

HEART-TO-HEART

November 2000

A Pastoral Letter From Richard J. Foster



Dear Friends,

In this, my last correspondence to you in 2000, (and I do wish you a wonderful Christmas and a blessed New Year) I want to continue with the theme of the "Reformation of the Heart" as I have throughout the year. It is now time for us to work together on the vital issue of the coming structures for renewal. This matter invariably comes up when people ask me questions like: "What do you see in the Church today?", or "Where is the new life springing up?", or "Where will such renewal or reformation come from?"

This issue has a genuine urgency about it because frankly we are witnessing the old structures and the old ways of social cohesion crumbling about us. It is, however, a difficult issue to answer because at present we are in an "in-between" time: clearly the old ways of doing church are passing but the new structures have not yet fully emerged. It will be some time--perhaps two or three decades--before they become clear. Nevertheless, I will do what I can to respond to this issue, and my response may surprise you. I would like to discuss with you:

- two structures from which renewal is unlikely though not impossible,
- two structures from which renewal is possible though not yet realized, and
- five structures from which renewal is now emerging.

My criterion for evaluating these structures is to always ask, "Are these places where it is possible for the very core of the human personality to be genuinely and increasingly transformed into the nature of Jesus Christ?" I'm looking for those structures where transformation into Christlikeness is no mere accident; rather it is placed intentionally at their very center.

RENEWAL UNLIKELY

I begin with the two structures from which renewal is unlikely though certainly not impossible, for nothing is impossible with God. The first is **the mega-churches**. These have burst onto the scene in recent decades with great fanfare. And they are, in their way, most impressive, with enormous budgets and masses of people and huge buildings. But they simply are not centers of substantial renewal because they have within them the seeds of perpetual superficiality. The mega-church by its very nature must gravitate toward an "entertainment religion" which turns worship into a constant effort to keep people occupied and happy. It must focus on a single charismatic leader, which up to this point has always been male. And it must pour the bulk of its time and energy into the ABCs of church success: **A**ttendance, **B**uildings, and **C**ash.

In this regard we must recognize that nothing will fail us like success. To be sure, people are attracted to "success". But this is precisely the problem: they are attracted to success, not to Jesus. And the addictive character of a success mentality effectively hinders any real progress in the spiritual life. With "success" as our constant appeal it becomes impossible for us to become serious about self-denial or the cross-life or the Sahara of the heart or the dark night of the soul or other like matters, without which there simply is no substantial spiritual growth.

Now, the mega-churches do many good things, serving most importantly to turn the thoroughgoing secular mind toward things of the spirit. But we must not expect the renewal, the Reformation of the Heart, to come from this direction.

The second group from which renewal is unlikely to emerge is **the Denominational Centers**. The reason is that these centers by their very nature are captives to agendas and organizations that they must maintain regardless of whether or not they work for renewal in the hearts and minds of people. They are captives to the

political maneuvering that comes with the territory of wealth and position. And they are captives to old doctrinal battles that have pretty well expended their capital.

I wish it could be otherwise, but it is not. The mainline denominations are at the mercy of political infighting over various social agendas, and the evangelicals are at the mercy of vested interests seeking power and prestige. And once the specific issues of the moment are exhausted, other issues will replace them.

Now, Denominational Centers have value in holding forth particular distinctives: vital doctrines that others tend to pass over or de-emphasize, a social cohesion for groupings of churches, a history that needs to be remembered, and more. But the renewal we seek will not come from this quarter.

RENEWAL POSSIBLE

Now to the two structures from which renewal is possible though not yet realized. The first of these is **the local congregation**. Here opportunities abound, the main problem being one of distraction. Pastoral leaders need to keep their focus on the enduring work of the cure of souls and refuse to be distracted by all the religious fads which come their way. They need to help their congregations overcome the inferiority complex that comes from not being "mega", and not being flashy, and not being on TV. Pastors themselves must come to believe that to pour themselves into a hundred or so people growing their souls into Christlikeness is a ministry of immense value.

