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## *HEART-TO-HEART*

### **November 2002 A Pastoral Letter from Richard Foster**



Dear Friends,

The RENOVARÉ practical strategy for spiritual growth involves a “Covenant” to give us focus, “Common Disciplines” to help us live out the life of the Covenant, and “Questions of Examen” to encourage us to evaluate how we are doing from week-to-week.

With this pastoral letter I am providing each of us the means to affirm and re-affirm our commitment to the RENOVARÉ Covenant. You will find a “Service of Commitment” inserted. This is the first of what I hope will be an annual commitment experience. If you are alone, I urge you to experience this service by yourself with only small adaptations. If you are part of a Spiritual Formation group, I hope you will use this service for one of your weekly meetings. It can even be used by larger gatherings of like-minded folk. I suggest you have this “Service of Commitment” sometime during the Advent Season (starting the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Christmas Day which is the beginning of the Church year) or on New Year’s eve or day (which is the beginning of the calendar year). Some of you have never made a commitment to the RENOVARÉ Covenant and so this will be your first opportunity to do so. Others have been a part of our Covenant Family for a long time and so this becomes your opportunity to re-affirm these Covenant vows. In this letter I want to provide some of the theological and biblical underpinnings for our Covenant and explain why it is vital for you and me to make such a commitment.

#### **THE PURPOSE OF THE COVENANT**

The RENOVARÉ Covenant is deceptively simple, captured as it is in one sentence: “In utter dependence upon Jesus Christ as my ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend I will seek continual renewal through spiritual exercises, spiritual gifts, and acts of service.” The simplicity is intentional, but it is far from simplistic: an awful lot is packed into that single sentence. I shall get to that presently.

First, let me explain the purpose of the Covenant. Its purpose, very simply, is to give us focus. It is a brief, clear declaration of what we are seeking in our growth in grace. It is a kind of short-hand, if you will. Just as the Apostles’ Creed is a short-hand for Christian belief, so the RENOVARÉ Covenant is a short-hand for Christian practice. It becomes a constant reminder to us of our goal and the means for accomplishing this goal.

We need just such a reminder. It is exceedingly easy for us to get caught up in the press of life and forget what life is all about in the first place. So the Covenant calls us back to our first love, and reminds us that what we get out of life is the kind of person we become. A loving, persistent, insistent reminder of spiritual realities—that is the purpose of the RENOVARÉ Covenant!

#### **HIGHLY CHRISTOCENTRIC**

Now, to the Covenant itself. The very first thing we notice is how highly Christocentric it is. The opening phrase, even before we get to the verb, focuses upon Christ and our complete

dependence upon him, “In utter dependence upon **Jesus Christ . . .**” This is intentional. You see, this is no religion of the lowest common denominator. No, indeed! Jesus Christ is at the very center of our faith. This is a non-negotiable for us.

Then note the emphasis upon Jesus’ resurrection, “In utter dependence upon Jesus Christ as my **ever-living . . .**” Again, this is simply a non-negotiable. It makes an enormous difference that Jesus Christ rose from the grave, conquering sin and death and hell. It makes an enormous difference that Jesus Christ is alive and working in our world today. In fact, it makes all the difference in the world. As the Apostle Paul puts it, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17).

Next note the Covenant’s emphasis upon Christ among us in all his offices.

- He is our **Savior** to forgive us.
  - He is our **Teacher** to instruct us.
    - He is our **Lord** to rule us.
      - He is our **Friend** to come alongside us.

In dogmatic theology the offices of Christ are described as Prophet, Priest, and King, and an immense history and content stand behind those words. And we are giving expression to these great truths by confessing Christ as Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend.

When we speak of the offices of Christ we are recognizing that Jesus actually *functions* among his people. He does things. Now. It is not just that Jesus did great works in the past, especially the unrepeatable work of redemption on the cross. It is also that he is working in the present—forgiving, teaching, directing, comforting, empowering. And he will be working in the future, especially in his return in majesty and power and his everlasting reign in glory.

This is the glorious reality we confess in the Covenant. Jesus Christ is alive. He is here to teach his people himself. His voice is not hard to hear. His vocabulary is not difficult to understand. He **is** the good shepherd and his sheep do hear his voice.

So Christ is among us functioning as the Lord of his people. He guides his people. He corrects his people. He forgives his people. He instructs his people. He oversees his people. He empowers his people. And so much more. All this we confess in the RENOVARÉ Covenant.

## **THE MOMENT OF SACRED COMMITMENT**

Then, and only then, comes the verb, “I will seek . . .” This is a daring declaration of our intention. It brings us to the point of decision. It asks in no uncertain terms, “Am I prepared to accept Christ as my Life? Will I say ‘yes’ to him in all things?” And so we come to the moment of sacred commitment. It is up to us to choose Christ. No one else can make this choice for us. We are the only one that can make it.

And did you notice the teeth in this commitment? This is a commitment to “seek continual renewal . . .” The background to these words here is the biblical call for us to offer ourselves to God as a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1). Now, a “living” sacrifice takes a lifetime to be offered. And note: a “dead” sacrifice is never going to get off the altar; this exact temptation is ever-present for a “living” sacrifice. So our offering of ourselves is a continual one. Our commitment, you see, is for “continual renewal.”

## THE MEANS OF GRACE

Now, this renewal work is not done in a vacuum. We are not seeking continual renewal in the abstract. Oh, no. There *is* a way in, and that way involves . . .

- Spiritual exercises,
  - Spiritual gifts, and
    - Acts of service.

