

# HEART-TO-HEART

May 1998

A Pastoral Letter From Richard J. Foster

**RENOVARÉ**

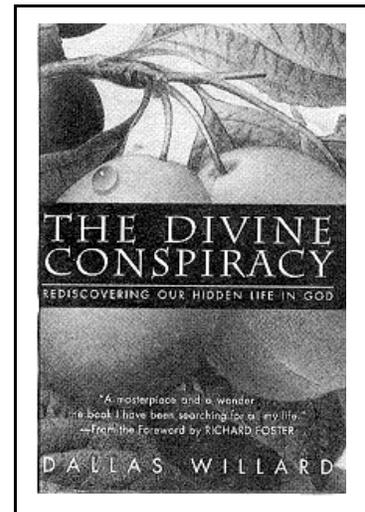
Dear Friends,

I have two things I want to share with you in this pastoral letter, and they are closely related. The first item concerns a book, and the second item concerns an international conference. Presently you will see how they are related.

## A Publishing Event

I am profoundly struck by Dr. Dallas Willard's new book, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. As I say in its foreword, it is "the book I have been searching for all my life." Why would I make such a blanket statement? I place *The Divine Conspiracy* alongside the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John Wesley, John Calvin and Martin Luther and others. Why would I go so far out on a limb? I state that Dallas' book is a masterpiece, a wonder, a banquet. Why would I use those superlatives to describe *The Divine Conspiracy*, something I will likely never do again about any other book . . . ever?

The reasons are almost too numerous to mention. In the foreword to *The Divine Conspiracy* I give four obvious ones why I value it, reasons you can learn when you read it. But in this letter I want to add some deeply pastoral reasons to that list.



To start, *The Divine Conspiracy* accurately diagnoses the human dilemma. We, you understand, have been created to make a difference for good, to rule under the guidance of God and in the kingdom of God here and now. And the last chapter of our Bible emphasizes that this rule extends on into eternity: "The Lord will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). But in the present, at the very time we feel destined to make a difference, to do something creative and good, we end up making a mess of things. We sin. Sin destroys, and we are touched at our deepest levels by the tangled web it weaves.

Willard describes our dilemma perfectly in the opening lines of his book: "Recently a pilot was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter. She turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent—and flew straight into the ground. She was unaware that she had been flying upside down.

"This is a parable of human existence in our times—not exactly that everyone is crashing, though there is enough of that—but most of us as individuals, and world society as a whole, live at high-speed, and often with no clue to whether we are flying upside down or right-side up. Indeed, we are haunted by a strong suspicion that there may be no difference—or at least that it is unknown or irrelevant" (pp. 1-2).

Unfortunately, our churches are not helping us work through this dilemma because they, for the most part, are taken over by what Willard calls "gospels of sin management." The conservative expression of sin management exclusively concerns itself with the conditions necessary to get us into heaven when we die but makes no real connection to life now. The liberal expression of sin management concerns itself with removing social or structural evils now with little or no connection to heaven.

Neither approach takes seriously the transformation of human life and character nor the moment-to-moment reality of living in God's kingdom of love. Therefore, we are left rooted in bitterness and sorrow, distanced from God and our fellow human beings.

This leads me to the second reason I profoundly respect this book, namely, **it introduces Jesus to us as a wholly competent teacher who can free us from life's dilemma.** Willard puts it this way; "Jesus is not just nice, he is brilliant." The Sermon on the Mount is at the center of Jesus' teaching, and Willard's understanding of it is unparalleled. Now, the moment I mention the Sermon on the Mount, I have an uneasy feeling that you will assume you already know what Willard writes. I assure you, there are many wonderful and helpful surprises in store in Chapters 4-7 of *The Divine Conspiracy*. I have read many pieces—books, magazine articles, commentaries—based on this "Discourse on the Hill," but Willard's work surpasses them all.

The manner in which Dallas uncovers the depth of Jesus' teachings on "life on the Rock" is breathtaking. His discussion of the "Beatitudes," for instance, is simply stunning, upsetting many of our common notions of this famous passage. The entire book is well worth this discussion alone. But he gives us more, much more—a feast for the mind and the heart. This feast, this discussion never allows issues to stay theoretical or removed from our daily living. Always it pushes us to see our moment-to-moment existence as a holy calling in "our God-bathed world."

A third reason I want to commend this book to you is the way *The Divine Conspiracy* takes the **mystery out of discipleship to Jesus.** Willard writes, "Who teaches you? Whose disciple are you? Honestly.

"One thing is sure: You are somebody's disciple. You learned how to live from somebody else. There are no exceptions to this rule, for human beings are just the kind of creatures that have to learn and keep learning from others how to live" (p. 271).

"*Being* a disciple or apprentice of Jesus is a definite and obvious kind of thing. To make a mystery of it is to misunderstand it. There is no good reason why people should ever be in doubt as to whether they themselves are his students or not" (p. 281).

"Now, people who are asked whether they are apprentices of a leading politician, musician, lawyer or screenwriter would not need to think a second to respond. Similarly for those asked if they are studying Spanish or bricklaying with someone unknown to the public. It is hardly something that would escape one's attention. The same is all the more true if asked about discipleship to Jesus" (p. 282).