And people must come to believe that they are called into a life of growing discipleship which, by its very nature, will move them beyond the trivial and superficial. This is serious, demanding, life-transforming work. Here again our main problem is one of distraction: running after trivial and unproductive activities that distract us from the essential work of formation into the image of Christ. We need to see that apprenticeship to Jesus Christ *is* our work, and that it is a work worth it all for in it we discover a faith that can see everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, a hope that can carry us through the most difficult of circumstances, and the power to overcome evil and do what is right.

We need to see that apprenticeship to Jesus Christ *is* our work, and that it is a work worth it all.

The second structure which holds great promise, along with serious obstacles, is **Christian colleges and seminaries**. Here the great promise is to take seriously the twin mandate of training the mind and growing the soul. Faith *and* learning, the life of study *and* the life of devotion, academic rigor *and* passionate faith, a tough mind *and* a tender heart, this is a high vision worthy of our best thinking and most sustained labor. We need to hold both sides of this vision in a delicate balance. Neither can be diminished. Neither can take the upper hand.

The obstacles to this high vision are many: academics merely for the sake of academics, turning the work of spiritual formation into merely an intellectual exercise, trying so hard to become acceptable to the elite centers of academia that we lose our vision for *Christian* education, and more.

RENEWAL EMERGING

I must turn my attention to those structures where I do indeed see renewal now emerging. The first of these is the small **Retreat Centers** that are popping up everywhere. I am thinking of The Inn of the Shepherd in Maryland where Carolyn and I have just finished spending a week of prayerful rest. I am thinking of The Little Portion Hermitage in Arkansas where we did retreat together last summer. I am thinking of Christian Prayer Retreat House in Colorado where I did retreat last spring. And there are thousands more, others popping up almost weekly. Unlike the "conference-in-the-woods" that we all know about these are centers where actual retreat happens. They are characterized by silence, prayer, study, worship, rest.

Now, why would I view these as centers of renewal? Well, to begin with they are centers of white hot love for Jesus that do not blink at intense formation and discipleship. It is for this that they came into being. They are the one place where I consistently see the pastoral work of the cure of souls actually practiced. They all have an ongoing core fellowship of loving accountability and are able to minister life to retreatants out of that core experience.

These centers are functioning for us much like Thomas Cahill described the preserving role of the Irish monasteries in *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. They preserve the best in the tradition of soul care, practicing it

with love and passion, showing us how it can be done. And, when the time is right, perhaps they can reintroduce this way of life back into our churches where it belongs.

Similar to the retreat centers is **face-to-face groups** which provide a loving, nurturing accountability. These are not groups focused upon "getting out the stuff" or "dealing with addictions" or even study of the Bible as important as those things are. No, they are small groups which give specific and sustained attention to spiritual growth in the individual and the group. (And when I say "small group," I really mean small: two to five people. Anything larger is no longer a small group.) These groups are simple in their format, practical in their outlook, and intentional in their spiritual formation. They gather together with a single purpose in mind—to become better disciples of Jesus Christ. Through the grace of mutual accountability they seek to inspire one another to love and good works.

The small group structure which comes after the Walk to Emmaus retreat experience is an example of what I am suggesting. And, of course, our Spiritual Formation Group structure is our contribution to this effort.

House Churches constitute another structure for renewal. These have not taken hold in a major way in the U.S. except for the Pacific Northwest where the desire to avoid institutional structures is unusually high. But in places where the political climate make it necessary or economic needs make it desirable house churches are growing rapidly. China, India, many places in Africa, even England and Canada have powerful house church movements. (The foursquare Gospel Church in Canada recently appointed national coordinators for "the planting of home-based churches.")

What can we say about the house church movement? On the plus side they provide intense accountability and growth, and they are a natural and effective means of church multiplication. On the minus side they often lack effective biblical teaching, and providing good pastoral oversight is a constant challenge.

Most effective house church efforts are in two-thirds world countries which leads me to mention the renewal that is springing up from **Two-thirds world Christians**. They bring us renewal by teaching us to return to our first love; showing us how to once again love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength. I am speaking of the witness of disciples of Jesus in Africa and South America and Asia. These are people of "the order of the burning heart" and they have much to teach us. For them suffering is a way of life and signs and wonders reflect the normal Christian life.

