

HEART-TO-HEART

May, 1995

A Pastoral Letter from Richard J. Foster



Dear Friends,

Many Christian leaders worldwide—myself included—are sensing that we may be entering the first stages of a great, new movement of the Spirit of God. There are numerous early signs worldwide:

- ◆ a massive longing for spiritual reality from all kinds of peoples, Christian and otherwise;
- ◆ a deep hunger for a life of prayer that extends beyond the superficialities of pop religion, seen particularly in two-thirds world countries;
- ◆ serious concern (as opposed to public posturing) over racial reconciliation seen in the dissolving of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America and the formation of the interracial Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America, the renewed conversations between the National Association of Evangelicals and the National Black Evangelical Association, and the aggressive position on racial reconciliation by Promise Keepers;
- ◆ a great new surge of Hispanic Christian witness seen in the formation of groups like Aliancia de Ministerios Evangelicos Nacionales (AMEN) which embraces 26 nationalities, 27 denominations, and 21 parachurch organizations;
- ◆ manifestations of "signs and wonders" (both authentic and manufactured) stemming from the "Toronto Blessing" experience which is dramatically affecting many Christian groups, especially on the British scene;
- ◆ reports from numerous American Christian colleges (Howard Payne, Eastern Nazarene, Houston Baptist, Gordon, Olivet Nazarene, Wheaton, etc.) of protracted meetings marked by repentance and reconciliation; and more.

The jury is still out as to whether these "early signs" will blossom and flower or wither and die. Many things can hinder this work, and other things can nurture it—more on that later.

CLARIFYING THE TERMS

Three terms—revival, awakening, and renewal—are often used to describe various aspects of these massive experiences with God, and it is helpful to clarify what we mean by them.

Revival simply refers to a reviving of the people of God. Think of a person on an operating table who is near death, but through the skill of the physician is brought back to life and restored to full health. Well, historically the Church—the people of God—frequently has looked like that person on the operating table. In fact, more than once observers have declared her dead. But time and time again Christ, our Master Teacher and Great Physician, has reached down in sovereign grace to revive his Church. Historically these movements have been characterized by a deep repentance of sin (pride, lust, bitterness, racism, faithlessness, and more) and a white-hot love for God (praying, worshipping, singing,

celebrating, and more). Most of what we have seen up to this point can be properly thought of as in the pre-revival stage.

Awakening refers more broadly to the life of God breaking into seeker groups and others with sovereign, saving grace, ushering them into life in the kingdom of God. People everywhere are awakened—"born from above" as the Scripture says—and reconciled to God. Awakenings are accompanied by a serious impact upon the culture in general. Throughout Christians are engaging the culture on various levels of art, music, drama, politics, and intellectual thought, all of which is done in a proactive rather than reactive manner.

Renewal is an ongoing process, "renewed day by day" as the Apostle Paul put it. This involves the spiritual formation of the disciple of Christ into the image of Christ, the *imitatio Christi*. It is a training in the spiritual life with disciplines appropriate for each individual's personal needs and spiritual development. Throughout renewal movements the culture becomes profoundly affected. Historically, these are times of great intellectual life and Christians become among the most creative thinkers and shapers of ideas.

POTENTIAL HINDRANCES

In the natural course of things, revival and awakening will draw disciples into the work of renewal. But, of course, we all know that the natural course of things is sometimes hindered, and whenever this happens, the individual is left with religious experiences devoid of the substance of faith and the life remains firmly rooted in destructive habits of anxiety, bitterness, and sin.

What are some things that might hinder a great work of God in our day?

◆ An obsessive preoccupation with end time scenarios. The closer we move to the millennial milestone—A.D. 2000—the more we will see this. Such predictive games are often tied to conspiracy theories and deep-seated fears. And often mixed in is an unbelievable literalism, as one person said to me, "Well, Jesus says we can't know the day or the hour, but we can know the month and the year!" Friends, Jesus made it unmistakably clear to anyone willing to listen to his words that the timing of his glorious return is none of our business. Our business, our only business is to live lives of loving faithfulness and see the life of the kingdom of God brought into the human situation everywhere possible. And we live this way whether Jesus returns today or ten thousand years from now.

◆ The discrediting of gospel ministry through immorality, sin, and rebellion. Christian leaders are to be an example in word and deed of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Infidelity and adultery are wrong and are not to be tolerated among those in leadership. Lying and cheating are an affront to God as is pride and arrogance. Nor is the Christian leader to mimic the world's system of position and prestige, but rather to take the role of a servant and caring under-shepherd. Honesty, integrity, compassion, faith, hope, love—all this and more should be the distinguishing characteristics of the servant of Christ.

◆ Christians who viciously attack other Christians over inconsequential issues. Today there is a tragic inability to distinguish between issues of major significance from minor matters. As a result, we have numerous self-appointed heresy hunters who are without any serious theological training and who condemn anybody and everybody who disagrees with them over anything. These people want to preserve the purity of the faith, but they lack the historical vantage point of the defining moments in theology such as the formulation of the Nicene Creed, the great doctrinal positions articulated by Augustine and Luther, the Westminster Confession, and more. To be sure, it is important to "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints," but this must be done from a clear historical, theological, and biblical perspective. Otherwise people will end up majoring on the minors and damaging the Christian cause.

◆ An anti-intellectual posture which unnecessarily pits faith against reason. Faith is not opposed to reason; it is opposed to sight. We need a well-articulated faith that is rationally cogent and intellectually defensible. To the ancient question, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" we answer, "Plenty." It is not wrong to show the insufficiency of intellectualism, but a posture that ridicules the work of the mind damages the Christian cause.

