Like Buytendijk, Snoeck also made a connection between mental health and those 'laws' which resist one's inner freedom. Rather diplomatically, Snoeck did not mention ecclesial laws in this context, but I believe it can be easily inferred that this was his subtext, especially considering the make-up of the audience he was addressing. Snoeck explains his position in the following way:

The more a person posits his spiritual freedom in his actions, the more he also creates that freedom in himself and makes it *disponible*. Spiritual freedom is like a stream that flows from one's personality through the psychical and psychological being, each of which is governed by its own laws. The more a person focuses his attention on those laws that resist his inner freedom, the less

³⁰ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 18.

³¹ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 19.

free he essentially becomes. It is a grave mistake that the previous generation did not recognise this peculiar dynamism of the spiritual person.³²

Thus, along with Buytendijk, Snoeck sets the Dutch Catholic church on a new trajectory in which overly strict and unrealistic moral precepts, denying the inner freedom of its members, are considered problematic.

As Snoeck drew his speech to a close, he summarised his findings:

The healthier the psyche is kept, the more *disponibiliteit* there is in a person, and he or she is set free among others to live fully in community and to attain the most valuable thing that is possible in humankind through God's grace: the surrender to the love of the Father in Christ.³³

The task of the Catholic mental health movement in the Netherlands, Snoeck believed, was to help all individuals to achieve this goal by utilising the data of diverse disciplines: 'anthropology (theological, philosophical and empirical), psychology, pedagogy, sociology, medicine in all its parts, asceticism, mysticism, and the pastoral.' By bringing all these disciplines together in conversation, and by the interpretation of the data collected, the mental health movement had the ability to 'prevent psychological degeneration in a threatened personality, to promote emotional maturity, and protect one's essential inner freedom.'³⁴

Han Fortmann and Narrow Moralism

The priest-psychologist and Catholic intellectual Han Fortmann (1912-1970) was also an influential figure in the Dutch Catholic mental health movement. At the Catholic University of Nijmegen, Fortmann was professor in general and comparative psychology of religion and culture. As noted by Jurjen Beumer in his biography of Nouwen, he had a considerable

³² Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 22.

³³ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 46.

³⁴ Snoeck, *Geesteshygiëne*, 46.

influence on Nouwen's formative years.³⁵ While undertaking his psychology degree at Nijmegen University, Nouwen attended courses offered by Fortmann.³⁶

Fortmann authored a number of the KCV brochures, but two in particular are of interest to our study: *Een Nieuwe Opdracht* ('A New Assignment'), and *Opdat zij gezond zijn in het geloof* ('That they may be sound in the faith'), published in 1955 and 1963 respectively.³⁷ Building on themes previously outlined by both Buytendijk and Snoeck, these two brochures show that Fortmann possessed a remarkable gift; an ability to present to his listeners and readers an understanding and approach to mental health care rarely seen before (with the exception of Buytendijk), all this being presented in order to inspire urgent action on the part of his audience.

Like Snoeck, in *Een Nieuwe Opdracht* Fortmann believed that Buytendijk's definition of mental health gets to the heart of the matter, that is, a person being able to stand in the freedom of their own decisions. 'After all,' Fortmann says, 'someone who is internally free is able to have healthy emotional relationships with others.' He also agreed with Snoeck that mental health involves an *innerlijke disponibiliteit*, but he offered a caveat, believing that although these observations were less than perfect, they did provide a useful working definition of mental health on which he could build.³⁸

The Individuality of the Psyche and Narrow Moralism

In order to address these difficulties, Fortmann spoke about the psyche (or mind) as having its own value which had to be clearly distinguished from ethical and religious values, even though it could not be completely detached from them. The novelty of the mental health movement, as Fortmann now understood it, was precisely that it had recognised the

³⁵ Beumer, *Henri Nouwen*, 24.

³⁶ See files under 'Education Series' among the fonds (papers) at the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center.

³⁷ Fortmann, Han. *Een nieuwe opdracht* [A New Assignment]. Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1955; Fortmann, Han. *Opdat zij gezond zijn in het geloof* [That they may be Sound in the Faith], Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1963.

³⁸ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 11.

individuality of the mind. The mind ‘must not withdraw from ethical assessment ...,’ he stated, ‘but it nevertheless operates in its own field, with its own concepts, and own questions.’³⁹

The most important part of his speech revolved around the theme of narrow moralism. ‘Psychological health is ... a value in itself, and at the same time it relates to, but cannot be completely separated from, moral good.’⁴⁰ However, he reiterated:

In practice this attitude, usually not explicitly expressed, is sometimes encountered in the form of a narrow moralism, which does not actually love a person, but is only interested in whether one fulfills one’s moral duties. Morality is sometimes defended in a way that has catastrophic consequences for mental health.⁴¹

Buytendijk may have pointed to the difficulties associated with moral norms that religion sometimes imposes, but in this speech Fortmann did not mince words. He believed that when narrow moralism had made a person mentally ill, it could only be a relief when one met a psychiatrist who recognised the psyche in its individuality, and therefore refrained from moralising.⁴²

Mental Health and Christian Salvation

Importantly, in Fortmann’s view, mental health was linked to the notion of Christian salvation, since he believed that one’s faith could ‘only blossom when a person is not hindered in his or her psychic freedom.’⁴³ Then, as we often see in his reflections, Fortmann appealed to Scripture to make his point. Taking Paul the Apostle as an example, Fortmann argued that as Paul was led away from Pharisaic moralism (which held that salvation could only be achieved by the strict observance of the Law), he discovered that a faithful surrender to Christ was indeed the source of our freedom. Quoting from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians,

³⁹ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 13.

⁴⁰ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 15.

⁴¹ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 16.

⁴² Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 16.

⁴³ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 16.

Fortmann proclaimed: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' (2 Cor 3:7). This goes to the very heart of Fortmann's argument, that although religion itself offered freedom (in the form of salvation), it could also bring about suffering (a lack of freedom). 'Nothing can degenerate like the religious,' he said, especially when one's 'zeal for faith becomes fanaticism,' leading to states of 'heartlessness,' and 'self-destruction.'⁴⁴ In addition, Fortmann believed, through a sense of duty to follow religious observance, humankind itself often had 'a tendency to flee freedom, and the security that it brings, and to lose oneself in the collective, in a conformism of the least resistance.'⁴⁵

Education and Research

In bringing his speech to a close, Fortmann identified two tasks in particular which fostered the aims of the mental health movement in a Catholic context: education and research. The education of those with pastoral responsibilities was paramount, but so too was research 'which acquired a clear picture of the current cultural situation, insofar as it hinders psychological health.' This was a difficult task, he believed, because 'every time and environment has its own neuroses.' However, Fortmann believed that what was needed was nothing other than a 'psycho-sociology, based on careful research.'⁴⁶ Furthermore, Fortmann believed it was time to leave behind the old uncertainties of the past, and to renew the mission of the Catholic mental health movement. His words were forceful:

Our association is now twenty-five years old, an age at which one is supposed to have passed puberty. Our pugnacity against sacred houses must be tempered ... but we should not be too afraid of demolishing a sacred house now and then ... Let us dare to see the spiritual need of our people, and if we do not see it, help each other to see it. Once seen the solution will come into view ... But anyone who has learned to think symbolically understands that [mental] health is the image and foreshadowing of Salvation.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 17.

⁴⁵ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 23.

⁴⁶ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 21.

⁴⁷ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 27.

For Fortmann, and for the Catholic church in particular, mental health care had become a 'salvific-pedagogical task,'⁴⁸ an undertaking I believe we see echoed in Nouwen's own research into the psycho-social condition of homosexual men and women.

Fortmann's Critique

In *Opdat zij gezond zijn in het geloof*, the 25th KCV brochure, Fortmann offered a further critique of the Catholic church's approach to mental health. Quite forcefully, Fortmann argued that anyone who had studied psychology would know that religions can do much harm, 'by holding humanity in a social and individual infantility, a dependence unworthy of the autonomous human being, a system of illusions that have prevented a person from fulfilling his or her earthly duties.'⁴⁹ However, Fortmann reminded his readers that although the New Testament might be 'full of stern admonitions,' it nonetheless 'begins with offering the gift of a new existence.'⁵⁰ The message of the New Testament is positive, he believed, as we find within its pages key words such as 'redemption, healing, justification, rebirth, resurrection, reconciliation, abundant life ..., covenant, communion, comfort, freedom, hope and joy.'⁵¹ Unfortunately, Fortmann believed, often this message becomes lost in translation.

Fortmann also offered a critique of the Catholic Church's approach to mental health. He believed it was time for the Church to learn from the many insights gained through the human sciences concerning the nature of humanity; indeed, it was time for the church to consider why its message of salvation had often brought about many mental health issues: 'She bruises people psychologically, while her only *raison d'être* is to cure people'. The reason for this in Fortmann's opinion was the Church's inability to interact with the very people most in need of healing. And in some of his harshest words aimed at the Catholic Church to date, he described the existence of 'a static conception of Christian salvation, which consists in imposing on men and women an abstract and absolute ideal of holiness, without taking into account his or her personal needs and possibilities.' Therefore, there was a need, in

⁴⁸ Fortmann, *Nieuwe opdracht*, 27.

⁴⁹ Fortmann, *Opdat zij gezond*, 15.

⁵⁰ Fortmann, *Opdat zij gezond*, 28.

⁵¹ Fortmann, *Opdat zij gezond*, 20.

Fortmann's view, for the Church to secure 'a more dynamic view of salvation,' where 'one does not fear teaching men and women to accept themselves as a first step towards the cure of conflict.' For Fortmann, 'clarity and insight' came when one gained a 'familiarity with one's own reality.'⁵²

Developing a Pastoral Competence

As he brings his essay to a close, Fortmann finds it essential for the Catholic Church to develop a pastoral competence, where faith serves health, where freedom and peace are the fruit of faith, and where people are helped to 'untangle the knots and purify their view of their own reality.' This would have the effect, he believed, of revitalising the Church's pastoral theology, where 'theology that has so far often remained abstract will receive its content from human reality, and human reality will acquire new depth and perspective through theological exposure.' Fortmann called upon priests, and indeed all involved in pastoral care, to 'learn to relate the general concepts of theology to what experience teaches them.' This involved those in pastoral care ministry becoming theologians - indeed, 'theologians who know what people are.'⁵³ This, I propose, is what Nouwen also did. As we will see, his writings on homosexuality revealed someone who began to think, not only pastorally, but 'theologically' about the pastoral issue set before him.

The 1970 Annual Meeting of the KCV

While Nouwen was a doctoral student at Nijmegen University, the KCV held a seminar day as part of their annual general meeting. It was devoted to theme of *Geloof en Gezondheid* (Faith and Health), the title of the KCV brochure which was subsequently published and circulated in 1971.⁵⁴ Transcripts of the addresses of four speakers were contributed to the publication, and all were offered in tribute to Fortmann, who had recently died. In the Foreword to the brochure, offered by the editor and Catholic Intellectual J.G.M. Wellen,⁵⁵ the reason given for

⁵² Fortmann, *Opdat zij gezond*, 28, 29.

⁵³ Fortmann, *Opdat zij gezond*, 31.

⁵⁴ Wellen, J.G.M. (ed). *Geloof en Gezondheid* [Faith and Health]. Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1971.

⁵⁵ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Wellen is listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

such a seminar was to assess the 'profound changes that had taken place in the last decades in both the religious life and mental health care.'⁵⁶ The timing of this seminar I believe is important, in that it took place in the year before Nouwen published his 1971 essay, 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual.'

Buytendijk offered the opening address in this seminar. He applauded Fortmann's belief that when good psychotherapy was offered, the client 'develops a knowledge that is much more than just mental knowing – the breakthrough of an insight which heals conflicts, ensures reconciliation with oneself and one's environment.' More importantly, when done effectively, good psychotherapy produces what he refers to as a 'participating turn,' or what could be called 'a knowing with the heart.' Buytendijk pointed out that for the client, this was a knowledge 'in the first person' who now has access to their own personal world, to that which is 'pre-eminently real' to them. This was none other than 'the urge to become internally awakened and anchored in a transcendent reality.'⁵⁷

Van der Hoeven and True Morality

P. Van der Hoeven,⁵⁸ in his lecture, tackled the subject of morality and mental health directly. He explained that a person lives within a particular environment in which they are offered a set of values against which they must determine their position. The issue, as he saw it, is that a tension is often created when this takes place, between what a person intuitively knows about himself or herself, and what he or she also knows to be 'morally acceptable' in the society in which he or she lives. Therefore, for Van der Hoeven, mental health becomes a controversial issue which puts into question society's 'moral norms.'⁵⁹ The problem, as he sees it, is that there should be nothing in those norms which is hostile to mental health and the leading of a moral life. He believed that 'morality has the task of promoting mental health, and must reject any element that threatens it.'⁶⁰ For his reflection on this, Van der Hoeven

⁵⁶ Wellen, J.G.M. 'Woord vooraf [Foreward]' in Wellen (ed), *Geloof en Gezondheid*, 7.

⁵⁷ Buytendijk, F.J.J. 'In Memoriam Han Fortmann' in Wellen (ed), *Geloof en Gezondheid*, 13, 14.

⁵⁸ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 475 do not have P. Van der Hoeven listed as a Catholic Intellectual.

⁵⁹ Van der Hoeven, P. 'Religieuze waarden en geestelijke gezondheid [Religious Values and Mental Health] in Wellen (ed), *Geloof en Gezondheid*, 20

⁶⁰ Van der Hoeven, 'Religieuze waarden,' 23.

turns to the philosopher David Hume for some insight, leading him to speak in terms of ‘true morality,’ the kind of morality which is ‘the most authentic expression of true religious experience, and an essential condition for spiritual health.’⁶¹

Wertenbroek’s Address

Neurologist and Catholic intellectual M.J.H.M. Wertenbroek also gave a lecture at this seminar.⁶² Of interest to this thesis are two themes he addresses: the first which describes the mentally healthy person as someone who has access to, or who has ‘at their disposal’ their mental capacities, and the second, his comments on sexuality and mental health.

In the context of describing good mental health in terms of ‘a mentally unimpeded and undisturbed functioning,’ Wertenbroek used the expression ‘*beschikking heeft over* (having at one’s disposal, or being available to)’ to describe the particular characteristic needed in a person in order to maintain this kind of function.⁶³ Wertenbroek compared the mentally healthy person to that of a fully-able person psychically:

the mentally healthy person has fully and freely at one’s disposal [*beschikking heeft over*] one’s mental capacities, just as the physically healthy person has fully and freely at one’s disposal [*beschikking heeft over*] one’s physical faculties [so] perhaps it can be said that in body and mind our faculties are available [*beschikking*] in the sense of equipment that we use ... [Mental health] is an instrumental well-being in the sense that one has freely at one’s disposal [*beschikken*] one’s own abilities, and that these abilities function optimally.⁶⁴

Wertenbroek’s expression *beschikking heeft over* is most certainly being used in the same sense as the term *disponibilité*, first utilised by Buytendijk in a psychological sense, but is

⁶¹ Van der Hoeven, ‘Religieuze waarden,’ 28.

⁶² Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Wertenbroek is listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

⁶³ Wertenbroek, M.J.H.M. ‘Grenzen van de geestelijke Gezondheidszorg [Limits of Mental Health Care]’ in Wellen (ed), *Geloof en Gezondheid*, 38.