When we speak of “spiritual exercises” we are tapping into the great biblical and historical tradition of the classical Disciplines of the spiritual life. These Disciplines are the main way we are enabled to train in the spiritual life. Remember Paul’s words to Timothy, “Train yourself in godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). It is by means of the Spiritual Disciplines that we bring our body, our mind, our spirit . . . all that we are, and place all that we are before God as a “living sacrifice.” Disciplines like meditation and prayer and fasting and study and simplicity and solitude and service and frugality and confession and guidance and worship and celebration. And more. Frankly, I have no exhaustive list of the Spiritual Disciplines, and, as far as I know, none exist. We are simply learning ways of placing ourselves before God so that he can work the righteousness of the kingdom into us.

But not just spiritual exercises; we also seek continual renewal through “spiritual gifts.” The charisms or gifts of the Spirit are meant for our growth, for our encouragement, for our good. There are gifts of wisdom and knowledge and faith and healing and discernment of spirits and tongues and the interpretation of tongues. There are gifts of administration, indeed one of the spiritual gifts is administration, but there are also spiritual charisms of apostle, prophet, teacher, pastor. There are gifts of exhortation and giving and helps. And more.

Paul, that wise, pastoral Apostle, states with crystal clarity that the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit are, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13).

## 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 most extensive discussion of the spiritual gifts in all the Bible is given in 1 Corinthians, chapters 12-14, and note that right at the heart of that discussion is what we call “the love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13. Love, the maturing, nurturing fruit of the Spirit, is absolutely central to the right functioning of the gifts of the Spirit.

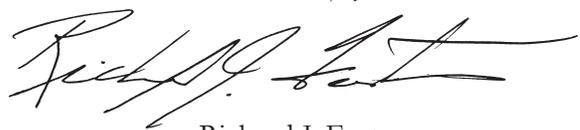
Then there are “acts of service.” This means initially simple, trifling tasks of daily life through which we help and encourage one another; taking out trash, washing dishes, folding laundry. And so much more. There is the service of common courtesy and of guarding the reputation of others and of hospitality. Even listening to another person can be an act of service. Perhaps most important of all is the service of bearing the burdens of each other.

You might wonder why something so ordinary as acts of service would be placed alongside things like spiritual exercises and spiritual gifts. The answer is profoundly simple: any vital life with God will, by its very nature, express itself in loving human relationships, and how better to express this than through acts of service. Service takes us beyond ourselves, constantly teaching us to value other human beings . . . all kinds of human beings. It is a means of grace for the transforming of our heart, our spirit, our mind, our affections.

**THEREFORE**

This then is a brief overview of the RENOVARÉ Covenant and its importance to our ongoing life of discipleship. I hope that during this Advent season or on New Year’s Day you will affirm and re-affirm this commitment to follow Jesus Christ in all things and in all ways. And may God bless you as you do so, whether individually or in a group setting. Remember, even when alone, we are together in our Covenant commitment and together always in the glorious fellowship of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Peace and joy,



Richard J. Foster

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# A SERVICE OF COMMITMENT

## For Each New Year

### OPENING (read aloud in unison)

In the name and in the glorious fellowship of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—I this day;

- surround myself with the Light of Jesus Christ,
- cover myself with the blood of Jesus Christ, and
- seal myself with the cross of Jesus Christ.

### READINGS (read aloud in turn)

Old Testament: Ezekiel 37: 1-10

New Testament: Ephesians 4: 1-16

Gospels: Matthew 5: 1-16

### CONFESSION OF FAITH (read aloud in unison)

I call all heaven to witness today  
that I have put on Christ.  
I choose no other Lord  
than the Maker of Heaven and earth.  
This day I walk with him  
and he will walk with me.  
I fasten close to me this day  
that same Jesus  
who came to us as flesh and blood  
and was himself baptized in the Jordan River.  
He died upon a cross to rescue me,  
broke free from death, its conqueror.  
He left us, to return the more certainly.

All these truths and their power  
I fasten close to me this day.  
Resisting my own selfishness and sin,  
refusing to live as a slave to riches,  
pleasure, or reputation,  
rejecting Satan and all his lies,  
I call on heaven to witness today  
that I have put on Christ.

## COVENANT COMMITMENT (read aloud responsively)

Leader: Do you this day believe that Jesus Christ has risen and is, through the Holy Spirit, alive and present among his people?

People: Yes, we so believe!

Leader: Do you this day confess that Christ is among us as

- Our Savior to forgive us,
- Our Teacher to instruct us,
- Our Lord to rule us, and
- Our Friend to come alongside us.

People: Yes, we so confess!

Leader: Do you this day commit yourself to seek continual renewal through

- Spiritual exercises,
- Spiritual gifts, and
- Acts of service.

People: Yes, we so commit!

Leader: Let us then make our commitment the more sure by speaking the words of the RENOVARÉ Covenant.

All: In utter dependence upon Jesus Christ as my ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend I will seek continual renewal through spiritual exercises, spiritual gifts, and acts of service.

## COMMUNITY COMMITMENT (read aloud in unison)

We journey alone;  
we journey together;  
we say Yes to God;  
we say Yes to each other.

Alone in God  
we will find  
ourselves together  
and know the gift  
of community.

Amen.

*To sign the RENOVARÉ Covenant, log on to [www.renovare.org](http://www.renovare.org) (click on "Journey", click on "Covenant Form") and print, fill out, date, sign, and mail or fax the Covenant Form to RENOVARÉ, 8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO 80112-5624 USA, Fax: 303-792-0146, or call 303-792-0152 and request a Covenant Card and Introductory Packet.*