In manuscript form I gave a copy of Chapter 9, "A Curriculum for Christlikeness," to Bob Howey, a businessman I meet with weekly in a Spiritual Formation group. For several weeks Bob showed me extensive notes he had taken—applying and extending the teaching into his business life—which thrilled me. By itself that chapter had taken the mystery out of discipleship for Bob and had made it a living reality for his daily experience. It can do the same for you and me.

A fourth intently pastoral reason I urge you to read this book is the way **it connects this life with the life to come.** That is, it shows us how our present lives in this world relate to our future lives in heaven. This kind of teaching is tremendously important, for if people consider heaven at all today, they usually think of something like "an everlasting church service," or worse.

Willard writes, "Those who have apprenticed themselves to Jesus learn an undying life with a future as good and as large as God himself. The experiences we have of this life . . . now fill us with anticipation of a future so full of beauty and goodness we can hardly imagine. . . . Our future can be incorporated into our life now and our life now can be incorporated into our future.

"I meet many faithful Christians who, in spite of their faith, are deeply disappointed in how their lives have turned out. . . . what they had hoped to accomplish in life they did not. . . . Much of the distress of these good people comes from a failure to realize that their life lies before them. That they are

coming to the end of their present life, life 'in the flesh,' is of little significance. What is of significance is the kind of person they have become" (pp. 375-387).

"We should expect that in due time we will be moved into our eternal destiny of *creative activity with Jesus and his friends and associates in the 'many mansions' of 'his Father's house.'* We should think of our destiny as being absorbed in a tremendously creative team effort, with unimaginable splendid leadership, on an inconceivable vast plane of activity, with ever more comprehensive cycles of productivity and enjoyment. *This* is the 'eye hath not seen, neither ear heard' that lies before us in the prophetic vision (Isa. 64:4)" (p. 399).

Honestly, I could go on and on. You can tell that I am hoping you will get this book. I do so out of pastoral concern. I believe this book will help you enormously. That is the reason I want you to read it, and in a moment I will mention a way that you can get it. But first I want to discuss the other matter I promised to mention.

### **An International Conference**

Over the past year key Christian leaders in Houston, Texas, have been urging us to make it the site of a **RENOVARÉ International Conference on Spiritual Renewal**. In January about 25 churches and para-church groups (representing several denominations) extended an official invitation to us, pledging prayer, finances, promotion, and volunteer labor in support of the Conference.

After following a deliberate discernment process—listening carefully to what God was saying through this gracious invitation and watching with eagerness the signs of spiritual life occurring in Houston—we have decided this is a right and good thing for us to do. Hence, this gathering is scheduled for **June 30-July 3, 1999, at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston**, a facility that can accommodate up to 7,000 precious people. I believe it will be a wonder-filled time of learning, worship, and fellowship across cultural, ethnic, and denominational boundaries. We are expecting folk from every state in the U.S.A. to come, and we are going to advertise the Conference in several countries so that key people from them can join us. I hope you will make plans now to be part of this international gathering. (Actual registration information will be sent in the months ahead.)

### **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.

**The Connection**

So what is the connection between Dallas Willard's new book and this conference? Simple. **"The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God"** will be the theme for our gathering in Houston in 1999. All of the general session talks will be building on themes in the book —extending them, filling them out, and making them accessible to everyone. All twenty-five workshops will be based on some aspect of the Sermon on the Mount and will use Willard's insights into Jesus' teaching as their starting point.

Dallas Willard will be with us for the gathering as will all of the members of our RENOVARÉ Ministry Team—twelve women and men full of joy and the life of the Spirit. Each one brings a dimension of ministry that is uniquely God-kissed, and I am always encouraged and helped when with them.

This is a huge commitment on our part as the facility alone costs \$25,000.00 to rent and the sound/audio setup will cost approximately \$70,000.00. Of course, this is only the beginning—there will be plane fares and hotel rooms and meals and printing and magazine advertisements and postage. And much more.

But we believe it is the right thing to do and the right time to do it. The people in Houston are working hard. We are working hard. And we need your help . . . help in prayer and help in financial support. We are entering the typically lean summer months and have all of the normal day-to-day needs. We are also launching out, convinced that God is calling us to do the International Conference. If ever we needed your generous financial support, that time is now.

And we have a plan that will help us both. For every gift to RENOVARÉ of \$50.00 or more, we will send you a copy of *The Divine Conspiracy*. You receive the book to further your spiritual growth, and we receive the financial resources needed to undergird our ongoing ministry. Thank you for linking arms with us and becoming our partners in this kingdom work.

Peace and joy,



Richard J. Foster

P.S. We now have credit card capabilities for receiving contributions. Please call Joan at [long distance access number] 1-303-792-0152.

*Permission is granted to duplicate this letter for free distribution. Any quotations or references to it should give proper credit to RENOVARÉ, 8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO 80112-5624 USA.*

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All gifts are tax deductible.**

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- Quarterly Gift . . . . . \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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self-addressed envelope.**

- Regular Prayer Support.
- \$50.00 Gift or more/*The Divine Conspiracy*.
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- Please send me a RENOVARÉ Covenant Card so I can prayerfully read, consider, and sign it.
- Please remove my name from your mailing list.

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