⁶⁴ Wertenbroek, ‘Grenzen,’ 38.

more analogous with Snoeck's understanding when he describes a mentally healthy person as someone who is in possession of an *innerlijke disponibiliteit*.

Having One's Sexuality at One's Disposal

In Wertenbroek's comments on sexuality and mental health, he applied this concept by way of an example of a person living the religious life, who had undertaken a vow of celibacy, but was experiencing sexual problems of some kind. The problem, as he saw it in this context, often revolved around a member of a religious order who had not accepted his or her sexuality in some form, and who needed to accept it 'as a positive human possibility and learn to integrate it into his or her life.' Only then, Wertenbroek believed, can one choose religious celibacy responsibly because one now has one's faculties freely at one's disposal, and therefore is spiritually healthy and mature. 'That one can choose freely,' he says, 'is a matter of mental health.'⁶⁵

As we will see in chapter six, Wertenbroek's belief that an essential part of mental health involved having one's sexuality at one's disposal is mirrored in Nouwen's 1971 'Self-availability of the Homosexual' essay; Wertenbroek's address offers a context for Nouwen's application of his own concept of 'self-availability' to the need for a self-acceptance of one's homosexuality. Wertenbroek believed that the mission and focus of the mental health movement was to help people address both these issues, and in particular, to help them develop those abilities in order to become a fully functioning person.⁶⁶ Nouwen's approach correlates well with Wertenbroek's findings.

Sporken's Call

The final address of this seminar was provided by Catholic Intellectual C.P Sporken,⁶⁷ entitled *Pastorale zorg en Geestelijke gezondheid* (Pastoral Care and Mental Health). Sporken believed that mental health care involved confronting 'pathogenic social structures', and in particular

⁶⁵ Wertenbroek, 'Grenzen,' 38.

⁶⁶ Wertenbroek, 'Grenzen,' 39.

⁶⁷ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Sporken is listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

those views about one's faith which led to mental health problems. In such circumstances, the pastor had an important role to play; Sporken saw any threat to a person's mental health as a call for the pastor 'to roll up his sleeves.' 'Preaching future salvation,' Sporken held, 'while at the same time passively observing human salvation being shattered, is a pastoral fiasco of the worst kind.' For Sporken, pastoral care played a vital role in mental health care.⁶⁸

What is interesting about his address is that he assumes his audience fully comprehends Buytendijk's concept of *innerlijke vrijheid*, and more importantly, Snoeck's notion of *innerlijke disponibiliteit*,⁶⁹ saying that he believed we can 'understand each other if we roughly describe mental health' in these terms. Interestingly, he adds the concept of *innerlijke volwassenheid* (inner maturity) to this list of mental health virtues.⁶⁹ Taking account of the context in which this statement was made, knowledge of these concepts must have been widely disseminated and understood among Catholic priests and pastoral care workers by this stage, so it is no stretch to expect that Nouwen was thoroughly familiar with these terms.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to place Nouwen's research projects on homosexuality within a certain socio-political context. It was this environment, in which Nouwen was fully immersed as a Dutch Catholic priest and university student, which provided him with the ontological and epistemological tools to understand the mental health needs of homosexual men and women. As the principal opinion leaders in Dutch Catholic mental health of the 1950s and 1960s, Buytendijk, Snoeck and Fortmann believed that the Catholic Church could learn much from the insights offered by the human sciences. Their influence on priests like Nouwen within the Dutch Catholic Church cannot be overestimated.

Buytendijk believed that the primary focus of the newly formed KCV was the promotion of mental health in healthy people (as distinct from the mentally diseased), therefore its mission involved the education of preventative measures within the Dutch Catholic community. For

⁶⁸ Sporken, C.P. 'Pastorale zorg en geestelijke gezondheid [Pastoral Care and Mental Health]' in Wellen (ed), *Geloof en Gezondheid*, 53, 54.

⁶⁹ Sporken, 'Pastorale zorg,' 51.

him, mental health issues often arose from the tension that existed between authority and compliance, which, more often than not, led to an unfree submission. The lack of freedom which arose, Buytendijk taught, was the result of an incorrect understanding of oneself, particularly when false reflection occurred.

Although agreeing with Buytendijk that mental health issues could often be traced to a lack of inner freedom, Snoeck emphasised that mental health involved a positive possession which he described as an *innerlijke disponibiliteit* (an inner openness). This he explained in terms of balance, well-being, flexibility, adaptability, and strength in resistance.

Fortmann, too, agreed with Buytendijk and Snoeck's assessments, believing *innerlijke vrijheid* and *innerlijke disponibiliteit* were foundational concepts for mental health, but his major contribution was to question the harm done to a person's psychological health through the forced observance of a narrow moralism. Believing it was time for the Catholic Church to consider why its message of salvation often brought about many mental health issues, he called for education and research in these matters.

By 1970, a year before Nouwen published 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual,' discussions at the Annual Meeting of the KCV revolved around the notion that there should be nothing in society's moral norms that was hostile to mental health and the leading of a moral life. This notion involved having one's sexuality at one's disposal and integrating it into one's life for good mental health, something Nouwen himself would publish on around a year later.

Chapter 4

The Dutch Gay Emancipation Movement, the Pastoral Centre and the Research of Wijnand J. Sengers

Introduction

At the time that Nouwen began his studies in psychology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen in 1957, the Netherlands was experiencing a changing attitude towards homosexual men and women. This chapter explores how these changes informed Nouwen's research on homosexuality. Although Catholicism maintained its official rejection of all homosexual behaviour as a sin, we will discover in this chapter that within the Dutch Catholic Church, an alternative narrative emerged in the late 1950s, one which contributed to the emancipation of homosexual men and women and helped them to integrate into broader Dutch society. Nouwen himself, through his own writings on homosexuality, not only became part of this changed social environment, but contributed directly to it. In 1957, the Dutch Catholic Church opened the Pastoral Centre under the leadership of Catholic intellectual and psychiatrist, C.J.B.J. (Kees) Trimbos (1920-1988),¹ in response to calls from the Netherlands' leading gay emancipation organisation and certain Catholic clergymen; both had noted that Catholic homosexuals in particular were suffering from moral conflict and needed some kind of mental support. As we will learn, the Centre's work revolutionised the way pastoral provision was offered by the Dutch Catholic Church. A greater emphasis was placed on the inner life, with personal conscience and individual responsibility identified as desirable ideals.

This chapter will open with an overview of the Dutch Gay Emancipation Movement, which includes the founding of *Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum* (The Centre for Culture and Leisure, known by the acronym COC) and its political aim to promote the social integration of homosexual men and women into Dutch society. It was this organisation which played a significant role in influencing the Dutch Catholic Church to provide pastoral provision for its

¹ Simons & Winkeler, *Het Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Trimbos is listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

own homosexual members. This will be followed by an analysis of an important research project undertaken by Harry Oosterhuis on the Pastoral Centre in Amsterdam, the organisation created by the Dutch Catholic Church in response to COC's request. Oosterhuis's findings were published in 1992 in *Homoseksualiteit in Katholiek Nederland: Een sociale geschiedenis 1900-1970* (Homosexuality in the Catholic Netherlands: A social history 1900-1970), and provide the context in which to situate Nouwen's own research projects on homosexuality.

This will be followed by an analysis of the research undertaken by Catholic psychiatrist Wijnand J. Sengers (1927-2002), whose book *Gewoon hetzelfde?* (Just the Same?),² first published in 1968, and reprinted several times, established a new social-psychiatric approach to homosexuality, where the concept of cure was replaced by that of self-acceptance. These findings were of particular interest to Nouwen, finding their way into 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual'. It is my view that collectively, Sengers' research, and the research undertaken by the Pastoral Centre, provided Nouwen with the empirical evidence he needed to explore the topic of homosexuality. Both provided Nouwen with the cultural environment, and even the permission he needed (as a Catholic priest) to study what was considered, within Catholic circles, a rather provocative and vexed issue in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Dutch Gay Emancipation Movement

The Dutch gay emancipation movement is one of the oldest and most influential LGBT+ movements in the world. From 1912, a homosexual rights movement known as *Nederlandsch Wetenschappelijk Humanitair Komitee* (Dutch Scientific-Humanitarian Committee) lobbied for social tolerance and changes in the criminal law to support homosexuals. By 1939, The Netherlands saw a pioneering publication, *De Homosexueleen*, designed to create understanding and provide information about the homosexual way of life. The magazine 'Levensrecht' (Right to Live) was another, founded by Nick Engelschman (1913-1988), a radical

² Sengers, Wijnand J. *Gewoon hetzelfde? Een visie op vragen rond de homofilie* [Just the same? A vision on questions about homophilia]. Bussum, NL: Paul Brand, 1968.

socialist, although only three editions were produced before the German invasion of the Netherlands put an end to it.³

After the war, in 1946 when Nouwen was aged just 14, Engelschman revived *Levensrecht*, renaming it *Vriendschap* (Friendship) several years later.⁴ Its relaunch saw Engelschman form a society for homosexuals around the magazine, 'The Shakespeare Club,' which two years later changed its name to *Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum*. These names reflected the organisation's initial desire for anonymity; in the beginning its primary aim was to build social networks in a 'respectable' environment, away from the illicit haunts of casual sexual encounters. COC also allowed members, shielded from a homophobic society, to learn more about homosexuality. Engelschman believed that homosexual men and women should be accepting and proud of themselves, and act accordingly. Phenomena which society associated with homosexuality, such as promiscuous behaviour and unstable relationships, he attributed to societal repression and homophobia. As a result, Engelschman introduced the world to the word *homophilie* (homophile) believing that the word 'homosexual' had many negative connotations, not least of which that it placed too much emphasis on sexuality and implied that a person had a psychosexual disease. The second half of the word *homophilie* he based on the Greek word for love, *philia*, in an effort to show that homophiles could love each other in the same way as their heterophile counterparts. Commenting on this subject, the far-sighted Engelschman once said:

Step by step the insight will grow that race, colour, religion and political convictions should not be grounds for discrimination and persecution. Very slowly society will be convinced that homophiles are complete normal human

³ Hekma, Gert & Jan W. Duyvendak. 'The Netherlands: Depoliticization of Homosexuality and Homosexualization Politics' in Manon Tremblay, David Paternotte & Carol Johnson. *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State: Comparative Insights into a Transformed Relationship*. London: Routledge, 2011, 103-117; Tielman, Rob. 'Dutch Gay Emancipation History (1911-1986),' *Journal of Homosexuality* 13:2-3 (1987): 9-17; Ramsay, R.W., P.M. Heringa, P.M. & I. Boorsma. 'A Case Study: Homosexuality in the Netherlands' in Loraine, J.A. (ed). *Understanding Homosexuality: Its Biological and Psychological Bases*. Lancaster, UK: MTP, 1974, 121-139. These three English language references give an excellent overview of the Dutch gay and lesbian emancipation movement.

⁴ In the late 19th century, Dutch authors writing in a positive manner about bonds between people of the same sex referred to *vriendschap* (friendship), which could refer to friendships with a 'romantic' component.

beings with the same human shortcomings and feelings of love as all other humans.⁵

Engelschman held that homosexual men and women should have the same rights and privileges as any other Dutch citizen. His statement was a political one, a policy based on the Universal Declaration of Human Right by the United Nations: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' It was a strategy designed to assist homophile men and women become more accepted into mainstream Dutch society.⁶ In 1964, to reflect its more political agenda, the social emancipation of homophiles, COC changed its name to the *Nederlandse Vereniging van Homofielen* (The Netherlands Association for Homophiles), retaining the acronym COC for its name in common usage. In 1971, its name was again changed, to *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Integratie van Homoseksualiteit COC* (Dutch Association for the Integration of Homosexuality COC), reflecting its aim of the social integration of homosexual men and women. Still in operation today, COC is the longest-running LGBT+ organisation in the world.⁷

COC's Aims

In an effort to disseminate information, COC produced a number of publications. As mentioned earlier, *Vriendschap* (Friendship) was one of them, and a copy dated April 1962 can be found among Nouwen's archival papers.⁸ It was the official monthly publication of COC, featuring gay-related editorials, articles, essays, and advertisements. Another of COC's publications collected by Nouwen (issues one to four dating from 1960 to 1962), may also be found among his archival papers.⁹ Entitled *COC periodiek* (periodical), the inside cover of each magazine describes it as 'a publication of COC appearing four times a year with contributions

⁵ Warmerdam, Hans. 'Engelschman, Nico (1913-88)' in Robert Aldrich & Garry Wotherspoon (eds). *Who's Who in Contemporary Gay & Lesbian History: From World War II to the Present Day*. 2001. London & New York: Routledge, 2001, 125. Source for Engelschman's quote not given.

⁶ Warmerdam, 'Engelschman,' 124-126.

⁷ Ramsay, 'A Case Study,' 125, 126.

⁸ Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Education Series, 'Materials on Homosexuality.' Box 414/File 14298.

⁹ Nouwen Research Collection, Box 414/File 14298.

taken from the official monthly magazine of COC, *Vriendschap*.' COC's objectives are clearly stated on the inside cover of each edition:

1. The promotion of scientific research-based insight into the essence of the homophile.
2. The promotion of a just and humane assessment and treatment of the homophile, in whose fate the Association aims to achieve improvement.
3. The provision of psychological, moral and legal assistance against the effects of the prevailing social bias and existing criminal legislation and to promote the abolition of criminal exemption provisions.¹⁰

Between 1965 and 1967, COC also produced a bi-monthly magazine called *Dialogo* (Dialogue), which was sold via Dutch newsstands. As the name suggests, it was designed to create ongoing dialogue between homophiles and Dutch society. This became the mouthpiece for a foundation formed by COC under the same name; committee members assisted in disseminating information, organising study groups, building up a reference library, the training of field workers, and the counselling of individuals with personal or legal difficulties.¹¹

The existence of a copy of *Vriendschap* and the several copies of *COC periodiek* found among Nouwen's papers shows his ongoing interest in COC's objectives and may well have had an influence upon his own thinking and writing. As the aforementioned list shows, COC's greatest achievement was the promotion of scientific research into homosexuality and the promotion of a more just and humane treatment of homophiles, including their psychological well-being. These objectives certainly stimulated social research among Dutch psychiatrists and initiated a pastoral response from members of several mainstream churches in the Netherlands, Nouwen being one of them.

¹⁰ Nouwen Research Collection, Box 414/File 14298.

¹¹ Ramsay, 'A Case Study,' 131, 132.

