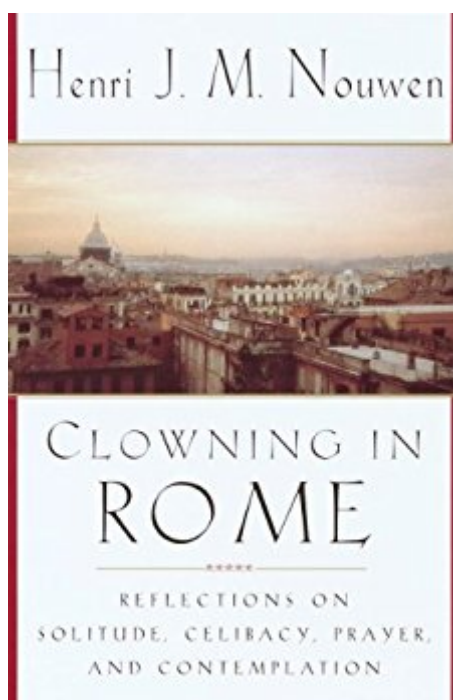


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# Clowning In Rome: Reflections On Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, And Contemplation



## Synopsis

A classic work by one of this century's most beloved spiritual writers now reissued. The inspirational writings of Henri Nouwen have touched millions of readers all over the world, and since his death in September 1996, widespread recognition of their enduring value has continued to grow. Now, after being unavailable for several years, Nouwen's *Clowning in Rome* is available again as an Image trade paperback. In this classic account of the time he spent in Rome, Nouwen offers reflections and spiritual insight characteristic of his best works. During the months in Rome, it wasn't the red cardinals or the Red Brigade who had the most impact on Nouwen, but the little things that took place between the great scenes. In some ways, Nouwen discovered, the real and true story was told by the clowns he often saw in the city streets. In his own words, from the Introduction to *Clowning in Rome*: "The clowns are not the center of events. They appear between the great acts, fumble and fall and make us smile again after the tensions created by the heroes we came to admire. The clowns don't have it together--they are awkward, out of balance and left-handed, but--they are on our side. The clowns remind us with a tear and a smile that we are sharing the same human weakness. The longer I was in Rome, the more I enjoyed the clowns, those peripheral people who by their humble, saintly lives evoke a smile and awaken hope, even in a city terrorized by kidnapping and street violence."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nouwen is always warm and genuine in his relationship to God. He reflects on our own foolishness in Christ. He loosely relates chastity to everyday life, broadly defining it. He demonstrates our poverty and its usefulness in maintaining our simplicity. And we must always submit ourselves to one another in obedience. If you like Nouwen, you'll like this book. It's an easy read, though penetrates through the veil of modernity.

I bought this book for a friend. She said that it was great. I read it quite a while ago and remembered that it was worth passing on. Thank you and God Bless you. Sister Rose Therese OSF

An old, but excellent book

Excellent book!

A few months ago I read Nouwen's classic *The Wounded Healer*. I loved Nouwen's ability to be very deep and serious while remaining personable. *Clowning in Rome* was recommended to me by a friend, and I look forward to reading another gem from Henri Nouwen. The first couple of chapters were great. Drawing upon the image of clowns, Nouwen talks about the characters' life and how they can be the real show even when they are on the sidelines, similar to clowns at the circus. I thoroughly enjoyed his discussion on solitude and its effect on the individual and the community. Who were in solitude helps us understand who we are not and how God works with us, things that we can take into community. The other topics in the book are dull and boring. I was looking forward to his chapter on celibacy however if he admits that he avoids the more obvious questions. In the end, it's still a good read, but not a life changer or a thinker.

A Classic: great understanding of the role of the church.

Father Nouwen has collected for us into this book four original lectures he gave to American religious and seminarians in Rome in the 1970s: on solitude and community, celibacy and the Holy,

prayer and thought, contemplation and ministry. Nouwen writes with such warmth and conviction. He is genuinely concerned with the reader's relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and he writes to offer encouragement and comfort. I found that when I read this book I would often breathe a sigh of relief or say out loud, "Thank you God for Henri Nouwen." The portion on "Unceasing Thoughts/Unceasing Prayer" (pgs 65-75) deeply affected me. Without realizing it, our minds are usually running a mile a minute; we think about ourselves, our desires, our past mistakes, etc. without ever slowing down. This mental confusion plagues us, and Nouwen teaches that we can turn such unceasing thinking into unceasing praying by confessing ALL of our thoughts, fantasies, and sins to our loving God. A constant conversation opens us up to Him and frees us. God wants to lead us out of our "fearful isolation into a fearless conversation with God" (71). I needed to read this book when I did.

Clowns stand apart and make us see our situation afresh. They are like us and we respond to the weakness they portray. Priests and religious also stand out, against the assumptions of the day and yet are like the rest of us. The person who works with people needs time out for reflection in order to be more deeply with people, avoiding the superficial and meeting others in the silence. Our world is in crisis and people become angry and over-active, thus providing short-term solutions but avoiding the root problem which is at man's centre. Regarding prayer as second best, for when we have nothing else to do, shows how much the secular and pragmatic viewpoint has got to the roots of Christianity and there needs to be a renewed emphasis on prayer. He also suggests that there needs to be a renewed emphasis on celibacy. Love is of God and too many people seek full love in a marriage and their expectations are not met because of their over-high expectations. Chastity is a witness to the fact that sexual love is not the whole of love and that the love of God can fill a person's life and enable him to relate more lovingly to others than if he were married. Poverty should be part of celibacy - a witness to capitalist society that there is more to life than possession of money or a marriage partner. I enjoyed this book as it challenged many of my assumptions about the primacy of action over contemplation. It also made reflective prayer sound useful in a positive

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