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.

It is a good investment of the wealth that we in the West possess to use it to travel to two-thirds world settings, not to preach to them but to learn from them. We can go to many South Korean prayer mountains and learn how to pray. We can go to Brazilian street meetings and learn how to evangelize. We can go to Ugandan churches and learn how to suffer.

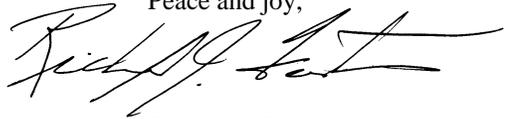
In addition we can use our wealth to bring leaders from two-thirds world countries to teach us. And in doing so we should humbly receive their witness. In some cases the witness will be unpolished, even poorly stated. But remember, a thing can be unrefined and profound at the same time. And if anything, these brothers and sisters in the faith have the most profound of spiritual lives.

A fifth structure that has genuine potential is the many **Infra-church efforts** who periodically gather the people of God into city-wide and regional-wide worship and teaching settings. The RENOVARÉ Regional Conferences is our contribution to this emphasis. Others are doing similar events. We need times when the people of God gather in larger, more public venues. They are a celebration of our life together. They are a witness to the watching world of the intensity of our love for one another.

Two counsels here. First, these need to be intently Christ-centered events and so they are not gatherings that can or should be attempted by the various inter-faith councils. Their role is in other matters. Second, these are efforts that must do the hard work of moving across and including all Christian communions. Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Pentecostals, Orthodox, Methodists, Episcopalians, and many, many more. Asian, Latino, Anglo, African-American, Native-American, and many, many more. All are included.

I could say more but I think I've already gone over my word allotment. God's very best to you as you celebrate the birth of our Savior and prepare to step into the new year.

Peace and joy,



Richard J. Foster

P.S. How we thank God for the exceedingly generous support you gave as a result of our *Heart-to-Heart* appeal last May. Your gifts have put us right where we should be for solid fiscal responsibility. Thank you! Our needs, of course, continue and recently five couples, all friends of RENOVARÉ, have put together a challenge gift of \$33,000.00. They have promised to match dollar for dollar any monies given from now to the end of the year up to \$33,000.00. This is a wonderful opportunity and a genuine challenge. Will you help us? Thank you. RJF

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 - Monthly \$ _____
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- Regular Prayer Support.

Signature _____

Make checks out to RENOVARÉ and mail to RENOVARÉ, 8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO 80112-5624 USA.

**Send this section to RENOVARÉ in the enclosed
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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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The purist will tell you that January 1, 2001 is technically the beginning of the third millennium and the twenty-first century. It's not an issue I care to debate one way or the other, but it does give me an opportunity one year after all the media hype to do my list of the "100 Enduring Spiritual Classics". Actually it's not "my list" as several on the RENOVARÉ team have been working on it and we have consulted with others as well.

The idea for the list that follows came after reflecting on the "Christian Classics" list that John Wesley put together to help those who were pouring into the young Methodist societies. Likewise here, we want to give you a basic list in the field of Christian Spirituality that you can work with in the years to come.

These are all books that we believe can help you grow in grace. They all have intrinsic merit. They all have stood the test of time. And most of them have had a substantial impact on Christians throughout the centuries.

You can buy the books with an asterisk beside the author from our office—simply call 303-792-0152. Many others can be secured through a book store or from a .com service. Those that are out of print you can find in any good library. Happy reading.