The Pastoral Centre

According to Harry Oosterhuis the topic of Christianity was a regular feature in *Vriendschap* and COC's other periodicals, and COC's membership consisted of a large number of both Catholic and Protestant faithful who were looking for a changed approach by the churches to homosexuality. In response to this, in the early 1950s, COC considered setting up its own working group for its Catholic members to facilitate discussions and exchange views on matters of faith. Such a group never eventuated, but in 1957 Catholic members and board members of COC came into contact with Trimbos, director of the *Amsterdam Katholieke Stichting voor Geestelijke Volksgezondheid* (Amsterdam Catholic Foundation for Mental Health, a sister organisation of the KCV). Trimbos listened with an open ear to their concerns, particularly to their plea that the Catholic Church showed little understanding towards homosexuals. He too had noted that a number of clergy were increasingly encountering Catholic homosexuals suffering from moral conflict and in need of mental support. This was in part due to the forces of secularisation in post-war Europe in the 1950s, which brought about social change and a reassessment of moral norms within Dutch society.¹² As Oosterhuis reports:

Growing prosperity and social mobility gradually increased the overall freedom to choose and move around. Established boundaries of class, religion, and between city and countryside faded, and this caused the contradictions between social practice and the restrictive Catholic norms and values to grow larger. Numerous clients were caught in between the constraints of religious tradition and the wider possibilities of everyday modern life.¹³

Trimbos agreed with COC members that there was a need for more empirically-based research on the subject, and the idea arose of setting up a pastoral centre based on the

¹² Oosterhuis, Harry. *Homosexualiteit in Katholiek Nederland: Een sociale geschiedenis 1900-1970* [Homosexuality in the Catholic Netherlands: A Social History 1900-1970]. Amsterdam: Sua, 1992, 135-138. An English version of Chapter 5 'Not very happy & mixed with a lot of nervousness: the priest as therapist in Catholic mental health care (1958-1978)' was sent to me by the author; on the subject of secularisation and Dutch Catholicism, see also Coleman, *Evolution of Dutch Catholicism*, 93.

¹³ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 151; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 7.

psycho-hygienic insights of the Dutch Catholic mental health movement. Thus, the Pastoral Centre in Amsterdam was born, open from 1958 to 1965 with the consent of the Dutch Catholic episcopate. It was initially set up as an experiment; the various experiences gained by staff members were to form the empirical foundation for advice, offered to the Dutch Catholic episcopate, on a pastoral approach towards Catholic homosexuals. However, it was also created to offer immediate support for those men and women experiencing problems associated with their homosexual orientation. It was staffed by a number of Catholic clergymen and Catholic psychiatrists, with a Catholic moral theologian appointed to offer support in an advisory capacity.¹⁴

The Research of Harry Oosterhuis

Harry Oosterhuis's study of the 166 surviving client files of the Pastoral Centre offers an insightful analysis of the issues presented by those who attended the Pastoral Centre, together with the findings and recommendations of the staff offering pastoral support.¹⁵ Importantly, his findings noted that despite the Catholic Church's official rejection of homosexual acts, the file contents indicate that 'some influential Catholic physicians and clergymen (working at the Pastoral Centre) expressed alternative biomedical and psychological viewpoints.'¹⁶ The files contain correspondence from third parties, mostly from those referring clients, along with reports from the priests and psychiatrists of the Pastoral Centre; these in some cases contain quotes or paraphrased comments made by the clients.

As the work of the Pastoral Centre was mainly aimed at those with spiritual difficulties, a brief summary of the types of presenting issues will assist in establishing the kinds of problems homosexual men and women were facing at that time. However, as Oosterhuis points out: 'it is difficult to determine to what extent the files provide a representative picture of the situation and world of Catholic homosexuals.'¹⁷ Nonetheless, through his research, we are offered, not only an insight into the problems Catholic homosexuals faced at the end of the

¹⁴ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 138, 139.

¹⁵ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 135-178. The Pastoral Center files are held at the Regional Institution for Outpatient Mental Health Care 'Centrum Oud West' in Amsterdam.

¹⁶ Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 1.

¹⁷ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 141.

1950s and early 1960s, but also the unique approach taken by pastoral carers of Pastoral Centre and sanctioned by the Dutch Catholic Bishops.

Oosterhuis reports that most of the people who attended the Pastoral Centre were men; only 10 of the 166 surviving client files concerned women. Non-Catholics also attended the Centre from time to time, including Protestants, Jews, and people with no church affiliation. These made up approximately ten percent of the clientele. People in their 20s made up the largest group of clients, followed by those in their teens and 30s, with a small number over 40.¹⁸

Reasons for Attending the Pastoral Centre

As for the clients of the Pastoral Centre, most came because they felt rejected by the Church, leading to inner conflicts and feelings of guilt. Much of this was due to a lack of empathy from the clergy, but, despite such complaints, the records do not show that 'crude rejection and oppressive measures were the order of the day in the Catholic Church.'¹⁹ As Oosterhuis reports: 'the records reveal that many priests showed restraint or even adopted a benevolent stance.'²⁰ Nonetheless, the records show that the contradictions offered by the clergy in pastoral care were often the source of much anxiety among Catholic homosexuals. Those who were critical of the Catholic Church wanted it to show a 'different attitude' or 'much more understanding and openness.' Some no longer wished to hide their homosexual orientation within the Church, feeling that to do so was 'dishonest' and 'insincere.' One man, for example, complained that 'you can never give yourself as you are.' As was increasingly the case among Dutch homosexuals during this period, leading a double life, or leading a life of self-denial, were no longer taken for granted. The records showed that a number of clients, now self-aware and assertive, were showing 'a certain degree of self-confidence and empowerment.'²¹ For this group, traditional Catholic morality was both burdensome and restrictive, although most did not want to leave the Church. They had come to the Pastoral Centre seeking guidance because their Christian faith remained important to them and they felt a need to

¹⁸ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 145.

¹⁹ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 146; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 4.

²⁰ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 146; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 4.

²¹ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 147.

reconcile that faith with their homosexual orientation. Oosterhuis notes that the Pastoral Centre's records showed that clients often had 'a highly religious sense of guilt and loyalty to the Mother Church on the one hand, and increasing doubts about Catholic morality on the other.'²² 'The seeds of the desire to 'be who you are' were present, but for most clients it was hard to imagine how their life would take on meaning outside the given frame of the Church, marriage, family, and work.'²³ These too were the issues that Nouwen faced, as he explored homosexuality in his own writings.

New Insights Utilised by Caregivers

When it comes to those who offered pastoral provision for those attending the Pastoral Centre, their main objective was to keep homosexual men and women within the folds of the Catholic Church. During this period, apostasy among homosexuals was increasing; therefore, it was the duty of the staff at the Pastoral Centre to show a greater understanding: what one psychiatrist referred to as a 'group of fellow-believers at risk.'²⁴ As the Pastoral Centre was not permitted to question traditional Catholic morality due to its links with the Catholic hierarchy, a cautious approach in pastoral advice was taken. As one caregiver had noted, their task was to provide their client with 'a livable morality and ethics within the dos and don'ts of our Church.'²⁵ However, Oosterhuis notes that the records show a number of 'new insights' utilised by the caregivers to 'reassure clients suffering from fear of conscience and guilt.'²⁶ While conflicting advice to clients was apparent among the files of the Pastoral Centre, a shift in traditional attitudes towards homosexuality can also be noted. Due to the psychoanalytic perspective taken by the care givers, the Catholic psychiatrists and Catholic clergy of the Centre began to distance themselves from the 'common beliefs in the Catholic world according to which moral decay, contamination or seduction were responsible for homosexual behaviour.'²⁷ Oosterhuis notes that their predominant interpretive framework was 'more psychological than medical.' Although the records show that they often referred

²² Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 148; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 6.

²³ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 150, 151; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 7.

²⁴ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 151; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 7.

²⁵ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 162; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 7, 8.

²⁶ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit* 1992, 152.

²⁷ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit* 1992, 154.

to homosexuality in terms of 'abnormality,' 'deviance,' or 'defect,' this was not to be interpreted as indicating a disease. Even though words such as 'neurotic,' 'unbalanced,' 'disintegrated,' and even 'psychopathic' appear often in the files, these are not to be interpreted as referring to homosexual tendencies per se, 'but the way in which clients reacted to social rejection.' This shows, for the first time, a decided mental health approach to the pastoral care of homosexuals which 'shifted attention from the actual pressure of the social environment, which was hard on homosexuals, towards their inner coping within it.'²⁸

The Dilemma Faced by Clients

The notes kept by caregivers in the Pastoral Centre's files often refer to the dilemma faced by clients between observance of official church teaching, which required sexual abstinence on the part of the homosexual, and a personal need for intimacy through sexual expression. In the view of some, this enforced abstinence was seen as an unreasonable expectation, and could be detrimental for mental health and psychological well-being, often leading to 'feelings of guilt,' 'unhealthy inhibitions,' 'neurotic disorders,' and 'frustration.'²⁹ It was believed, therefore, that an outlet for sexual desire was needed to prevent unhealthy suppression. In a letter to a parish priest who objected to advice given to one of his parishioners, a Pastoral Centre psychiatrist noted that their objective of 'helping people' was quite a different matter than 'imposing objective moral rules' on their clients.³⁰ The Centre's caregivers had concluded that traditional moral teaching was at odds with good mental health; hence, it became important for them to interpret the Church's moral guidelines much more broadly. This meant giving advice that placed a greater emphasis on mental health rather than rigid theological arguments. As Oosterhuis notes, this led the Pastoral Centre to offer a sensational innovation in pastoral advice: the 'positive appreciation of steady relationships.'³¹ For some homosexuals, the files indicate it was recommended that a permanent, faithful, lifelong, sexual relationship was acceptable, especially if it prevented the more serious evil of promiscuity. It was even argued that under certain conditions, it was the responsible way

²⁸ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 171; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 9.

²⁹ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 158.

³⁰ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 159.

³¹ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 159.

forward. But the files also indicate that not all caregivers offered the same advice, leaving some clients with a lack of clarity over the moral situation of homosexual acts. It is easy to speculate that the absence of such clarity resulted from the desire of the Pastoral Centre not to overstep the mark when it came to the interpretation of traditional Catholic morality. This was not their task; the mental health of the client was.

A Livable Morality

By changing the definition of the problem, clients were called upon to look at their difficulties and problems with a new perspective. A greater emphasis was placed on 'self-knowledge,' 'self-motivation,' 'self-guidance,' 'self-regulation,' and 'personal responsibility.'³² Oosterhuis summarises the views of the Pastoral Centre in the following way:

Instead of offering clear moral guidelines, which some clients in fact wanted from the priests, the care providers pointed to the importance of individual conscience and [their] own judgment. They sought to make it clear to clients that a 'livable morality' was not imposed from outside or above, but was based on inner conviction. Clients were continuously stimulated to engage in self-reflection and moral self-judgement.³³

In essence, this meant that clients were urged to consult their own conscience and to form their own judgement concerning the responsible course of action. Caregivers noted that problems in mental hygiene arose because of the moral obligations imposed by the Catholic Church, conceived as 'an obligation imposed from outside and above.'³⁴ A shift was occurring in the way that pastoral care was being offered to Catholic homosexual men and women, one in line with the findings of the mental hygiene movement. A greater emphasis was now being placed on the inner life, where personal conscience and individual responsibility became the higher ideal. As Oosterhuis assesses:

³² Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 160.

³³ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 161; Oosterhuis, 'Not very happy,' 14.

³⁴ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 161.

This shows that pastoral care was shaped through a redefinition of Catholic norms and values. With their ideas about a 'livable morality' and a personal, individual way of believing, the care workers emphasized values with general Christian-humanist tendencies, such as 'charity,' 'humanity,' 'understanding,' and 'openness.'³⁵

In the interests of good mental health, this meant Catholic homosexuals were called, not to observe a strict moral code, but to observe alternative ethical standards.³⁶ This involved a mature personality, where one accepted a homosexual orientation in a meaningful and responsible way. In client assessments, traditional words implying moral depravity were replaced with more psychological terms such as 'infantile,' 'undeveloped,' 'immature,' 'unbalanced,' and 'unstable'. For Catholic homosexuals in the Netherlands, mental health was now the driving force behind pastoral provision. 'Where clients articulated their difficulties in religious terms, the care providers often used psychological criteria.'³⁷

A Private Study Day

As one of the objectives of the Pastoral Centre was to reflect and report on the insights gained from their work, under the leadership of Trimbos the *Pastorale Commissie Homosexualiteit* (Pastoral Commission for Homosexuality) was formed in 1959. Composed of clergy, psychiatrists and psychologists, the Commission's role was to reflect theoretically on the findings of the Pastoral Centre. This led to a private study day on 23 March 1960, attended by approximately a hundred guests. Keynote speakers included such Catholic intellectuals as Buytendijk, the President of KCV, who gave the opening address; psychiatrist A.F.C. Overing, who was associated with the Pastoral Centre; moral theologian and Catholic intellectual, J. Vermeulen,³⁸ and the non-Catholic criminologist, G. Th. Kempe. The topics included the psychiatric, pastoral and social aspects of homosexuality. Furthermore, these talks were soon

³⁵ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 162.

³⁶ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 186; Oosterhuis. 'Not very happy,' 15.

³⁷ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 163.

³⁸ Simons & Winkeler, *Het Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Vermeulen is listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

published in a widely dispersed booklet called *Homosexualiteit*, reprinted three times.³⁹ The last edition in 1964 was revised and expanded, and included two further discussion papers by another Catholic intellectual and priest-psychologist, Professor Dr. H. Ruygers,⁴⁰ who reflected on the study day and the work of the Pastoral Centre to date. This publication was widely circulated among Catholic and non-Catholic circles, not only in the Netherlands, but further afield.⁴¹ The talks and discussion essays found in *Homosexualiteit* offered a decidedly mental health approach to the pastoral care of homosexual men and women. Whether Nouwen participated in this study day one can only speculate, but he was certainly aware of the first edition of the study booklet, and utilised its findings in his 1963 dissertation, *Homosexualiteit: Een pastoral psychologische studie over homoseksuele adolescenten* ('Homosexuality: a pastoral psychological study on homosexual adolescents'), evident from its inclusion in the bibliography of this work.⁴²

Wijnand J. Sengers and his Research

From 1966, the Catholic psychiatrist and neurologist Wijnand J. Sengers, a same-sex attracted man himself, published a number of preliminary studies in venues including the *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde* (Netherlands Journal of Medicine), regarding the diagnostic and therapeutic questions confronting a psychiatrist when consulted by someone with issues surrounding a homosexual orientation. Given that he was a Catholic psychiatrist, it seems his findings held a considerable amount of moral authority within Catholic circles.⁴³ For example, he was invited to deliver a paper at the 1968 study day jointly organised by the *Nationaal Protestants Centrum voor Geestelijke Volksgezondheid* (National Protestant Centre for Mental Health) and the *Katholiek Nationaal Bureau voor Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg* (Catholic National Office for Mental Health Care).⁴⁴ Sengers' many articles, produced in the

³⁹ Overing, A.F.C. (ed) *Pastorele Cahiers 3: Homosexualiteit*. Hilversum, NL: Uitgeverij Paul Brand, 1960.

⁴⁰ Simons & Winkeler, *Het Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Ruygers is listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research.

⁴¹ Oosterhuis, *Homosexualiteit*, 166.

⁴² Nouwen, Henri. 'Homosexualiteit: Een pastoral psychologische studie over homoseksuele adolescenten [Homosexuality: a pastoral psychological study on homosexual adolescents].' (Thesis, Catholic University of Nijmegen, 1963). Nouwen Archive and Research Collection Archive, Education Series, Box 287/File 302, p.220.

⁴³ Simons & Winkeler, *Verraad der Clercken*, 475. Sengers is not listed as one of 216 Dutch Catholic intellectuals identified by them through their research, despite his credentials.

⁴⁴ Westhoff, *Geestelijke bevrijders*, 230, 241.

