

HEART-TO-HEART



May 2005 **A Pastoral Letter from Richard Foster**

Dear Friends,

What is the future for RENOVARÉ? An excellent question and I'd like for you and I to think about it together in this pastoral letter. Of course, the most true and honest answer we can give to such a penetrating question is, "We really don't know!" No one knows, save God alone. We do our best thinking and planning. We study the currents of contemporary culture and consider how we ought to respond and what we might do to nurture a more life-giving society. We prayerfully listen and wait for the Divine Whisper. We step out when we feel the time and the action is right. But where it will all lead we simply do not know.

To illustrate: I recently received a letter from a person I believe has a genuine prophetic gift. She shared an encouraging and challenging prophesy about RENOVARÉ. "Encouraging" because it reminded me that God truly is in charge of the good ship RENOVARÉ. "Challenging" because it called us to venture out into the spiritual unknown boldly, confidently. However, if I were to condense the prophetic message itself into one phrase it was simply this: "Things are going to change." Well, yes, okay, but: How? When? Who? What? Where? These are matters unknown to us. You see, even the most spiritually astute of us still peer through a glass darkly. Even so, it is incumbent upon us to do everything possible to look ahead and consider the future face of RENOVARÉ—ten, fifteen, even twenty years from now.

A Look Back: The Message and the Messengers

Looking forward is almost always sharpened by looking back. Fifteen odd years ago RENOVARÉ started out with no material "things" . . . just a **message** hammered out on the hard anvil of our experience with God.

- A message about the good news of the availability of life in the kingdom of God, here, now.
- A message of Jesus alive and here to teach his people himself.
- A message of genuine forming, conforming, transforming life in and through Jesus.
- A message of God's grace-filled invitation for us to co-operate in this transforming work through Spiritual Disciplines appropriate to our need and growth.
- A message of breaking down the old walls that separate and isolate us.
- And more

From its inception RENOVARÉ has been an ecclesiastically positive movement. We are inter-denominational and multi-denominational, and at the same time trans-denominational. Rather than bypassing or avoiding denominational life, we wanted to gain from the best insights of all the denominations. Instead of a religion of the least common denominator we urge the denominations to bring us their most distinctive spiritual insights. We have found that the great spiritual treasures are almost always “loanable,” especially when our common core in Jesus Christ is firm. We want the Presbyterians to teach us about God’s sovereignty and the Baptists to teach us about evangelism and the Mennonites to teach us about community life and the Nazarenes to teach us about holiness and the Methodists to teach us about social justice and the Lutherans to teach us about justification by faith alone and Roman Catholics to teach us about liturgical life. And so on.

Further, we have always been an intra-church movement. We have no interest in doing an end-run around the churches. Far from it, we are committed to the Church of Jesus Christ in all her multi-faceted expressions. We believe in local congregations, even with all their imperfections and frustrations. And we know that new, creative expressions of the People of God will continue to burst onto the scene, and we are for them too.

That has been, and is, our message. The **messengers** in those early days were few in number: myself and Dallas Willard and Marti Ensign and Jim Smith and Bill Vaswig and Gayle Withnell and Roger Fredrikson and a few others. Even then, though few in number, we decided to work in teams whenever possible. People needed to see our message embodied in the love we had for each other. Without this fleshed out love the message would be undercut and of little effect for the forming of lives into Christlikeness. In the early days when people asked me to speak I always insisted on the inclusion of other team members as well, and that insistence helped to develop us as a community of love. Far from perfect, to be sure, but always deepening in our love for each other and for all people.

And Today: Two Significant Changes

Two significant changes have occurred since those early days. First, the numbers of individuals who “get” the RENOVARÉ message of spiritual formation has increased dramatically. All over this country people really are stepping into this “life that is life indeed.” The RENOVARÉ vision has become embedded in the consciousness of multitudes and we thank God for it. Fifteen years ago folk were asking for me and I was urging them into RENOVARÉ style events; five years ago probably 60% were asking for me and 40% were asking for the message of RENOVARÉ; today maybe 30% ask for me and 70% are looking for the RENOVARÉ message and are glad for any number of messengers who can rightly embody and articulate the message. For example, our initiative into Africa last fall was done entirely without me, and at the International Conference in June we will be having key leaders from Africa with us—leaders that are capable of speaking the RENOVARÉ message into African culture far better than I ever could. The same could be said for our Korean and Britain and Ireland initiatives. For this change I thank God. It gives us high hopes for the future, for, as we all know, a day will come when I will not be able to give the same visible presence to RENOVARÉ that is now the case.