Richard J. Foster

P.S. We're also including part of a brochure and an advertisement that HarperSanFrancisco developed with the hope that they will be helpful. RJF

100 Enduring Spiritual Classics

Andews, Lancelot (16 th Century)	<i>Private Devotions</i>
Anonymous (13 th Century)	<i>A Mirror for Simple Souls</i>
Anonymous (14 th Century)	<i>The Cloud of Unknowing</i>
Anonymous (19 th Century)	<i>The Way of a Pilgrim /The Pilgrim Continues His Way</i>
Aquinas, Thomas (13 th Century)	<i>The Aquinas Prayer Book: The Prayers and Hymns of St. Thomas Aquinas</i>
Athanasius (4 th Century)	<i>The Life of Antony</i>
*Augustine of Hippo (4 th /5 th Centuries)	<i>The Confessions</i> (\$13.00)
Baillie, John (20 th Century)	<i>A Diary of Private Prayer</i>
Bernard of Clairvaux (12 th Century)	<i>On the Love of God</i>
Bloom, Anthony (20 th Century)	<i>Beginning to Pray</i>
Boehme, Jacob (17 th Century)	<i>The Way of Christ</i>
*Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (20 th Century)	<i>The Cost of Discipleship</i> (\$12.00)/ <i>Life Together</i>
Bounds, E. M. (19 th Century)	<i>Power Through Prayer</i>
Brother Lawrence (17 th Century)	<i>The Practice of the Presence of God</i>
*Brother Ugolino (13 th Century)	<i>The Little Flowers of St. Francis</i> (\$10.00)
Bunyan, John (17 th Century)	<i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i>
Buttrick, George (20 th Century)	<i>Prayer</i>
Calvin, John (16 th Century)	<i>Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life</i>
Catherine of Genoa (15 th Century)	<i>The Spiritual Dialogue</i>
Catherine of Siena (14 th Century)	<i>The Dialogue</i>
Chesterton, G. K. (20 th Century)	<i>Orthodoxy</i>
Church Councils (4 th /5 th Centuries)	<i>The Apostles' Creed/The Nicene Creed</i>
Dante Alighieri (13 th /14 th Centuries)	<i>The Divine Comedy</i>
Day, Dorothy (20 th Century)	<i>The Long Loneliness</i>
*de Caussade, Jean-Pierre (18 th Century)	<i>The Sacrament of the Present Moment</i> (\$12.00)
de Sales, Francis (16 th /17 th Centuries)	<i>Introduction to the Devout Life</i>
Desert Fathers (4 th Century)	<i>Sayings of the Desert Fathers</i>
Doherty, Catherine de Hueck (20 th Century)	<i>Poustinia</i>
Dostoyevsky, Fyodor (19 th Century)	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i>
Eckart, Meister (13 th /14 th Centuries)	<i>Collected Works</i>
Edwards, Jonathan (18 th Century)	<i>A Treatise on Religious Affections</i>
Faber, Frederick William (19 th Century)	<i>Growth in Holiness</i>
Fénelon, François (17 th Century)	<i>Christian Perfection</i>
Fox, George (17 th Century)	<i>The Journal of George Fox</i>
Gregory of Nyssa (4 th Century)	<i>The Life of Moses</i>
Grou, Jean-Nicholas (18 th Century)	<i>How to Pray</i>
*Guyon, Madame (17 th Century)	<i>Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ</i> (\$9.00)
Hadewijch of Antwerp (13 th Century)	<i>The Complete Works</i> (Letters, Visions, Poems)
Hallesby, Ole (20 th Century)	<i>Prayer</i>

