

Book emphasizes that all are beloved of God

Life of the Beloved, by Henri J.M. Nouwen; The Crossroad Publishing Company (New York, N.Y., 1992); 119 pages; \$12.95.

By Bishop Dennis W. Hickey

"Let us proclaim the mystery of faith" highlights one of the most precious truths in Catholic tradition: Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. It ranks along with the mystery of the Trinity, the Incarnation.

Father Henri Nouwen addresses another mystery of faith, rivaling the mystery of the Eucharist: the mystery of God's love for us. Although Christians are aware of the obligation to love God and neighbor, God's prior love of us is overlooked. It is this ignored truth which explains the title, *Life of the Beloved*.

All people are loved by God. Christ was proclaimed at His baptism, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you." As members of Christ's body, His sisters and brothers, we are likewise beloved.

This book is written in the form of a letter to a non-Christian reporter from *The New York Times*, who interviewed the author. The reporter was flailing about in a sea of depression, discontent, aimlessness.

After a series of exchanges in which the interviewee became the interviewer — a la the late Father Paul J. Cuddy — the man at *The Times* blurted out, "Why don't you write something about the spiritual life for me and my friends?" *Life of the Beloved* is Father Nouwen's response to the chal-

lenge in which his media friend is reassured that he too is included in God's love — he is beloved.

God's love for us is reflected in parents, friends and teachers who cross our path. However, writes the author, "You and I don't have to kill ourselves. We are the Beloved. We are intimately loved long before our parents et al loved or wounded us."

The action step is found early in the book. "Becoming the Beloved means letting the truth of our Belovedness become enfolded in everything we say or do — in the commonplace of my daily existence." Four words identify the Spirit's movements in this process: taken, blessed, broken and given.

Taken, a synonym for chosen, means "we are God's chosen ones — we have been seen by God from all eternity as unique, special, precious beings." Father Nouwen goes on to elucidate four ways in which we get in touch with our "chosenness," which the reader will find most helpful. In the course of this task one will discover that others are chosen as well. "In my Father's house there are many mansions."

Blessed is another word for affirmation. We speak good things of others and we hear good things said of us. "A blessing touches the original goodness of the other and calls forth his or her belovedness." Blessedness can be cultivated in attention to our own blessings.

Brokenness refers to the suffering from physical pain, rejection, being ignored, despised, unappreciated, lone-

liness. This challenge is met by befriending or accepting it and putting it under the rubric of blessing.

Given — our humanity comes to its fullest bloom in giving ourselves to others.

When *Life of the Beloved* arrived as the current selection of the Spiritual Book Associates, I had no intention of reading it — let alone reviewing it. While fingering through the first few pages, however, I became curious and soon deeply touched.

In a few short pages — there are 119 in all — Father Nouwen addresses the problems confronting countless people at this point in history — those suffering from pain, loss of self confidence, loss of self esteem, misunderstanding.

God's love for each individual overshadows depression and fills lives with hope and revives enthusiasm. This is not an esoteric work for intellectuals, theologians and corporate executives. It is written for all of God's people who are encouraged in their daily struggle by the knowledge that they are not forgotten, they are beloved from all eternity.

The last chapter, the Epilogue, is at first shocking but quickly becomes understandable. The reporter cannot accept what is written because the author had not entered into the secular mentality. He lacked faith. It must be remembered that not all listeners followed Christ. Thank God we can say with Peter, "To whom Lord can we go. You have the words of eternal life."

Musical's tone endearing, but editing undermines it

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The musical *Sarafina!* (Hollywood-Miramax) celebrates schoolchildren's resistance to apartheid in South Africa's beleaguered Soweto township in 1986.

Sarafina (Leleti Khumalo) is a vivacious black teenager who dreams of being a glamorous star in contrast to her hardscrabble life caring for her younger siblings. Her widowed mother (Miriam Makeba) supports the family as a live-in maid for a wealthy white household.

Mary (Whoopi Goldberg), her favorite teacher, encourages feelings of black pride in her students, knowing full well such forbidden teachings could cost her her job or her very life. Trigger-happy soldiers are a constant presence at the school, eager to quash rebellious students like Sarafina who have been defying the white supremacist policy of apartheid.

After six students are brutally killed and Mary is summarily taken away by the military, Sarafina must come to terms with the nature of the violence in which she has both witnessed and participated. Her teacher remains her inspiration as she determines to continue the struggle without a gun but certain that right will overcome might.

Director Darrell James Roodt adapted Mbongeni Ngema's Broadway musical for the screen, strongly communicating its political and human rights message about racial injustice.

The musical numbers are vibrant and bursting with the energy of youth. The film as a whole, however, looks badly edited, abruptly cutting from



Hollywood-Miramax
Whoopi Goldberg is the inspiring educator who encourages her students to take pride in themselves and their heritage in *Sarafina*.

brutal beatings to joyous children singing of freedom. The contrast may be intentional, but the effect is jarring and undermines the movie's fluidity. The South African accents are also difficult on the ear but there's no mistaking the power of what is being said, even if individual words are lost.

It is heartening that with the release of Nelson Mandela and the abolition of apartheid this film could actually be shot in Soweto. One hopes that the happy ending suggested is not a Hollywood fantasy, but a strengthening reality.

Because of frequent violence, including beatings, shootings and torture of youngsters and a murderous act of retaliation by adolescents, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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