1960s, and based on his own pastoral research into homosexuality in outpatient mental health care, would later form the basis for his important PhD thesis, *Homoseksualiteit Als Klacht: een psychiastische studie* ('Homosexuality as a complaint: a psychiatric study') finally published in 1969.⁴⁵ In addition, a year earlier Sengers published the practical manual *Gewoon Hetzelfde? Een visie op vragen rond de homofilie* ('Just the same thing? An overview of questions around homophilia'), representing a more readable, informative and condensed guide than his thesis, especially for those unfamiliar with and less interested in the more technical language found in his published thesis. As will be discussed in the following chapter, it was Sengers' *Gewoon Hetzelfde?* which became an important resource for Nouwen when researching his 'Self-availability of the Homosexual' essay.

The research for Sengers' dissertation was undertaken while he was head clinician in the preventative and social psychiatry department of the Rotterdam Medical Faculty. After specialising in neurology, and taking on further studies in clinical and social psychiatry at the Dutch Society for Psychoanalysis from 1965, Sengers began to concentrate on issues surrounding mental public health. As outlined in the Foreword to his thesis, his research covered an issue which was deeply personal to him, a situation with which Nouwen could easily identify. Like Nouwen's 'The Self-availability of Homosexual,' Sengers' research represents a study in self-analysis and self-understanding. Taking the phenomenological approach prevalent in Dutch psychology and psychiatry at that time, Sengers' studies were developed and tested in part through consultation and discussion with numerous working groups involving homosexual individuals, and his own work with clients as a clinical psychiatrist. Practical experience, extensive literature research and introspection all played significant roles in the preparation of his findings. Sengers' desire to offer material for the pastoral care of homosexual men and women also gave his studies a practical relevance.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Sengers, Wijnand J. *Homoseksualiteit als klacht: Een psychiastische studie* [Homosexuality as a complaint: A Psychiatric study]. Bussum: Paul Brand, 1969.

⁴⁶ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 5, 6, 11.

The First Task of Psychoanalysis: Diagnostic

Sengers believed that the first task of psychoanalysis was diagnostic; priority must be given to determining whether one had a propensity towards homophilia, heterophilia, biphilia, or aphilia. Furthermore, this diagnosis could only be determined using a triad of information, namely one's sexual attraction, sexual fantasies, and sexual dreams. Therefore, to determine if someone were homosexual, one had to experience homosexual desires in all three categories. Through his extensive research with homosexual individuals, Sengers believed that this triad of information formed the 'only decisive criteria, the dreams having the validity of an absolute indicator.'⁴⁷ As a diagnostic method, Sengers' findings soon became widely accepted among his professional peers.

Should the homosexual orientation prove to be present in the subject, Sengers' therapeutic discovery was to introduce the psychiatric world and ecclesial communities to the beneficial concept of self-acceptance and integration. Evidence for this was based on the fact that, although it was commonly held in psychiatry that the propensity towards a same-sex orientation could be changed, his research found that 'such a process from the homophile propensity to the heterophile or biphile propensity is so seldom met with, that on these grounds alone, acceptance of the present propensity appears to be the only possibility.' In other words, Sengers could find little evidence that the sexual orientation of a homosexual person could be changed; therefore, it was in the interests of a homosexual patient to adapt to and accept their sexual orientation and social situation. This, Sengers believed was the 'only right and, indeed, the prime aim of psychotherapeutic treatment or other assistance.'⁴⁸

The elaboration of this principle formed the core of Sengers' thesis, a summary of which can be found in the first four chapters of his practical manual *Gewoon Hetzelfde?* This amounts to a presentation of material based on difficulties surrounding recognition of one's homosexuality, inner resistance to or an attitude of ambivalence to one's homosexual

⁴⁷ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 427.

⁴⁸ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 428.

orientation, and the positive benefits associated with its acceptance, all in the context of the effect upon, and development of, one's personality.

Inner Attitude

For Sengers, one's inner attitude in such matters was of primary importance. Such an attitude involves how one thinks about oneself, how one deals with one's homosexuality, and whether or not one comes to terms with it. Inner resistance, he believed, could take many forms based on one's doubts, fears, disappointments, or an unwillingness to commit what was thought to be a sin. Sengers suggests that social attitudes towards homosexuality play an important role in the development of one's inner attitude. Nouwen appears to be particularly taken with Sengers' arguments in this regard, quoting the following passage in 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual' from *Gewoon Hetzelfde?*: 'The pressure leading to condemnation must be strong. What is good must be called bad, what is positive must become negative. It amounts to adapting [one's] own feelings to what others say about them.'⁴⁹ Sengers believed this could lead to a 'radical' form of inner resistance, arising in particular from those influenced by the beliefs and philosophy of overly moralistic and extreme forms of Christian teaching, particularly when homosexual acts are seen as the most serious of all sins. In an attempt to 'pray the gay away,' life becomes an intensely serious matter, filled with rigour, vigilance, duty, and distrustfulness: a life held in constant tension. The question of sustaining a loving relationship with another person of the same sex becomes impossible. As a result, interactions with other people are only possible from a cold intellectual approach. The cost of such inner resistance, Sengers believed, was often high. Once such inner tension becomes untenable, 'life collapses like a house of cards.'⁵⁰

A less serious form of inner resistance which Sengers mentions, and which gained Nouwen's attention, is one primarily based on fear. This resistance is found in the person who at some level acknowledges to himself or herself their homosexuality but lives in fear that others will find out their secret. Fear leads one to think of one's sexual orientation as a 'disability,'

⁴⁹ Sengers, *Gewoon hetzelfde?*, 23; Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 208.

⁵⁰ Sengers, *Gewoon hetzelfde?*, 24, 25.

cultivating an obsessional attitude about it, and bringing about feelings of isolation and loneliness. There is no sense of '*innerlijke vrijheid*' or inner freedom (a concept made popular by the Dutch Catholic mental health movement, as we saw in Chapter 3), and a large part of one's energy must remain directed against oneself, but when someone can no longer put up a fight, the subsequent derailment which occurs in one's life is costly.⁵¹ For Sengers, the dangers associated with inner resistance become evident:

I have to stress the fact that people whose lives are lived in resistance are convinced of the positive value of this attitude. In conscience they are honest and responsible and can face their fellow man without shame... But the price they pay is high: there is an increasing tension, internal as well as in every relationship to the other; the sexual life cannot form a unity with the rest of the personality, it has become a hostile part which through its increasing power becomes a disturbing reality. Every form of social life remains superficial, which causes life to become increasingly distorted and narrow.⁵²

Nouwen appears to have maintained a strong interest in the psychotherapeutic nature of Sengers' arguments, and, I believe because of the strong phenomenological characteristics of his research, thought this passage worth quoting at length in 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual.'⁵³

Self-Acceptance

As mentioned previously, Sengers' research led him to believe that self-acceptance and the integration of one's sexual orientation was the logical psychotherapeutic solution to the various problems faced by those with a homosexual orientation. For Sengers, acceptance offered a greater guarantee for optimal personal development than an attitude of resistance, therefore becoming the prime objective in psychotherapeutic situations.

⁵¹ Sengers, *Gewoon hetzelfde?*, 28.

⁵² Sengers, *Gewoon hetzelfde?*, 30.

⁵³ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 209-210.

In his thesis, Sengers noted that within the philosophical and psychological literature extant at that time, there were few reflections on the concept of self-acceptance. For Sengers however, Rogers was an exception, in that the idea of acceptance became increasingly central for him. He notes Rogers' belief that when all one's perceptions of oneself in relation to others were 'accepted into the organized conscious concept of the self, then this achievement is accompanied by feelings of comfort and freedom from tension which are experienced as psychological adjustment.' Similarly, in *On Becoming a Person*, he notes that Rogers wrote: 'We cannot change, we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly accept what we are. Then change seems to come about almost unnoticed. Another result which seems to grow out of being myself is that relationships then became real.'⁵⁴

In Sengers' opinion, his fellow countryman, the psychologist C. Scharff, had thought most profoundly about the meaning and implications of the self-acceptance process. Scharff held that acceptance was 'an intentional act, which consists of daring to incorporate something ambiguous into the temporal flow of [one's] existence in the hope of realizing its stated and ever-deepening meaning.'⁵⁵ This, in Scharff's opinion, was a decision of existential importance, often determined by the need to adapt during a crisis situation.⁵⁶

Voorhandene (Availability)

Throughout his research, Sengers believed that self-acceptance is an active and ongoing process, a function of the 'self' that is central to the development of one's personality as it relates to the formation of interpersonal relationships. This, he recognised, is particularly evident when it comes to what is experienced as negative in one's life; acceptance can only be made if something positive is seen within it. Moreover, that process is necessary for personal growth, and opens up the perspective for love and hope.⁵⁷ Importantly, the Dutch word *voorhandene* is used by Sengers in this context. *Voorhandene* is generally translated into English as 'available' and '*disponible*' in French. Only when a negative feeling is

⁵⁴ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 184.

⁵⁵ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 186.

⁵⁶ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 184.

⁵⁷ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 186.

acknowledged and accepted, he wrote, can it be integrated into one's broader context of life, leading to a more real knowledge about oneself and others. Therefore, what is now *voorhandene* (available/*disponible*) becomes more manageable, increasing a sense of self, and reducing uncertainty about oneself and others.⁵⁸ Might this be the direct origin of Nouwen's concept of the self-availability of the homosexual? Perhaps, but the concept of *disponibilité* was very much part of the milieu of the day in Dutch Catholic mental health circles.

In the fourth chapter of *Gewoon hetzelfde?*, Sengers summarises his research on acceptance, as developed in his thesis. Desires need to be accepted without feeling that one is leading a double life, and living with those desires must form a unity with the rest of one's being. Full acceptance of desires is characterised by the feeling of being oneself, living in a way that is in line with one's own conscience, no longer trapped within oneself, becoming free, strong and resistant to criticism. As Sengers notes: those who have accepted themselves 'have become bosses in their own house and have turned their gaze outward.'⁵⁹ One's energy is no longer wasted in defending oneself against attacks from outside, and any feeling of being different or an outcast disappears.

On the religious front, Sengers believed that through the self-acceptance of one's homosexuality, religious feelings could now develop in a healthy way; with the new ability to turn one's gaze outward, such religious feelings may be grounded in love for one's fellow human beings, taking on a personal, therefore fruitful, existence. Being a believer no longer means adapting to other people's ideas, but can now become an experience in which one's way of being human has been given a new perspective.⁶⁰

Conclusion

In the history of the emancipation of LGBT+ people in the Netherlands, certain therapeutic views outlined within the Dutch Catholic community in the late 1950s and throughout the

⁵⁸ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 186, 187.

⁵⁹ Sengers, *Gewoon hetzelfde?*, 41.

⁶⁰ Sengers, *Gewoon hetzelfde?*, 43.

1960s contributed to the integration of many homosexuals at that time within Dutch society. I believe this is a story unprecedented anywhere in the life of the Catholic Church, and is the social-political environment in which Nouwen became intertwined. The Pastoral Centre, under the leadership of Trimbos, became the exponents of an intellectual vanguard, steeped in the ideals and motivations of the Dutch Catholic mental health movement, which assisted Catholic homosexuals adapt to the changing social conditions of the day, mostly in an effort to keep them within the fold of the Catholic Church. And although the number of clients seen over the Pastoral Centre's seven-year existence might be considered small and therefore unrepresentative of Dutch homosexual men and women in general, its influence on the wider Dutch Church remains substantial and significant.

The Catholic psychiatrist Sengers defined acceptance as 'the process of self-realisation which is based on the patient's recognition of what is present in himself,' and affirmed the psychotherapeutic value in coming to terms with one's homosexual orientation.⁶¹ Resistance or rejection of one's homosexuality, on the other hand, he defined as 'the process of self-realisation resulting from the patient's consciously ignoring what he knows to be present in himself.'⁶² In Sengers' professional opinion, this caused much harm, given that when one's sexual feelings could not form a unity with the rest of one's personality, this would lead to a distorted and narrow form of life. Sengers' findings held considerable sway among his profession and were to influence the psychotherapeutic approach taken by counsellors in the decades that followed. Indeed, when it came to the acceptance of one's homosexual orientation, Sengers held that when it was made *voorhandene* (available/*disponible*), it became more manageable, increasing a sense of self, and reducing uncertainty about oneself and others. Indeed, Sengers' concept of *voorhandene* may well have inspired Nouwen's notion of the self-availability of the homosexual; even if there was no direct link, it aligns with the language of the Dutch mental health movement which described mental health as an *innerlijke disponibiliteit*.

⁶¹ Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 428.

⁶² Sengers, *Homoseksualiteit*, 428.

Chapter 5

Nouwen's Research on Homosexuality

Introduction

Nouwen's archived materials on homosexuality form part of a much larger collection of records comprising the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Collection at the John M. Kelly Library at the University of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. During Nouwen's own lifetime, he compiled and built his own archival record, arranging his own records into various categories, which, over time he deposited at the Yale Divinity School Library until his death in 1996. This same order was preserved when the Henri Nouwen Archive and Research Center in Toronto, Canada took possession of these materials in 2000.¹ Maintaining the order is an important archival practice which preserves the 'provenance' of particular records. Provenance refers to the original order in which the records were received by the archivist, and the way in which the creator or collector of the records arranged them in the first instance. Keeping records in their original order has important epistemological implications, contributing to the formation of certain meanings and conclusions. Thus, the provenance of a particular document can enable connections to be made, between it and other primary source materials. It helps the process of contextualisation that no record is an isolated thing, but forms part of a larger web of knowledge.

The Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Collection includes a substantial quantity of material on homosexuality, which can be located within the archival collection, dating from the late 1950s to the mid 1990s, indicating that this topic occupied Nouwen's thoughts for much of his adult life. Nouwen collected various materials, study notes, course assignments, published articles and teaching notes on the topic of homosexuality. It is from these files that I have selected the following materials for discussion: two unpublished manuscripts, two

¹ Earnshaw, Gabrielle & Anna St. Onge. 'A Rich Harvest: Henri Nouwen's Archival Legacy,' in Bengston, Jonathan & Gabrielle Earnshaw (eds). *Turning the Wheel: Henri Nouwen and Our Search for God*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2007, 122-125.

published manuscripts, and some lecture notes.² These I have chosen for contextual analysis because of their direct relevance to the development of Nouwen's therapeutic approach to the question of homosexuality. These documents indicate the kind of questions Nouwen explored when dealing with this topic, and, as I will demonstrate, reveal influences from certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals. These documents also play an important role in the deliberate attempt at (re)constructing a missing and important part of queer history, particularly as it pertains to the Catholic Church, and the part that Nouwen played within it. As discussed earlier, this involves viewing the archival material through a 'queer lens,' challenging and undermining existing historical narratives, providing queer Catholics with the necessary archival evidence to recognise their identities and struggles in the past. Because the central aim of this project is to establish Nouwen as a therapeutic gay writer grounded in the theories of certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals, I will confine my analysis and critique of these documents to the therapeutic elements which can be easily identified within them.