The second change (and it is significant) is the volume of literature now surrounding and reinforcing the RENOVARÉ message. Since *Celebration of Discipline* was published there has come *Devotional Classics* and *Spiritual Classics* and *Freedom of Simplicity* and *The Spirit of the Disciplines* and *The Divine Conspiracy* and *Prayer* and *Streams of Living Water* and *Renovation of the Heart* and *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* and *Wilderness Time* and a host of other writings. Beyond this is a ton of literature out there now; it all needs sifting, of course, but many fine works can be found in among a lot of silliness. And I must not forget *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* that has just been released. It will give us a solid biblical foundation for all the spiritual formation work we have been doing. This Bible, I predict, will take on a life of its own. The Bible is God’s book and we can be confident that God will take care of it. It will win its way. nto the hearts and minds of

honest seekers. And it is fully capable of standing on its own in the open market of ideas. I expect this new study Bible to be a fantastic aid in our ongoing engagement with contemporary culture. In addition, I just yesterday signed contracts with HarperSanFrancisco for sixteen supplemental books to surround *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*. One is a “unity of the Bible” book and the other fifteen will be study books designed to help people walk through the entire Bible with spiritual formation themes in mind.

And Into The Future: Four Daring Proposals

The future is bright. RENOVARÉ’s beginning efforts have reaped a substantial harvest and now it should be considered the major movement within the field of spiritual formation. A solid foundation has been laid. But now we must look to the future, and not just the immediate future. To that end allow me to cast a vision for perhaps the next fifteen to twenty years in areas I believe God would have RENOVARÉ move into, confident of divine leading and undergirding.

1. I long to see the gathering together of multiplied numbers of “spiritual formation based congregations” throughout the US and beyond. In the beginning days it was important for us to cast the vision of spiritual formation as broadly as possible. We have done this and multiplied thousands of individuals have responded. We thank the Lord. Now it is time to see this vision find root in congregational life. We are linking efforts with other groups like *The Spiritual Formation Forum* near Chicago and *Springs of Living Water* near Philadelphia and the *Jesus Connection* near Kansas City that are working with many of the same concerns. At the International Conference we will have a congregational spiritual formation workshop track, and we hope to learn much from that experience. What future initiatives we will be taking is yet to be determined. The operating idea is to see a substantial increase in the number of churches that value spiritual formation as the organizing principle of their congregational life. And to see them working together; sharing resources, sharing successes, sharing failures, sharing staff . . . sharing, sharing, sharing.

2. I long to see the nurturing and deepening of the spiritual formation life of the global house church movement. This is a non-traditional church expression that has been exploding, particularly in Africa, Asia, and South America. (It has had only limited success in the Western World in pockets of the Pacific Northwest, Canada, and England.) Think of it this way: In the traditional church model we have a church **with** small groups; in the house church model the church **is** small groups. In the West some are now speaking of this as the “home churching movement” and RENOVARÉ has much to give this burgeoning effort. In their vast experience our RENOVARÉ Spiritual Formation Groups have substantive insights to bring to the table. We can enhance the movement with a discipleship element that is rich in historical perspective. In addition, we have an ecclesiastical emphasis of network and connection that stands in stark contrast to the independent, stand-alone model of many house churches. In some respects the global house church movement is akin to the emergent church movement that is being talked about so much in the US; in other ways the two are quite distinct. We want to encourage and give depth to both. To learn more on this topic I would direct you to Dr. Rad Zdero’s book *The Global House Church Movement*.

3. I long to see new and creative missional efforts to seeker movements everywhere. These seeker groups—not yet Christian but deeply interested in spirituality—represent our largest mission field. They are post-modern in thinking and nearly all are allergic to institutional religion. Because RENOVARÉ’s history and structure allows us to function without either buildings or hierarchy we are ideally suited to reach out in servant ministry toward these many seeker groups. But to do so will demand of us new cross-cultural thinking, writing, and outreach. It will become our greatest challenge in the future. But, also, perhaps our greatest opportunity. As Western culture continues to deepen in its secular outlook and to harden in its anti-establishment, anti-religious sentiments, Christians will need to find non-institutional ways to flourish.

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.

4. I long to see a solid financial foundation undergirding all RENOVARÉ's efforts. It may sound strange to conclude a visionary list of future ministry opportunities with harsh financial realities, but without serious resources our most visionary dreams simply will not get off the ground. We are so thankful for the wonderful, sacrificial support that has come from precious people over the years. In addition to this, however, the time has come to establish solid, dependable funding resources for what we hope to accomplish. Frankly, many of our most longed for hopes and dreams have remained on the drawing board because we have lacked the resources to bring them to pass. Now is the time to work to solve this impasse.

Last year we began "Partners in Renewal," a small group of folk who have proven to be generous toward RENOVARÉ in their giving or in their praying or in their volunteer efforts, and often in all three. (If you want to know more about this group contact Lyle SmithGraybeal at lyle@renovare.org.) But we must do more, much more. We need committed monthly givers we can count on. We need to form a RENOVARÉ Foundation that can lay a lasting financial base under what we do. We need to establish an endowment for RENOVARÉ. And more. Already one couple has given us \$20,000.00 as seed monies to begin a RENOVARÉ endowment and in the months ahead we will be working to build upon their generosity. So the time has come for us to build a strong financial base that is equal to our dreams.

Daring proposals? Perhaps. And yet, I am reminded of the evangelical cry of William Carey so long ago, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God!"

Peace and joy,



Richard J Foster

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