◆ The wedding of the gospel message to any particular political persuasion. The gospel has much to do with politics, but it can never be identified with any single political party or movement. To do so threatens its prophetic role over all political parties and movements. The Christian is to be the conscience of the State; commending it when it provides justice for all peoples and critiquing it when it fails to do so. To be co-opted by the State for any political agenda is to threaten the integrity of the gospel and to flirt with idolatry.

NURTURING THE FUTURE

What things can we do in cooperation with God to nurture a potential great, new movement of the Spirit?

◆ Pray with sensibility, understanding, and intensity. It is common and right to urge Christians to pray for revival, awakening, and renewal. But this needs to be done with good sense and understanding. We do not pray for some nation/state to ascend to greatness when we should be praying for the kingdom of God to advance. We do not pray to be delivered from problems when we should be praying for endurance to live through them. We do not pray against the demons when we should be praying for the angels. Throughout our prayer work we should be seeking (and expect to receive) discernment and prudence.

◆ Influence our great universities for Christ and his kingdom. One of the great lacks in the "early signs" I mentioned at the beginning of this letter is substantive Christian influence in our great research universities. To be sure, there are many fine Christian professors, especially in the hard sciences, but overwhelmingly our great universities are centers of agnosticism and unbelief. This deficiency is significant for these places are the fountainhead for the great intellectual ferment of our culture. To lose the battle here is, most surely, to lose the war.

◆ Seek out loving, non-manipulative forms of Christian community and witness. We are in the midst of a "spiritual centrifuge" where old densities are breaking up and new densities are being formed, and people need to see new paradigms of faith and practice. Jesus observed that the watching world will know us by our love. And in new and living ways Jesus Christ is bringing forth an all-inclusive community as its prime sustainer and most glorious inhabitant. It is a community of cross and crown,

OUR FINANCIAL GUIDELINES

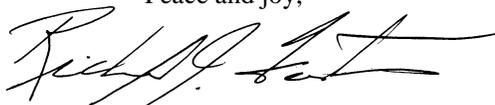
- We urge everyone to give first to their local church (or wherever they are being nurtured spiritually) and to the poor before ever giving to RENOVARÉ.
- An accountant oversees our financial records in accord with accepted accounting procedures and the highest professionalism.
- We will live within our means. One thing we refuse to do is overextend and overspend ourselves and then beg for God's people to bail us out. We believe that God will give us the money to do what we are being called to do. We feel it involves just as much faith to trust God for the money before a purchase as after a purchase. In fact, one way we discern God's will for the ministry of RENOVARÉ is through the financial support of his people.
- We believe in full disclosure at all times. Our financial reports are available to anyone upon request.
- We will receipt all donations.
- If we offer books, tapes, or other materials for a suggested contribution, we will receipt the amount given above the retail price of the product plus shipping and handling costs.
- When we make a purchase, we will pay the bill within thirty days. We refuse to subsidize this ministry on the backs of vendors.
- We will never sell or rent our mailing list.
- We are primarily a voluntary organization and as such we depend in large measure upon the sacrificial labors of many. If, however, we employ paid staff, they will receive equal pay for equal work.
- We will communicate our financial needs to our constituency as clearly and as truthfully as possible. We will not inflate or overstate our situation, nor create a crisis to boost income.
- We believe RENOVARÉ was initiated and continues to be sustained by God. While we are eager to follow the Divine whisper at every turn and work with all our might, it is God's business and not ours to prosper or end the work of RENOVARÉ. We rejoice either way.

of courageous militant action with suffering love that redeems. It is a community of unselfish love and witness without compromise. It is a community buoyed up by a theology of Christ's everlasting rule, not only imminent on the horizon but already coming to birth in our midst.

◆ Encourage a leadership which is equipped to labor in the movement of God. The day of the superstar is over. In the new movement of God it will not matter who is up front or who gets the accolades. The new leadership under God will be free to give way to one another. It will be a leadership who has a continuing hunger for God, a deep satisfaction in prayer, and the ability to forgive others at great personal loss. It will be a leadership who has a realistic assessment of personal abilities and limitations, a fundamental freedom from boasting about spiritual accomplishments, and a demonstrated ability to live out the demands of life patiently and wisely. Above all it will be a leadership who has a deep sense of being "established" in God for otherwise such leaders are too dangerous to be allowed into the soul space of others to influence their spirits.

◆ Trust in our loving Lord who sovereignly pours out his Spirit where he wills, when he wills, and upon whom he wills. One of the clearest signs that any movement is from the hand of God is that no single human being is in charge of it. No manipulating, no managing, no controlling. God is in charge of this operation from start to finish. In truth, "He's got the whole world in his hands." We do need to fear. And we must be prepared for God to work his work among whomever he chooses and in whatever ways please him. Most certainly his ways will surprise us, but we can come to live in, and even enjoy, God's great surprises. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Peace and joy,



Richard J. Foster

P.S. I have said that I will let you know our financial needs, and so I am. We are down \$20,000.00, and for us to continue our work with integrity, it is important to replenish these monies. Wonderfully, several friends of RENOVARÉ have set before us a \$10,000.00 matching challenge gift. Therefore, every dollar you give to this work in the days ahead will be matched, thus doubling the good you do us. Out of a grateful heart will you give generously, joyously, and sacrificially? Thank you.

RJF

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