

Speaking Notes  
The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella  
Speaker of the Senate

On the occasion of a literary celebration of the book  
*Genius Born of Anguish:  
the Life and Legacy of Henri Nouwen*

Speaker's Dining Room, Ottawa  
Tuesday, 8 May 2013

Your Honour, Lieutenant-Governor Nicholas,  
Dr. Higgins,  
Mr. Burns,  
Honourable Senators and Members of the House of Commons,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Parliament and to the Speaker's Chambers this evening, where we are gathered for a literary celebration of a book authored by Michael W. Higgins and Kevin Burns. Before continuing, I would like to draw your attention to the doorways and to the Latin epigraphs carved in the wood above them. You will see that the one on the South wall reads *Sapere aude* and is roughly translated as "Dare to be wise".

The book which is the subject of tonight's gathering is entitled *Genius Born of Anguish: the Life and Legacy of Henri Nouwen*. This is a biographical work whose subject is an individual who exemplified the epigraph. For those unfamiliar with him, Henri Nouwen was a rare being.

From the outside looking in, he was a "Dutch priest/psychologist, a charismatic and theatrical speaker who lived at L'Arche giving talks and retreats ...

a Canadian celebrity who was also Catholic and who increasingly found audiences beyond the loose perimeters of the Canadian Catholic world ... an influential priest in the media and not in the crosshairs of controversy ... a spiritual writer who has discovered some deep spiritual meaning at the circus.”

For those who followed Henri’s career, he was all that and much more. He was a theologian and psychologist who sought the synthesis of the two, with one informing the other. Known as a theatrical and charismatic lecturer, he found inspiration in the everyday and subjects as varied as Thomas Merton, Van Gogh, and even the acrobats at the circus. He authored 39 books himself and was, as the authors of today’s work describe him, a holy misfit.

Before introducing the authors, we have with us this evening a very special guest, His Honour the Honourable Graydon Nicholas, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick. Our acquaintance is of long standing, as we worked together on a number of projects in the field of human rights education in his previous life as a provincial court justice and human rights scholar. It is a pleasure to welcome him to the Speaker’s Quarters and invite him to take to the podium to say a few words.

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Thank you, Your Honour. As I call Michael Higgins and Kevin Burns to the podium, I will mention that my acquaintance with Dr. Higgins is similarly lengthy. Our first meeting occurred when he was President of St. Jerome's University. I must have made a favourable impression, because shortly thereafter he became President and Vice-Chancellor of St. Thomas University, where I had the pleasure of teaching for 42 years. He now serves as Vice-President of Mission and Catholic Identity at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut.

Kevin Burns is a writer, editor and researcher based here in Ottawa. He has an extensive publishing background on the subjects of spirituality, religion and matters of faith and culture. A seasoned freelance radio producer, he has done documentaries for CBC Radio's *Tapestry* and *Ideas*, which first aired the original documentary on which this book is based.

Please join me in welcoming Michael Higgins and Kevin Burns.

## **Closing Remarks**

Thank you, Michael and Kevin, for your presence. We are most appreciative of your comments and this evening's gathering has certainly cast events in an interesting light. I hope everyone will take a moment to have a look at their book, limited copies of which are available tonight.

Thank you all for coming.