The documents on homosexuality chosen for analysis are as follows, in chronological order. Firstly, an unpublished thesis proposal entitled *Homosexualiteit: Van vooroordeel naar oordeel* (Homosexuality: From Prejudice to Judgement), followed by the unpublished thesis itself, *Homosexualiteit, Een pastoraal psychologische studie over homoseksuele adolescenten* (Homosexuality: A Pastoral Psychological Study on Adolescent Homosexuals).³ In addition, two published essays found among the archival records on homosexuality will be studied. One is entitled 'Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness?' published in the *National Catholic Reporter*, 29 November 1967, later appearing unaltered in Nouwen's 1969 first published book, *Intimacy*; the second, 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual,' is listed as unpublished in the Nouwen archival finding guides although it was published in 1971 and included in an anthology on homosexuality entitled, *Is Gay Good? Ethics, Theology and Homosexuality*.⁴ Within the archival records, several typed manuscripts of the last-named

² The two unpublished manuscripts are found among Nouwen's series of Education Records; one published manuscript is found among Nouwen's series of Published Records; another manuscript is found among Nouwen's series of Manuscript Records; and the lecture notes selected are found among Nouwen's series of Teaching Records.

³ Nouwen, Henri. 'Homosexualiteit: Van vooroordeel naar oordeel [Homosexuality: From Prejudice to Judgement]' (Schema, Catholic University of Nijmegen, undated [between 1959 to 1962]). Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Education Series, Box 414/File 14299; 'Nouwen, 'Homoseksuele adolescenten.'

⁴ Nouwen, 'Homosexuality'; Nouwen, 'Self-availability'; Oberholtzer, *Is Gay Good?*.

essay are found, and were used by Nouwen as class hand-outs during courses offered at Yale Divinity School from 1973, and possibly as late as 1976. The final document to be examined is a series of lecture notes for an undergraduate university course Nouwen held at Yale Divinity School in 1973. The course was entitled 'Discipline and Discipleship.'⁵

The Therapeutic Discourse

A review of literature covering LGBT+ theology and spirituality indicates that two authors in particular have attempted to systematise that literature into a number of categories, the first being Donald Boisvert, writing in 2000, and the second being Patrick Cheng in 2011.⁶ For the purposes of this thesis I have utilised the theological and spiritual categories devised by Boisvert rather than Cheng, as I believe they better illustrate the varied content of Nouwen's body of work on homosexuality. Boisvert's classifications allow for what he describes as a 'four-dimensional typology.' These modes of discourse Boisvert describes as 'apologetic,' 'therapeutic,' 'ecological' and 'autobiographical.'⁷ He describes each of these words or categories as 'first and foremost descriptive: it refers to the tradition or form of expression from which each type stems, or to which it can lay claim.' His choice of words reflects what each category 'is meant to do or to accomplish.'⁸

Boisvert's 'therapeutic' category is an important one for this thesis, as it 'seeks to place the individual experience of being gay in a strongly positive, legitimate, celebratory, and *psychologically healthy context*' (Italics mine.) Therefore, this category of writing has more to do with the individual person than it does with the institutional church and its teachings, and

⁵ Nouwen, Henri. 'Discipline and Discipleship Course Material.' Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Teaching Series, Box 266/Item 2096.

⁶ Boisvert, Donald. *Out on Holy Ground: Meditations on Gay Men's Spirituality*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2000; Cheng, Patrick. *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*. New York: Seabury Books, 2011.

⁷ Cheng uses four different categories ('apologetic theology,' 'liberation theology,' 'relational theology' and 'queer theology') to describe the chronology of LGBT+ theologies, but speaks more of an 'evolution' of ideas than a four-dimensional typology. However, even today one will find authors writing in one or more of the categories described, and there is certainly no uniform opinion in the academy that sees 'queer theology' as the pinnacle of all other LGBT+ theologies which have gone before. Nouwen's writings examined in this thesis do not reflect Cheng's 'evolutionary' categorisations, and do not fit comfortably in any one of his four categories. Nouwen himself always maintained a 'therapeutic' concern throughout his entire discourse on homosexuality.

⁸ Boisvert, *Out on Holy Ground*, 23.

has much in common with other forms of pastoral theology found within the Catholic tradition. Authors such as John Fortunato, Craig O'Neill, Kathleen Ritter, Christian de la Huerta and John McNeill, have all authored works in this therapeutic category.⁹ Boisvert highlights two features it offers the LGBT+ Christian: firstly, 'it emphasizes the beneficial impact of the coming out process for the person,' and secondly, it tends to argue that if God 'created sexuality in its variety of forms, and what is created is good,'¹⁰ then by implication, 'as a gay person, you are good.'¹¹ In the field of LGBT+ theology and spirituality, therapeutic writing remains popular, not only among queer Catholics, but other queer Christians, because it addresses and continually readdresses one fundamental problem: the frequent feelings of rejection and self-hatred experienced by these people in view of official church teachings around queer identity. Therefore, Boisvert sees 'many close affinities between religion and therapy ... a spirituality that bridges the two can be quite effective in providing a reassuring sense of wholeness and "redemption" to the injured person.'¹² All of Nouwen's selected writings on homosexuality examined in this chapter display a similarly therapeutic mode of thinking, as he continually addresses the pastoral issue of homosexuality in psychological and mental health terms. Nouwen's 1971 essay, 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual,' represents the peak of his therapeutic research, and therefore it sits comfortably within this genre of writing.¹³

Identifying the Lacuna in the Literature

An important aspect of this thesis has been to identify a lacuna in the literature of LGBT+ theology and spirituality and to establish Nouwen's rightful contribution to this genre of writing. Nowhere among the literature identified in Boisvert's four types or modes of discourse do we find an acknowledgement of Nouwen's writings on homosexuality. Indeed, neither Boisvert or Cheng make any reference to the contribution Nouwen made to ecclesial debates about this issue, despite their naming other Catholic authors who worked in this field of research. Therefore, the analysis of Nouwen's writings on homosexuality as outlined in this

⁹ Boisvert, *Out on Holy Ground*, 25.

¹⁰ Genesis 1:31, 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.'

¹¹ Boisvert, *Out on Holy Ground*, 24.

¹² Boisvert, *Out on Holy Ground*, 25.

¹³ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 204-212.

chapter will shed further light on the existing discourses found in LGBT+ theology and spirituality.

Similarly, in the scholarly literature concerning Nouwen produced in the 25 years since his death, including several theses covering various themes in his spiritual theology, only one author, Michael Ford, has undertaken any analysis of Nouwen's writings on homosexuality. This included Nouwen's 1967 published article 'Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness,' and his 1971 published essay, 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual.'¹⁴ The latter Ford believed was 'one of the most persuasive psycho-spiritual studies on homosexuality ever written,' and suggests its limited circulation amounted to a loss for the Church, as for the homosexual.¹⁵ Although Ford notes the psychological and psychiatric perspectives of these two essays, he does not investigate the broader context in which these two essays are located, as products of Nouwen's training in phenomenological psychology, and the influences which were brought to bear upon Nouwen's thinking from the Dutch Catholic mental health movement. Neither does Ford investigate the meaning behind Nouwen's term 'self-availability,' a concept which, if left unexamined, loses much of its impact as a therapeutic tool for homosexual men and women. These issues represent gaps in the existing literature on Nouwen which this chapter seeks to address.

Homosexualiteit: Van vooroordeel naar oordeel
(Homosexuality: From prejudice to judgement) Undated [Between 1959-1962]

The first document of interest is a typed 39-page manuscript entitled 'Homosexualiteit: van vooroordeel naar oordeel (Homosexuality: from prejudice to judgement)'; it is estimated by the archive to have been written sometime between 1959 and 1962, and is found within a file described by the archives as 'Course notes on homosexuality,' a title based on the contents of the file. It was originally housed in a green folder labelled *Homosexualiteit* (Homosexuality) in Nouwen's own handwriting and located among Nouwen's series of education records. The file also contains a draft of the typed manuscript in Nouwen's own

¹⁴ Ford, *Wounded Prophet*, 152, 153; Ford, Michael A. 'Wounded Lover' (PHD thesis, University of Liverpool, 2002), 63-69.

¹⁵ Ford, 'Wounded Lover,' 67.

handwriting; an incomplete second copy of the manuscript; and some other handwritten notes by Nouwen, together with some blank psychological testing forms.¹⁶ Importantly, on the handwritten copy of the manuscript, the word 'Schema' is written as a heading; however, this does not appear on the typed manuscript. As the word *schema* generally describes the structured framework or planned outline for something intended, it becomes apparent that this manuscript was prepared by Nouwen as the outline proposal for his 1963 thesis proposal, *Homosexualiteit: Een pastoraal psychologische studie over homoseksuele adolescenten* (Homosexuality: A pastoral psychological study on homosexual adolescents), submitted as part of his post-graduate studies in psychology.¹⁷ As a manuscript, it represents Nouwen's first identifiable reflections on the topic of homosexuality which can be found among his archival papers, and we find contained here the genesis of his own therapeutic approach to the subject.

The proposal is divided into two parts. The first gives a brief overview of the dynamics involved in fostering society's general prejudice towards homosexuals, based on historical/anthropological, theological, and social/psychological theories. Nouwen believes an understanding of these underlying issues offers a foundation which can lead to a more mature attitude toward homosexuality. In the second part of the proposal, Nouwen takes a therapeutic approach to the pastoral issues faced by homosexuals, offering a number of suggestions which he believes will be liberating and healing for them. The influence of the Dutch Catholic Mental Health Movement and Buytendijk in particular are apparent throughout the proposal.

As Nouwen saw it, part of the problem faced by homosexuals related to the premise of the self-fulfilling prophecy, a theory made popular by the American sociologist Robert K. Merton (1910-2003).¹⁸ As we will see, this was a concept to which Nouwen returned on more than one occasion when writing about homosexuality, believing it was a sociological phenomenon experienced by most homosexuals which led to psychological issues. It is reminiscent of

¹⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Education Series, 'Course notes on homosexuality' (1959-1962), Box 414/ File 14299.

¹⁷ Nouwen Archives, 'Homoseksuele adolescenten.'

¹⁸ See Merton, Robert K. 'The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,' *The Antioch Review* 68:1 (Winter 2010 [1948]), 171-190.

Buytendijk's reflections on inner freedom or lack thereof, and its link to the untruths we tell ourselves which may lie beneath a mental health issue. As Nouwen explained, the self-fulfilling prophecy is the premise that:

If people view situations as real, then they are real in their consequences; when people attach a certain meaning to a situation, their subsequent behaviour and its consequences are determined by this ascribed meaning. The self-fulfilling prophecy is, initially, a false definition of the situation that evokes a new behaviour that lives up to the original false belief.¹⁹

The self-fulfilling prophecy, therefore, in Nouwen's opinion, exposed homosexuals to a certain social-psychological dynamism as a result of society continually treating them as 'different.' It was believed that in some way this 'difference' became a central feature of the way homosexuals felt about themselves, leading to a sense of isolation and loneliness. By way of example, Nouwen turned to the writing of Donald Webster Cory (1913-1986); he wrote *The Homosexual in America* in 1951, regarded as an early influence on the gay rights movement in the United States. Nouwen quotes the following passage from Cory's work:

Delving into two questions I found that fundamental to all answers is an understanding that the dominant factor in my life, towering in importance above all others, is a consciousness that I am different. In one all-important respect, I am unlike the great mass of people always around me and the knowledge of this fact is with me at all times, influencing profoundly my every thought, each minute activity, and all my aspirations. It is inescapable, not only this being different, but more than that, this constant awareness of dissimilarity.²⁰

Nouwen's impression was that the problem faced by the homosexual was not a clinical problem, but a social-psychological one. Categorising it as psychological problem firmly places

¹⁹ Nouwen, 'Homosexualiteit,' 17.

²⁰ Cory, Donald W. *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach*. New York: Greenborough, 1951; Nouwen, 'Homosexualiteit,' 18.

Nouwen's thinking in this regard within the therapeutic discourse of the Dutch Catholic Mental health movement.

The key question which Nouwen sought to answer in this thesis proposal is 'how to break the vicious cycle of the self-fulfilling prophecy,' apparently identified by him as the main psychological issue facing homosexuals. To answer this question, Nouwen turned to the reflections of Professor Dr. Gerrit Theodoor Kempe, the only non-Catholic to offer a paper at the KCV private study day held on 23rd March 1960 entitled, 'Maatschappelijke Aspecten van Homophilie' [Social Aspects of Homophilia] and subsequently published that same year in the pamphlet *Homosexualiteit*. Nouwen quotes Kempe from this KCV pamphlet at length, believing with him that if homosexuals are unable to leave their feeling of isolation behind them, then full human contact with other people remains impossible. This led to someone being unable to achieve 'knowing the inner self.' In such circumstances, a negative attitude remains, where someone is completely unaware of their own potential, and unable to be open with other people.²¹

For Nouwen, the way to solve this problem was through the psychological attitude of Ludwig Binswanger's *Wirheit van de liebende Begegnung* (the truth of the loving encounter). As discussed in chapter 3, the concept of the 'encounter' became an important motif among the Utrecht School of phenomenologists, and in particular Buytendijk, who often spoke of Binswanger's notion of the loving encounter. It was a way to gain knowledge of a person's 'innerness' through participation in the other, requiring a certain *disponibilité* for its authenticity. Nouwen believed that the objectification of the homosexual can be avoided through the loving encounter; a way of 'participating in the experience of the homosexual man in a way that is liberating and healing.'²² This, Nouwen believed, is not a technique but a 'psychological attitude that transforms prejudice' encouraging a reciprocal way of understanding. Here we see Nouwen expressing the phenomenological attitude outlined in chapter three and encouraged by certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals in the phenomenological psychology movement.

²¹ Nouwen, 'Homosexualiteit,' 30; Overing (ed), *Homosexualiteit*, 54.

²² Nouwen, 'Homosexualiteit,' 30.

Finally, I believe the most important element we can take away from Nouwen's 'Schema' is his use of the concept *innerlijke vrijheid*, the primary condition for mental health promoted by Buytendijk, and closely aligned with the concept of *innerlijke disponibiliteit* in the writings of the Dutch Catholic mental health movement. Nouwen believed that 'a person's self-determination, possibly through one's *innerlijke vrijheid*, [and] one's integrated set of values ... offers the most responsible basis for an approach to homosexuality.'²³

***Homosexualiteit, Een pastoraal psychologische studie over homoseksuele adolescenten*
(Homosexuality: A pastoral psychological study on adolescent homosexuals) 1963**

A 210-page thesis entitled *Homosexualiteit, Een pastoraal psychologische studie over homoseksuele adolescenten* (Homosexuality: A pastoral psychological study on adolescent homosexuals) dated 1963, accompanied by an extensive bibliography, is the second document of interest to this study.²⁴ It is a substantial piece of writing designed to address the issues faced by pastoral care givers when it comes to the subject of homosexuality. In the Preface to the thesis, Nouwen indicates that the data for his study was collected from homosexuals in many phases and in three locations: the psychiatry department of Radboud Hospital, led by Professor Dr. J.J.G. Prick; the military psychiatric service in The Hague; and the department of skin diseases (possibly a sexual health clinic) at the GGD (Municipal Health Service) in Rotterdam.²⁵ Thus, the phenomenological nature of this study is established.

From the outset Nouwen points out that his study is not about the causes of homosexuality or any associated therapies; rather, its aim is to give a detailed description of the life of homosexuals, based principally on interviews with two adolescent homosexual males, among others, and an analysis of the most recent literature on the subject.²⁶ In essence, its main

²³ Nouwen, 'Homosexualiteit,' 25.