Hammerskjöld, Dag (20 th Century)	<i>Markings</i>
Hildegard of Bingen (12 th Century)	<i>The Book of Divine Works</i>
Hopkins, Gerard Manley (19 th Century)	<i>Poems</i>
Ignatius of Loyola (16 th Century)	<i>The Spiritual Exercises</i>
John Climacus (7 th Century)	<i>The Ladder of Paradise</i>
John of the Cross (16 th Century)	<i>The Dark Night of the Soul</i>
Johnson, Samuel (18 th Century)	<i>Prayers and Meditations/Ascent of Mount Carmel</i>
Jones, E. Stanley (20 th Century)	<i>The Christ of Every Road</i>
*Julian of Norwich (14 th Century)	<i>Showings</i> (\$20.00)
Kagawa, Toyohiko (20 th Century)	<i>Meditations on the Cross</i>
*Kelly, Thomas (20 th Century)	<i>A Testament of Devotion</i> (\$12.00)
*Kempis, Thomas à (15 th Century)	<i>The Imitation of Christ</i> (\$10.00)
Kierkegaard, Søren (19 th Century)	<i>Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing</i>
King, Martin Luther Jr. (20 th Century)	<i>Letter from a Birmingham Jail</i>
Kuyper, Abraham (19 th Century)	<i>Near Unto God</i>
Laubach, Frank (20 th Century)	<i>Letters by a Modern Mystic</i>
*Law, William (18 th Century)	<i>A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life</i> (\$7.00)
*Lewis, C.S. (20 th Century)	<i>Mere Christianity</i> (\$8.00)/ <i>The Screwtape Letters</i>
Luther, Martin (16 th Century)	<i>The Bondage of the Will</i>
MacDonald, George (19 th Century)	<i>Creation in Christ</i>
Marshall, Catherine (20 th Century)	<i>Something More</i>
Merton, Thomas (20 th Century)	<i>The Seven Storey Mountain</i>
Milton, John (17 th Century)	<i>Paradise Lost/Paradise Regained</i>
*Murray, Andrew (19 th /20 th Centuries)	<i>With Christ in the School of Prayer</i> (\$6.00)
Nee, Watchman (20 th Century)	<i>The Normal Christian Life</i>
Newman, John Henry (19 th Century)	<i>Apologia Pro Vita Sua</i>
Nicodemus the Hagiorite (18 th /19 th Centuries)	<i>Philokalia</i>
*Nouwen, Henri J. M. (20 th Century)	<i>The Return of the Prodigal Son</i> (\$16.00)
Palmer, Pheobe (19 th Century)	<i>Pheobe Palmer: Selected Writings</i>
Pascal, Blaise (17 th Century)	<i>Pensées</i>
Paton, Alan (20 th Century)	<i>Cry the Beloved Country</i>
Penington, Isaac (17 th Century)	<i>Letters on Spiritual Virtue</i>
Penn, William (17 th /18 th Centuries)	<i>No Cross, No Crown</i>
Phillips, J. B. (20 th Century)	<i>Your God is Too Small</i>
Rolle, Richard (14 th Century)	<i>The Fire of Love</i>
Ruusbroec, John (14 th Century)	<i>The Spiritual Espousals</i>
Sanford, Agnes (20 th Century)	<i>The Healing Light</i>
Schaeffer, Francis A. (20 th Century)	<i>True Spirituality</i>
Sheldon Vanauken (20 th Century)	<i>A Severe Mercy</i>
Smith, Hannah Whitall (19 th Century)	<i>The Christians Secret of a Happy Life</i>
Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr (20 th Century)	<i>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</i>
Steere, Douglas V. (20 th Century)	<i>On Beginning from Within</i>
Sundar Singh (20 th Century)	<i>At the Feet of the Master</i>
Taylor, Jeremy (17 th Century)	<i>Holy Living and Holy Dying</i>
Temple, William (20 th Century)	<i>Christianity and Social Order</i>
Teresa of Ávila (16 th Century)	<i>The Interior Castle</i>
Thérèse of Lisieux (16 th Century)	<i>The Story of a Soul</i>
Thompson, Francis (19 th /20 th Centuries)	<i>The Hound of Heaven</i>
Tolstoy, Leo (19 th Century)	<i>The Confession</i>
*Tozer, A.W. (20 th Century)	<i>The Pursuit of God</i> (\$10.00)
Trueblood, D. Elton (20 th Century)	<i>Company of the Committed</i>
Underhill, Evelyn (20 th Century)	<i>The Spiritual Life</i>
Vanier, Jean (20 th Century)	<i>Community and Change</i>
von Hügel, Friedrich (19 th /20 th Centuries)	<i>Selected Letters</i>
Wallis, Arthur (20 th Century)	<i>God's Chosen Fast</i>
Weil, Simone (20 th Century)	<i>Waiting for God</i>
Wesley, Charles (18 th Century)	<i>A Song for the Poor: Hymns by Charles Wesley</i>
*Wesley, John (18 th Century)	<i>The Journal of John Wesley</i> (\$23.00)
*Woolman, John (18 th Century)	<i>The Journal of John Woolman</i> (\$15.00)