²⁴ Nouwen, 'Homoseksuele adolescenten.' Two copies of this thesis exist, one in the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Collection (Nouwen Archive and Research Collection Archive, Education Series, Box 287/File 302) and another is held at the *Katholieke Documentatie Centrum* (Catholic Document Centre) Radboud University, Nijmegen (formerly the Catholic University of Nijmegen). It was sent to Prick for examination and forms part of his archival collection (File PRIC-33).

²⁵ Nouwen, 'Homoseksuele adolescenten,' 3.

²⁶ A further short eleven-page essay by Nouwen entitled 'Man en Vrouw als twee realiseringsmodaliteiten van het mens-zijn [Man & Woman as two realization modalities of being human],' January 1964, is found in the

focus was the social environment and its effect on the development and behaviour of homosexuals. Noting that many people, both Catholic Protestant and Protestant, felt 'very uncomfortable with the phenomenon of homosexuality, and therefore feel a lot of uncertainty in their pastoral approach' to them, Nouwen believed that a lengthy description of the homosexual lifestyle was needed, in order to eliminate preconceived prejudices, and to offer a starting point for a pastoral approach.²⁷

Nouwen's thesis is divided into five parts. The first part discusses the prejudices common in society surrounding homosexuality; the second is the detailed discussion of the life and world of two homosexual adolescents interviewed by Nouwen; the third section offers theoretical reflections on homosexuality; part four attempts to further understand these theoretical reflections through the two adolescent homosexuals; and the final section is intended to situate the whole study in a pastoral perspective.²⁸ It is the last section which is of interest to this study, as it establishes Nouwen's research firmly within the therapeutic turn which took place within Dutch Catholicism at the time of the writing his thesis.

In the final section of the thesis, Nouwen points out that it is not the task of pastoral caregivers to:

ask and solve the cause of homosexuality through research, not to attempt to cure homosexuality, not to intervene in the societal factors that could promote homosexuality. The task of the caregiver is to understand the homosexual and his world in such a way that that he can show him the way and guide him to the Person of the Incarnate Son of God [Jesus], in faith, hope and love.²⁹

archival papers of J.J.G. Prick at the *Katholieke Documentatie Centrum* (Catholic Document Centre) Radboud University, Nijmegen (File PRIC-35). It was presented to Prick as a correction to criticisms by him that Nouwen's thesis did not adequately cover the causes of homosexuality, and acts as a supplement to it. It undertakes a brief study of the anthropological, biological-physiological and sociocultural factors which might answer this question, a common obsession at that time, but a study of this document adds little to the ongoing argument of this thesis.

²⁷ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 3.

²⁸ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 3.

²⁹ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 191.

Thus, drawing similar conclusions to the work of the Pastoral Centre discussed earlier, Nouwen believed that one of the aims for offering pastoral care to homosexuals was to keep them within the fold of the Church. Elsewhere, Nouwen had noted how striking it was that all the homosexuals he interviewed or spoke to 'assumed that the Church and the Bible condemned their behaviour and that they should therefore stay away from that environment.'³⁰

As part of his research on adolescent homosexuality, Nouwen undertook projective testing with his clients, a form of psychoanalysis in which the respondent gives a free response to stimuli, such as inkblots, pictures, or incomplete sentences.³¹ The assumption in such testing is that in their responses clients project and reveal unconscious aspects of their personalities. IQ testing was also undertaken. Suffice to say, the value of this data is questionable, but Nouwen was aware of the possible limitations of his findings, noting the difficulty he had in 'pinning down' individuals for interviews.³² Projective testing was also open to interpretation, so there is always the question of how much Nouwen projected his own reflections when assessing the data.

Nonetheless, from the data collected, Nouwen made the assessment that homosexuals were people living 'without a home ... classified under the term: "homeless".' This owes as much to the findings of Hans Giese (1920-1970) as it does to Nouwen's own interpretation of the data. As Nouwen pointed out, the homeless nature of the homosexual was an important factor in Giese's research as well, published in 1958 under the title *Homosexuelle Mann in der Welt* (Homosexual Man in the World).³³ Due to the prejudices imposed on the homosexual by society, Nouwen relied on Giese's findings in discussing the predicament he believed homosexuals find themselves in: 'Giese has already shown that the homosexual can be considered as someone who lives nowhere, who cannot form habits, who does not have a safe home from which to approach the world and where he can return to rest.'³⁴

³⁰ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 197.

³¹ For a historical overview of Projective testing see Carter, Nathan T., Michael A. Daniels & Michael J. Zickar. 'Projective Testing: Historical Foundations and uses for human resources management,' *Human Resources Management Review* 23 (2013), 205-218.

³² Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 192.

³³ Giese, Hans. *Homosexuelle Mann in der Welt* [Homosexual Man in the World]. München: Kindler, 1958.

³⁴ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 199.

In order to discuss these findings further, Nouwen turned to the writings of Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1903-1991), a German philosopher and his 1955 book *Neue Geborgenheit: Das Problem einer Überwindung des Existentialismus* (New Security: The Problem of Overcoming Existentialism), which draws on the works of other philosophers like Saint-Exupéry, Heidegger, Zutt and Minkowski. Nouwen believed that although the topic of homosexuality was not mentioned by Bollnow, his book offered a description of human existence which fitted Nouwen's data, helping to place his research on homosexual adolescents in a broader context. In particular, Nouwen paid special attention to one of Bollnow's main philosophical points in his book: 'The meaning of the house'.³⁵ Nouwen highlighted Bollnow's concept of existence, whereby 'existentialist man is essentially a restless wanderer, without a house, without a village, city or homeland. He is the eternal refugee, for whom every certainty and security is an illusion.'³⁶ Certainly, on Bollnow's part, much of this reflection can be linked to the post-World War II situation in Europe, where the traumatic and devastating experience of displacement was commonplace, and many people were forced to become refugees. 'What Bollnow is looking for,' Nouwen writes, 'is "a new security, a new solidity, a new homeland, a new house, to give a person a firm base against the powers of oppression."³⁷ Nouwen continues to reflect that it is the house which 'offers shelter from the chaotic powers of the world, it protects against the enemy ... In the home, the habit of familiarity becomes possible ... [where] peace and security reign.'³⁸

Although Nouwen does not mention the French existential philosopher Gabriel Marcel, the originator of the concept of *disponibilité* (availability/*disponibilität*), Bollnow's reflections on 'the meaning of the house' bear a striking resemblance to Marcel's notion of being at home, discussed in the introductory chapter. Marcel held that the state of being receptive involved the preparation of a space in which one is *disponible* towards others; the idea that one needs to be 'at home' in order to receive others, 'at home' with oneself, or present to oneself, in order to be *disponible* to others. Nonetheless, Nouwen saw Bollnow's philosophical concept

³⁵ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 200.

³⁶ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 201.

³⁷ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 201.

³⁸ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 202.

of the house, and the lack thereof for many, as a kind of metaphor which allows the caregiver 'to transcend the field of strict pathology and see the homosexual and his world in the broader perspective of human existence.'³⁹

In concluding his thesis, Nouwen offered a critique of the only comprehensive study to date on the pastoral provision for homosexuals from a Catholic point of view: *Morality and the Homosexual: A Catholic Approach to a Moral Problem* by Michael J. Buckley, published in 1959.⁴⁰ Following in the tradition of the Dutch Catholic mental movement, Nouwen viewed this work as dangerous, being 'stuck in a number of moralistic views,' where few attempts were made to describe the pastoral aspects of homosexuality, and where the burden of sin and guilt was placed on the homosexual individual. This was made all the worse for Nouwen by the fact that the book was granted a special authority for use among the clergy via the Preface provided by John C. Heenan; Heenan was the Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, one of the most senior bishops in the United Kingdom. Because the book paid more attention to the role of the priest in a pastoral situation than the homosexual person, Nouwen believed the influence of this book in the Catholic world could be disastrous. Its overly moralistic tone, its 'drastic' and 'rock-hard measures,' Nouwen held, would only scare the homosexual person away, leaving the impression of a largely misunderstanding Catholic Church. Rejecting this approach, Nouwen saw the role of the Catholic Church in such a situation in quite a different light. The role of the priest was to be one of 'shepherding,' built upon a 'direct pastoral relationship of the pastor with the individual person.'⁴¹ Furthermore, the gospel would only bear fruit in a person,' according to Nouwen, 'when it is redeeming, not when it leads to forced external action.' When a homosexual person forms the view that the Church or the Bible condemns their behaviour, then, Nouwen held, the good news which the gospel was meant to proclaim had failed.⁴² In the final words of the thesis, Nouwen declares: 'It is now the task of pastoral theology to elaborate a richer and deeper picture of the theological-

³⁹ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 205.

⁴⁰ Buckley, Michael J. *Morality and the Homosexual: A Catholic Approach to a Moral Problem*. London: Sands, 1959.

⁴¹ Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 206, 207.

⁴² Nouwen, 'Homosexuele adolescenten,' 208.

pastoral perspective of homosexuality.⁴³ As we will see, this indeed was a mission statement which Nouwen himself took very seriously.

‘Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness?’ (1967)

Soon after Nouwen returned to the Netherlands, following his time as teaching at the University of Notre Dame, Illinois, he published ‘Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness?’, his first attempt at publicly discussing the subject of homosexuality.⁴⁴ It first appeared as an article in the American publication *National Catholic Reporter* on 29th November, 1967.⁴⁵ It was subsequently published as the third chapter in Nouwen’s first book, *Intimacy: Pastoral Psychological Essays* in 1969, a collection of essays based on his time as a lecturer at Notre Dame.⁴⁶ In the introduction to *Intimacy*, Nouwen offers us the reason why an essay such as ‘Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness?’ would have been written. ‘I wrote, not to solve a problem or to formulate a theory, but to respond to men and women who wanted to share their struggles in trying to find a niche in this chaotic world.’⁴⁷ Thus, pastoral intent was established as the primary driving force behind the writing of this article. It should also be noted that this chapter was deleted from subsequent additions of *Intimacy*, perhaps because his views on homosexuality had somewhat evolved after 1969. Despite this, this essay is in line with Nouwen’s later work on homosexuality, as it ‘seeks to help in formulating a mature human and Christian attitude’ to the subject of homosexuality.⁴⁸

Much of this article’s content owes its origin to Nouwen’s research contained in his 1963 thesis. Nouwen approached his topic from two different perspectives: from the point of view of prejudice, and from the point of view of homosexuality as a psychopathology or mental disorder. Nouwen explained that it is not his task ‘to decide who is right or who is wrong, but

⁴³ Nouwen, ‘Homosexuele adolescenten,’ 210.

⁴⁴ Nouwen: ‘Homosexuality,’ 8.

⁴⁵ A copy is found in the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Published Works, Box 2294/File 1542.

⁴⁶ Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 38-52.

⁴⁷ Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 1.

⁴⁸ Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 38.

to explain the different approaches in such a way that we can come to a fearless and relaxed understanding of a problem which is a source of suffering for many people.’⁴⁹

When dealing with the topic of prejudice, Nouwen noted for the first time that ‘many homosexual adults ... will tell you that the homosexual way of life is normal.’⁵⁰ If this is true, then Nouwen believed that any prejudice homosexual men and women feel is due to the problem of projection. In his view it was the homosexual part which may be present in every person, and which when left unacknowledged, may be projected onto homosexuals in the form of hate and rejection. This appears to be based on the approach promulgated by Alfred C. Kinsey (1894-1956) in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, published in 1948, which set sexual orientation on a sliding scale (Kinsey is mentioned in Nouwen’s opening paragraph).⁵¹ For Nouwen, this meant that homosexuals were nothing more than victims of a ‘scapegoat mechanism, no different from anti-Semitism, anti-Negroism, or anti-Catholicism.’⁵² Nouwen also saw the sociological mechanism of Robert Merton’s ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ at play again.

In the second half of the article, Nouwen explores the possibility that homosexuality is the result of mental illness, still very much a consideration in 1967 when this article was written. This, I suspect, would have been of particular interest to his American audience. The American Psychiatric Association had declared homosexuality a ‘sociopathic personality disturbance’ in its 1952 manual; it was not until 1973 that homosexuality was removed from the manual altogether as a mental illness. Nouwen did not believe at the time of writing that social prejudices alone could account for the problems faced by homosexual men and women, and thought that homosexuality was at least to some extent the result of mental illness or developmental trauma. Again, the influence of Calon’s developmental psychology and Prick’s developmental perspective on sexuality are noticeable. Giese’s concept of the homosexual being a person living ‘without a home’ is once again discussed. So is Buckley, along with

⁴⁹ Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 38,39.

⁵⁰ Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 39.

⁵¹ Kinsey, Alfred C., Wardell Baxter Pomeroy & Clyde E. Martin. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia: W.B Saunders, 1948.

⁵² Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 40.

another author, Catholic psychiatrist John D. Cavanagh, both of whom are critiqued for their unpastoral and 'moralistic tone.'⁵³

As Nouwen draw this essay to a close, he makes what he believes to be some practical suggestions, offering guidelines derived from his experience and critical thinking. 'Overly moralistic concerns' should be avoided at all times, and a greater understanding of the homosexual man and woman is encouraged, one based on reality and not prejudice. Still holding the view that homosexuality may be due to a mental illness, he feels that if a homosexual sincerely wants to change, then 'he can be helped and even cured.'⁵⁴ However, if the possibility exists that a cure cannot be achieved, Nouwen makes an interesting and bold statement: 'We can *dispose of* our sexuality in the form of abstinence, but this is only possible in the form of sacrifice'⁵⁵ (my italics).

I do not believe that this statement is as straightforward as it may first seem. Surely Nouwen is not saying that we can 'dispose' or 'get rid' of our sexuality in some way. Rather, I think we are dealing here with a grammatical 'false friend,' a translation error which uses a foreign expression having a different meaning or nuance in English. We must remember that English was a second language for Nouwen. From all that we know so far, I believe the meaning is best understood as having our sexuality 'at our disposal' or in terms as we are about to see, having our sexuality 'available.' Only then can it be utilised in the form of abstinence or celibacy. Therefore, it is my view that this is the first time we see Marcel's concept of *disponibilité* utilised in any of Nouwen's writings. It is also analogous to the central concern of the Dutch Catholic mental health movement, as in Snoeck's *innerlijke disponibiliteit* and Wertenproek's *beschikking heeft over* (having at one's disposal, or being available to) as outlined in chapter 3. Be that as it may, by 1971 Nouwen was certainly exploring the concept of availability in the context of homosexuality.

⁵³ Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 44-50; John R. Cavanagh, *Counseling the Invert*. Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1966.

⁵⁴ Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 51,52

⁵⁵ Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 52.

‘The Self-availability of the Homosexual’ (1971)

Taking a pastoral and therapeutic approach to same-sex attracted people, Nouwen’s ‘The Self-availability of The Homosexual’ marks the first occasion in which we find the concept of availability explicitly utilised in his body of works. The essay was published as chapter 10 of an anthology edited by W. Dwight Oberholtzer, *Is Gay Good? Ethics, Theology and Homosexuality*.⁵⁶ In addition to the Preface and Introduction, this anthology is a collection of thirteen articles designed to answer the question posed by its title, ‘Is gay good?’ John von Rohr, of the Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, begins the discussion with an essay entitled, ‘Toward a Theology of Homosexuality.’ In the introduction, it is explained by the editor that, as a symposium of papers, this anthology is dialogical in nature, with authors responding to von Rohr’s arguments in their own presentations. In addition, Oberholtzer explained that ‘an author’s entrance is determined by his contrast with the previous essayist.’⁵⁷ Nouwen’s paper, therefore, is a response to von Rohr’s chapter, and appropriately contrasted with the previous essay in chapter nine, ‘The Church’s Role After Law Reform,’ written by Anthony Grey, a one-time Director of the Albany Trust and Secretary of the Homosexual Law Reform Society, London, from 1962 until 1970.

In his chapter, Von Rohr called for a reappraisal of outdated norms in relation to homosexuality, believing that these antiquated modes of thinking needed re-examining in the light of the insights and discoveries of psychology, sociology, and contemporary biblical exegesis.⁵⁸ Grey, on the other hand, takes a decidedly therapeutic approach, calling for ‘compassion, realism – and not least, atonement’ from the church on the issue of homosexuality. He highlights a central theme which would be adopted by Nouwen in his paper, namely the need for a therapeutic acceptance of one’s homosexuality. Grey writes:

homosexuals need not only acceptance of their homosexual state, but also acceptance of their capacity to love others and to be loved by them ... From the

⁵⁶ Nouwen, ‘Self-availability,’ 204-212.

⁵⁷ Oberholtzer (ed). *Is Gay Good?*, 53.

⁵⁸ Oberholtzer (ed), *Is Gay Good?*, 75, 77.

Church, above all other sources, the homosexual needs help in finding a renewed belief in the reality of love for himself, as well as for others.⁵⁹

As we will see, these pivotal ideas offered by von Rohr and Grey led Nouwen to explore a therapeutic approach to address the current pastoral issues faced by homosexual men and women. Furthermore, through the development of the concept of availability, Nouwen discovered a psychological-therapeutic tool which he believed could encourage what Grey called for: 'a renewed belief in the reality of love for himself, as well as for others.'⁶⁰

In addition, as indicated by Nouwen in the opening paragraph, it appears this essay was also offered as a corrective to negative reactions to his 'Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness?' Nouwen mentions that he was criticised by a number of homosexual men and women, in that he had failed to consult them and enquire into their own experience when writing the earlier article. They had felt that it was too one-sided, due to Nouwen's psychological training, and because he had apparently had little contact with those homosexuals who had no desire to pursue professional help. In order to address these negative reactions, Nouwen immediately establishes a phenomenological attitude in 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual' establishing that his argument is based on communication with homosexual people 'through many discussions,' getting to know their world, and involving their voice and experience (a client-centred approach).⁶¹ It had become an occasion, to use Nouwen's own words, for treating others as 'living human documents,' becoming in the process the 'source for his theological reflection.'⁶²

This renewed approach brings Nouwen to the very centre of the pastoral issue at hand: if a homosexual's 'feelings are just as real, personal, and intimate as for the heterosexual,' then any suggestion that these feelings should be changed is 'a direct offense to [that person's] most precious self.' It would appear Nouwen accepted the suggestion von Rohr made in his opening essay, that regardless of the arguments surrounding the origin or cause of same-sex

⁵⁹ Oberholtzer (ed), *Is Gay Good?*, 199, 200.

⁶⁰ Oberholtzer (ed), *Is Gay Good?*, 200.

⁶¹ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 204.

⁶² Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 137, 138.

attraction in an individual, its existence as a human way of being remains 'fact,' and therefore can be interpreted, regardless of traditional ecclesial arguments that homosexual acts are unnatural, as an expression of one's 'nature.' Therefore, Nouwen posed the question, setting the premise for his essay and the argument which follows: 'How can the homosexual make his own feelings available to himself so that he can meaningfully relate to them?'⁶³ As we will see, for Nouwen, this required that one is constantly mindful of who one truly is psychologically, an activity of self-awareness which goes to the very core of one's existence as a human being.

In order to open the discussion on how a homosexual person can make his or her own feelings available to him or herself, and relate to them meaningfully, Nouwen first explains the concept of 'Self-availability in General' and then moves on to 'The Homosexual and His Self-availability.' Using principals found in depth psychology - a form of psychology that explores the 'subtle, unconscious, and transpersonal aspects of human experience'⁶⁴ - Nouwen believed that in our day-to-day lives, we are generally 'only partially available to ourselves.' Everyone tends to see themselves in a selective way, only calling on those feelings and experiences which accommodate the 'pre-conceived ideas' we have about ourselves. Hence, Nouwen believed that 'the perception of our own world is very selective.' The difficulty, Nouwen judged, is that among human beings there is a 'deep conservatism' causing us to 'cling to the self-concept' that develops, making it 'difficult to be a realist' and 'to face the wide range of feelings, experiences, and ideas' that are part of one's life. The result is that the individual is closed to any form of growth, and worse, becomes the subject of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy.' For Nouwen, a person who constantly lives with negative self-concepts experiences difficulties because he cannot 'become available to himself and really to claim all his experiences as his own.' Indeed, Nouwen asks the question, 'how can you relate to a reality that is not available to you[?]' for 'you cannot keep what you do not have, nor can you detach yourself from something you do not own.'⁶⁵

⁶³ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 204, 205.

⁶⁴ 'What is Depth Psychology?' The C.G. Jung Center. Accessed January 26, 2022.
<https://www.cgjungcenter.org/clinical-services/what-is-depth-psychology/>.

⁶⁵ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 205-207.

In the next section of the essay, Nouwen presented his central argument, moving to the topic of the homosexual and self-availability.⁶⁶ In a society where homosexual behavior is referred to 'in terms of pathology,' it is understandable that a homosexual person would be 'inclined to disown himself or herself from these feelings and put them in the periphery of his or her experience.' Therefore, it becomes impossible for most 'to relate realistically' to their homosexual orientation. To illustrate this point further, Nouwen turns to Wijnand J. Sengers, the Dutch psychiatrist discussed in chapter five.⁶⁷ Nouwen is convinced by Sengers' argument that any suffering experienced by homosexuals can be attributed to the 'deep-seated resistance' to their same-sex orientation. 'Only when this resistance is gone,' Nouwen writes, 'and the homosexual feelings can become available to one's self is one able to relate realistically to them.'⁶⁸ Nouwen noted Sengers' belief 'that erotic feelings towards another person of the same sex as such can be experienced as positive.' This is due to the fact that 'love is a beautiful, enjoyable, pleasant, freeing experience, and the strong attraction between two people cannot be considered otherwise than something valuable and enriching.'⁶⁹ However, such a positive attitude is not always the case, because such erotic feelings are often viewed by the person experiencing them as shameful, leading to low self-esteem and the fear of being abnormal. This in effect means that feelings which should be regarded as good 'are being condemned by many people who experience them.' Nouwen agrees with Sengers' findings that such a situation leads to the forced denial of legitimate feelings, which can 'build up a strong wall of resistance,' causing the very problems psychologists and psychiatrists are called upon to deal with. It is not the feelings themselves which cause the problem, Nouwen deduces, but the 'strong resistance against them.'⁷⁰

Two levels of resistance identified by Sengers (as discussed in the previous chapter) are then utilised by Nouwen to illustrate the effects of unavailability for a homosexual person. The first level of resistance is described as 'radical,' while the second level is described as 'less serious.' Radical resistance refers to the condition of persons who totally deny their homosexuality, not only to others, but to themselves. This results in a person cutting himself or herself off

⁶⁶ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 207-211.

⁶⁷ Sengers, *Gewoon hetzelfde?*.

⁶⁸ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 207.

⁶⁹ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 207, 208

⁷⁰ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 208.

from the 'most personal, intimate, and creative feelings,' forcing one 'to "evacuate" to the safe place of cerebral life.' Nouwen, seeing such actions as detrimental to one's health, and tells us that the consequences of such actions cause 'great harm' to an individual who becomes 'rigid,' 'impersonal,' and 'distant.' The second level of resistance cited by Nouwen refers to the homosexual person who has at some level accepted his or her homosexuality but 'in no way wants to communicate his feelings to anyone else.' This form of resistance involves some self-acceptance, but the individual is still 'tortured by the fear that anyone else should know them.' As it is based on fear, it can lead to feelings of isolation and the individual being 'constantly on his guard to prevent anyone from discovering his condition.'⁷¹

Nouwen is in total agreement with Sengers on the dangers inherent in these forms of resistance, and he quotes Sengers at length to underline this. Nouwen tells us of Sengers' belief that, although people who live their lives in resistance are 'convinced of the positive value of this attitude ... the price they pay is high,' because their 'sexual life cannot form a unity with the rest of [their] personality.' Words such as 'hostile,' 'disturbing,' 'superficial,' 'distorted,' and 'narrow' describe the effects of such a life. Taking Sengers' findings into account, Nouwen concludes that 'it becomes clear that man cannot deny without harm his most essential feelings.' Such feelings, Nouwen argued, 'touch the core' of one's 'internal life,' whether heterosexual or homosexual, and the person who denies such a reality is pretending 'to live without a heart.' Furthermore, such a person 'mutilates his own emotional life and is danger of a psychological paralysis.'⁷²

We then arrive at the central theme of Nouwen's thesis: that when 'a man is able to overcome his resistance and make his homosexual feelings available to himself and recognize them as belonging to the center of his own life, he will be in a situation in which he can relate to them on a realistic basis.' On the one hand, Nouwen describes the unavailable person as suffering various forms of resistance, leading to the closing of the heart (noting that for Nouwen, the heart is always 'the centre of our being human' where 'our deepest thoughts, intuitions, emotions and decisions find their source.')

⁷³ On the other hand, through the practice of

⁷¹ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 208, 209.

⁷² Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 210.

⁷³ Nouwen, Henri. *Letters to Marc about Jesus*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987, 68.

availability (in Marcel's language via self-presence and receptivity), one is able to overcome such resistance and relate to one's homosexual orientation realistically.

As Nouwen begins to summarize his research, he notes that Christian morality does not in any way encourage the 'denial of feelings' which in themselves can only be considered morally neutral. Rather it calls for 'a responsible way of relating to them.' And this is seen as true for the heterosexual just as for the homosexual person. 'Man becomes a moral man,' Nouwen writes, 'only when he is able to face his own real condition and make his decision from there.' Therefore, only by liberating one's homosexual feelings from isolation and making them available to oneself by integrating them into one's total personality, can any moral decision be made about the kind of life one wants to lead.⁷⁴

Nouwen lists four choices open to a self-available, homosexual person: it is possible to develop a deep personal relationship based on a strong mutual attraction between two men or two women; it is possible to establish a distance from your homosexual feelings and invest your strong emotions in broader social concerns; it is possible to make your homosexual feelings part of a more profound and contemplative life; and it is possible to detect in them a call to celibacy or a bachelor's life, which also may make it possible to develop a larger range of personal friendships. Nouwen then concluded his essay by making a theological statement: 'The gospel makes it overwhelmingly clear that Christ came to reveal man's real condition in all its greatness as well as misery and to challenge man to face it without fear.' 'Christ invited man to take off the mask of illusion of self-righteousness,' Nouwen writes, and to make our innermost feelings and emotions 'available to God's love.'⁷⁵

This is a revolutionary essay for a Catholic priest to write in 1971 and establishes Nouwen as a pioneering writer in the therapeutic discourse of LGBT+ theology and spirituality. Indeed, it still has revolutionary force today, pointing to the unfinishedness of the work that Nouwen began; his work represents a significant missed opportunity for the Catholic Church. From the outset of this essay Nouwen speaks very much of the concept of *innerlijke disponibiliteit* (the

⁷⁴ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 210.

⁷⁵ Nouwen, 'Self-availability,' 211.

attitude of inner or spiritual openness), so important for mental health as recognised within the Dutch Catholic mental health movement. It also echoes Wertenbroek's belief that one needs to have one's sexuality 'at one's disposal' or 'available to oneself' in order to accept it as a positive human possibility. Or indeed, it resonates with Sengers' use of the term *voorhandene*; only when negative feelings are made 'available' can they become manageable, increasing a sense of self and reducing uncertainty about oneself and others.

Discipline and Discipleship Course Material, Yale Divinity School, 1973

After leaving the Netherlands, in the second half of 1972, Nouwen took up a teaching post at the Yale Divinity School. As Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology he taught a number of courses in Pastoral Care and Christian Spirituality. In the autumn semester of 1973, Nouwen offered a lecture course entitled 'Discipline and Discipleship,' in which he explored the concept of self-availability.⁷⁶ Nouwen typed and bound his extensive class notes for this course, which are now located in the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center. They offer a comprehensive picture of the topics and material covered in the course. In addition, a number of handouts were offered to his class, which too have been bound and archived, including a typed manuscript version of his 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual' essay.⁷⁷

The context in which Nouwen presents the topic of availability is important. Nouwen's typed class notes indicate that it was a course about Christian spirituality and the Christian lifestyle which focused on three main relationships: one's relationship with the inner self; one's relationship with one's fellow human beings; and one's relationship with God. It was, Nouwen has written, a course about 'self-understanding, ministry and prayer.' Explaining the title of the course, Nouwen stated that he called it 'Discipline and Discipleship' because 'these two words indicate the poles between which we have to work.' At one end is discipleship, which means the following of the Master (i.e. Jesus Christ), and at the other end is discipline, which he says refers to 'a self-imposed structure' and to 'an inner organisation of energy.' Nouwen

⁷⁶ Nouwen, *Discipline and Discipleship*.

⁷⁷ Nouwen Archive and Research Collection, Teaching Series, Box 266/Item 2095. At the time of writing the Henri J.M. Archive and Research Center did not possess a published copy of this essay, therefore, it seems, as they only possessed typed manuscripts of the essay (as class handouts) without reference to its origin, they believe that the essay has remained unpublished.

states in his idiosyncratic style that discipleship without discipline leads to an 'enthusiasm to following [Jesus Christ] which is not incarnated in the whole lifestory,' leading to 'uncritical belief.' In turn, in Nouwen's opinion an uncritical belief leads to 'rigidity, compulsive behavior, legalism and [the] dry following of rules while having forgotten ... reality.' These ideas are reminiscent of those discussed earlier in chapter three and four, expressed by certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals, who believed that rigid moral beliefs could cause serious psychological damage, even neurotic tendencies in some individuals.

It is clearly evident in his course notes, and important for this study, that Nouwen dealt with the topic of sexuality, offering 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual' as a class handout. Nouwen began the discussion of sexuality by reminding his class of something that Erik Erikson (1902-1994), a German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, once said: 'identity is the presupposition of intimacy.' Nouwen tells his class: 'You cannot give yourself when you do not have a sense of self,' and this includes being aware of your own manhood or womanhood, which, he says, 'has to be available to yourself so that you can relate to it and bring it into a relationship.' Once again, we see Nouwen exploring the concept of self-availability. Additionally, Nouwen believes that sexuality 'is part of the whole person,' and something quite different from 'genitality' because 'we not only have a body but we are our body and therefore sexuality is an essential part of any human encounter,' where 'all our senses are involved,' whether it be in the context of friendship, community life or marriage. Importantly, 'you have to be aware of yourself as a sexual being in order to be able to relate to yourself in that way' - the central theme he explored in 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual.' 'Sexual impulses and frustrations' can be 'very strong' at times, Nouwen believed, and therefore he advised to 'make them available,' recognising them in the context in which they occur. It appears he also believed it was important that one 'confess them' to oneself and 'realise that they are part of [one's] power too.' For Nouwen, 'it is very important that we start talking about homosexuality in a less fearful and taboo way and realise that the Church has in fact given little if any guidance to the large group of Christians whose erotic life is exclusively homosexual.'⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Significantly, Nouwen's course notes also reference a journal article written by Jesuit John McNeill (1924-2015) called 'Homosexuality and the Church' which appeared in *The National Catholic Reporter* on 5th October, 1973 while Nouwen was conducting this course. McNeill is often referred to in the literature as the pioneer

Nouwen's Further Exploration of Availability and Self-availability

Nouwen's archival records and published works from the 1970s show that he explored the concept of availability and self-availability in other contexts. His 1971 published work *Creative Ministry* discusses Nouwen's belief that 'availability' lies at the very core of one's spiritual life, and is also a core function of ministry.⁷⁹ Publications like 'Education to Ministry,' *The Living Reminder*, *The Wounded Healer*, together with other course notes, indicate that Nouwen began to take 'availability' and 'self-availability' in new directions. Often moving them beyond its original psychological and therapeutic context, he began to develop these concepts along a more theological and biblically-based path, applying it to other ministerial and pastoral situations. As Nouwen's career as a Christian spiritual writer unfolded in the 1970s, a change in his writing can be discerned; he moved away from the more psychological terminology of his training, and began to use a form of words with which his readership could more easily identify, representing not a total abandonment of the psychological, but a desire to ground his ideas more firmly in the Christian spiritual tradition. For the Nouwen scholar, this means there is room for further study in this particular area, broadening the concept of availability and self-availability theologically as it is applied to other pastoral situations.

Conclusion

Nouwen's 'Schema,' the first document analysed, was very much influenced by his psychological training and desire for a phenomenological attitude towards homosexual persons. Nouwen was aware of the many socio-political problems faced by homosexual men and women of his day. These, he believed, led homosexuals to feel that they were somehow 'different' from others in society, and this feeling alone led to psychological problems, including a sense of isolation, and an inability to be open with other people. Consequently, homosexual men or women were unable to achieve full knowledge of their inner selves. This could be overcome, in Nouwen's view, through 'the loving encounter,' a psychological attitude that transforms prejudice and enables reciprocal understanding. Finally, Nouwen

Catholic writer in the LGBT+ theology and spirituality discourse, while Nouwen's contribution is not mentioned.

⁷⁹ Nouwen, Henri. *Creative Ministry*. New York: Doubleday, 1971, .33, 34.

mentioned that *innerlijke vrijheid*, a concept closely aligned with *innerlijke disponibiliteit*, provided the most responsible basis for an approach to homosexuality. Thus, the therapeutic quality of Nouwen's research on homosexuality was first established.

Nouwen's thesis *Homosexualiteit: Van vooroordeel naar oordeel* was designed to offer some pastoral suggestions to those who dealt with homosexual men and women from time to time. Throughout his research, Nouwen returned to the idea that homosexuals of his day were like people living without a home, due to the socio-political pressures placed upon them. Turning to French existentialism, he deduced that homosexuals needed a sense of security, a home, and a firm base against the powers of oppression. This argument showed some similarity with Marcel's concept of 'being at home,' a place in which one can be *disponible*, not only with oneself, but with others. The therapeutic quality of Nouwen's research was again displayed in this thesis.

In Nouwen's 'Self-availability of the Homosexual' essay we see him established as a therapeutic writer, a fact previously unacknowledged in the history of the literature on LGBT+ theology and spirituality. He is a therapeutic writer because he identified self-availability, or the lack thereof, as the central issue faced by many homosexuals in his day. Nouwen's first published article 'Homosexuality: Prejudice or Mental Illness?' also identified that an overly moralistic view of homosexual acts was unhelpful, an opinion very much in line with the thinking of certain Catholic intellectuals who saw this view as affecting the mental health of many Catholics. The notion of self-availability, discussed by Nouwen in 1971 and closely linked to Senger's research on self-acceptance, can now be seen in the context of the Dutch Catholic mental health movement and the concept of *innerlijke disponibiliteit*, as a quality which everyone (not just homosexuals) needed to have in place to maintain mental health. For Nouwen, the concept of 'self-availability' became the therapeutic means by which homosexual men and women could cultivate a sense of liberation and self-acceptance, and could make right moral decisions for themselves. Only by taking a phenomenological attitude in his pastoral approach to homosexual men and women was Nouwen able to make such a deduction - the very epitome of treating another as a 'living human document.'

Conclusions, Applications and a Reflection

Conclusion 1

The archival records held at the Henri J.M. Nouwen Archive and Research Center show that the subject of homosexuality occupied much of Nouwen's early life, particularly during his formative years in the academy. The archive is littered with material on the topic and unfortunately, within the limits of this thesis, it has not been possible to examine all the available material. I have confined myself to those papers which have established Nouwen's contribution to the therapeutic discourses within LGBT+ theology and spirituality. Nouwen's sexuality has now been well documented in several biographical publications since his death, but it has not been my intention to duplicate or rehash this work. Rather, my project has been to reconstruct a little-known and missing part of queer history, and the part Nouwen played within it. Nouwen's views on homosexuality evolved over time, in keeping with the outside influences promulgated by certain Dutch Catholic intellectuals which were brought to bear on his work, and which were representative of the therapeutic turn which took place in Dutch Catholicism in the 1950s and 1960s. It is a very Dutch story and perhaps one little known in the English-speaking world; but it is also an extraordinary time in the history of the Catholic Church, a period devoted to the spiritual liberation of its members. For Nouwen, the views on homosexuality he developed over the 1950s and 1960s culminated in 1971 with the publication of 'The Self-availability of the Homosexual,' in which the concept of 'self-availability' became the therapeutic means by which homosexual men and women could cultivate a sense of liberation and self-acceptance, and thus make right moral decisions for themselves.

Deeply influenced by his training in psychology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, Nouwen always attempted to maintain a phenomenological attitude when dealing with homosexual men and women. A phenomenological attitude became a way of life for him, particularly when he was placed in pastoral situations. His pastoral approach was always client-centred. Individuals were treated as 'living human documents,' homosexual men and women being no exception to this personal rule. This led him to believe that if homosexual

men and women approached pastoral caregivers with any particular problems, the state of their mental health should become the all-important pastoral consideration. Overly moralistic prescriptions were discouraged and even rejected. Nouwen's positions were similar to ideas and theories encouraged by the Dutch Catholic mental health movement, where the promotion of mental health in healthy people (not mentally ill people) was their primary mission.

Application 1

How might the research undertaken in this study still have relevance for the difficulties faced by queer Catholics in today's Catholic Church? In 2017, American Jesuit James Martin noted with sadness the chasm that has grown between queer Catholics and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Martin has become a champion for the queer community within the Catholic Church, and in many respects its chief spokesperson, tirelessly advocating for their full inclusion within the Catholic fold. And he has devoted much of his ministry to building a bridge between these groups. As he explains, many queer Catholics have told him that they feel 'hurt by the institutional church - unwelcomed, excluded, and insulted.' However, at the same time it has also been reported to him that, 'many in the institutional church want to reach out to this community, but seem somewhat confused about how to do so.' He tells us that within the Catholic episcopate, at least among all those he has spoken to, there is a sincere desire to offer 'true pastoral outreach.'¹ It is my contention that Nouwen's research into homosexuality, and the ideas and theories informing his research, can help that outreach to happen. Nouwen's approach is a therapeutic pastoral one centred on mental health, and not on rigid moral prescriptions. It may have been forgotten over time, but this approach can now be uncovered from the history of the Catholic Church and used today.

Before examining how that might be put into practice, I believe that the Catholic Church first needs to understand how feeling 'unwelcomed, excluded, and insulted' presents a significant challenge for many queer Catholics, and the effect these challenges potentially have on their mental health. There exists significant research suggesting that being part of a stigmatised

¹ Martin, James. *Building a Bridge*. San Francisco; Harper One, 2017, 4, 5.

minority, particular for those who identify as queer, often leads to negative mental health outcomes due to negative social environments which endorse homophobia and heterosexism.² Therefore, I suggest that before any pastoral outreach can happen, the Church's role in causing such stress and trauma in any individual needs to be taken seriously and fully acknowledged, and any unrealistic moral prescriptions, I respectfully suggest, need to be abandoned. Hence, psychological outcomes need to be utmost for the Church when it offers pastoral outreach to queer people. This builds on the findings of the Dutch Catholic mental health movement that the narrow moralism which was being forced upon Catholics potentially led to catastrophic consequences for mental health.

Conclusion 2

A key focus of this thesis was the concept of *disponibilité*, expressed by certain Catholic intellectuals as *innerlijke disponibiliteit* (an attitude of inner openness), and by Nouwen as 'self-availability.' This thesis has shown how Nouwen's work establishes the relevance of this concept to the pastoral care of queer Catholics. More than this, it has shown that this concept, if reactivated could be the foundation of a new pastoral theology and practice, especially if developed along the lines indicated by the originator of the concept, Gabriel Marcel. For Marcel, *disponibilité* encouraged self-presence and receptivity, akin to the kind of self-acceptance required of homosexual men and women in order to maintain mental health, encouraged by Catholic psychiatrist Wijnand Sengers, and indeed by Nouwen himself. Marcel's discussions around *indisponibilité* help us realise the kind of harm which may result on the mental health of an individual who remains *indisponible*. Nouwen himself linked the unavailable person with various forms of resistance. Here, I believe is another lesson which this study can offer the Catholic episcopate in its pastoral approach to its queer members.

² See Edward J. Alessi, Ilan H. Meyer, and James I. Martin, 'PTSD and Sexual Orientation: An Examination of Criterion A1 and Non-Criterion A1 Events,' *Psychol Trauma* 5:2 (2013): 1. Accessed November 12, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0026642>; Brown, Laura S. 'Sexuality, Lies, and Loss,' *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2:2 (2003): 55-68; Odets, Walt. *Out of the Shadows: Reimagining Gay Men's Lives*. London: Penguin Books, 2019, Kindle Edition, 6.3.

Application 2

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, despite protestations from Pope Francis (who said, while speaking to reporters on a flight from Brazil in 2013: 'If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?'),³ the official Catechism of the Catholic Church still teaches that homosexuals, by their very nature, are 'intrinsically disordered,' and that physical expressions of their orientation constitute 'acts of grave depravity.'⁴ Undoubtedly, such condemnation brings with it those feelings of unwelcome, exclusion and insult mentioned by James Martin. Might such words have the capacity (at least in some) to bring about an *indisponible* attitude towards one's sexuality - to the detriment of one's psychosexual development? As an insult to the core identity of a queer person (which in itself has the potential to affect one's mental health), it surely does not promote a *disponible* attitude of self-acceptance and integration of one's same-sex orientation into one's whole personality. So, again I respectfully ask: is it not time for the Catholic Church to follow the social sciences on this issue, learn from its own history (as we saw it did several decades ago in the Netherlands), and remove these degrading passages from the Catechism? The Dutch Catholic mental health movement taught that mental health was closely linked to the notion of Christian salvation. Indeed, Nouwen himself believed that only when one was 'self-available' to one's homosexual orientation did one have the capacity to make right moral choices - these being integral to one's salvation in the Catholic tradition. This remains near impossible if the Catholic Church continues to perpetuate unsound teaching on the intrinsically disordered nature of homosexual men and women, to their detriment. Undeniably, the Catholic Church itself needs to practice (as an institution) an attitude of *disponibilité*. Only then can the episcopate offer true pastoral outreach towards its own queer members.

Finally, I offer these findings for further reflection by two groups within the Catholic Church. Firstly, to disenfranchised queer Catholics, who are either struggling with their sexual orientation, or who have lost hope in ever finding a home within the Church. May this

³ BBC News, 'Pope Francis.'

⁴ 'Catechism of the Catholic Church.'

research help them establish their existence in the past and that they were important enough to be studied. May it too help reflect identity in the present, to see oneself existing for the first time, promoting necessary feelings of inclusion. Hearing this story may even be a liberating experience for some. Secondly, I offer these findings to those bishops who possess a sincere desire to offer true pastoral outreach to the LGBT+ community. May it assist them in understanding the pastoral issue at hand; one that goes to the core of one's human dignity and salvation - the right to mental health. However, to those bishops who are unsure, hesitant or totally opposed to any of this, I ask them to see a moment in the history of their own Church where these things were otherwise.

Reflection

I would like to conclude this study by presenting an unpublished reflection found in a diary which was kept by Nouwen while acting as chaplain to the L'Arche Daybreak Community in Richmond Hill, Canada. It was written in 1995, a year before his death. Although Nouwen does not use the word 'self-availability,' I suggest it was this kind of notion he wished to invoke when he reflected on the death of a friend who had died from an HIV-related illness. Nouwen had ministered to a number of men who had been infected with HIV, and their subsequent deaths had a profound impact upon Nouwen. Having presided over the funeral of one such man, Nouwen reflects upon this man's life and legacy, and I believe his reflection offers a fitting closure to this thesis.⁵ In my opinion, it articulates the anguish which queer Catholics often face with the coming-out process, the fear associated with the possibility of an unfavourable response, and that profound psychological conflict between remaining *indisponible* or accepting *disponibilité*. Nouwen wrote:

You are a beautiful man. Warm humorous and with an endearing laugh begging for acceptance and affirmation. You loved God passionately, but was [sic] afraid that the God whom you loved would condemn you for your loving a man rather than a woman...

⁵ Reference redacted by request of the Henri Nouwen Legacy Trust after permission was granted by letter dated September 4, 2018 to use this 'reflection' in its current form.

While everyone loved you, it was impossible for you to love yourself. You kept asking me: “Do you think I am crazy? Do you think this is weird? Do you think there is something wrong with me?” You, who were surrounded by hundreds of people, you who had a companion who loved you dearly, you who had a lovely home and a very satisfactory job, still you felt isolated, alone, guilty, ashamed, sinful, and ostracized.

It was a great risk and a true jump of confidence to tell me about your homosexuality, your HIV+ status, your long [term] relationship ... And you were so relieved that I didn’t condemn you but offered my friendship and support. But when I suggested to let some people know about yourself ... you made it clear that you couldn’t do it. It was too difficult for you.

Oh dear friend, dear companion on the journey, dear little man, I so much wished you could have been at your own funeral! Now everyone knows! ... All the walls fell down the moment you breathed your last breath. Jews and Christians, gays and straights, young and old, students and teachers, lay persons and priests, they were all singing and praying together around your casket. In death you brought more unity than you ever could in life. You indeed are like Jesus who only after his death sent the Spirit that broke down the walls of fear.

Beautiful, fearful man. I miss you. I wish you were still here. But you have begun a whole new ministry in your absence. A ministry of reconciliation and healing, a ministry of creating unity and community. I am grateful to you for doing now what you couldn’t even do last week. So I am offering you my grief, my pain, my sadness and shout to you in heaven: “Do it ... tear down these walls, let all these strangers become friends, help your friends, [and] colleagues ... to claim their own truth and send them your spirit so that they can love more radically and more freely.”

It is my hope that this study will lead to ongoing research into other religious and ecclesial communities who grapple with similar issues faced by minority groups judged negatively on

their sexual or gender identity. For queer Catholics, this is an unfinished revolution but one which can be inspired by ideas, theories and events arising in the past.

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