

Perspective

Growing Edges

This will, I hope, be the first of many RENOVARÉ Perspective communications in which we learn together about the nature of the spiritual life and how growth can actually occur in our lives, personally and corporately. Peter urges us to "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). It is so important that we come to believe that this is actually possible. You see, it is common today to believe that these things simply cannot happen. And our unbelief hinders our ability to receive from God.

The Abysmal Ignorance

But these things do not happen automatically. There is a process that brings us into conformity to the image of Christ, and most of us have an abysmal ignorance of these God-ordained means of transforming the human personality.

In general, we today lack a theology of spiritual growth. And this lack is not just in this church or that one, in this denomination or that one. No, it is a universal problem found in every group and in every place regardless of the theological stripe or geographic location.

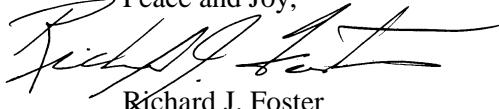
RENOVARÉ is dedicated to tackling this problem head on. First and foremost, I and all those on our RENOVARÉ team are committed to experiencing this kind of spiritual growth in our own lives. Like Moses, we want to become God's friend (Ex. 33:11). Like Paul, we want to know the power of his resurrection and share in the fellowship of his sufferings (Phil. 3:10). Like Mary, we want to have a ready heart to say, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Always, and in all ways, we want to be "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Then, we hope to share what we are learning.

The Gift of Tears

Each quarter in this column I will be sharing with you the cutting edge of my own growth. For example, recently I experienced a special grace which I believe was from God. It is the gift of tears. I had been considering my sin and the sin of God's people. I had also been meditating on the gospel teaching (and ancient teaching of the Church) on "compunction"--heart sorrow. As I did this, God graciously helped me to enter into a godly mourning in my heart on behalf of the Church, and a deep, tear-filled thanksgiving at God's patience, love, and mercy toward us. As Micah declares, "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity?" (Micah 7:18).

I saw that the people most to be pitied are those who go through life with dry eyes and cold hearts. But if we, like those at Pentecost, can be "cut to the heart, then we can enter the liberating shocks of contrition and repentance. And the experience will be not just for ourselves, and not just once in a great while, but as a precious gift given daily, a gift that catapults us into the growing edges of life.

Peace and Joy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard J. Foster".

Richard J. Foster

Vol. 1, No. 1



Going Deeper

Each month in the Perspective we will feature resources that many find useful and helpful in their spiritual lives along with ordering information. For this first issue, we are featuring the Devotional Readings; from their development to a few words from three subscribers who are using them.

BEHIND THE SCENES: THE DEVOTIONAL READINGS

(The following, written by James B. Smith, is a brief description of how the RENOVARÉ Devotional Readings came into being.)

In the winter months of 1989 I began reflecting on my own spiritual journey and, in particular, what means God has used to influence and shape that journey along "the stages of life's way." Next to the Bible, the most formative influence in this journey has been--and continues to be--the classics of devotional literature.

I came into contact with these writings nearly ten years ago. Since that time, I have obtained a considerable library of the Christian classics. They are a constant source of spiritual nourishment, and each day these writings shape my thought and life in new ways.

But it has grieved me that very few people ever read these great books. I wondered why so few take advantage of something so powerful. Several reasons, I concluded, are these: most people have never even heard of these authors; few of these books are still in print; and finally, many of the translations are difficult to read.

Then an idea occurred to me. Why not labor to make these great writings available in a kind of anthology for modern readers! I shared my idea with Richard Foster and others on the RENOVARÉ staff. The result is the development of a notebook-style anthology that hopefully is both thorough and readable. It contains 52 readings from such great devotional writers as Chrysostom, Juliana of Norwich, Martin Luther, Blaise Pascal, Madame Jeanne Guyon, and C. S. Lewis.

Each Devotional Reading begins with a brief introduction to the author followed by excerpts from the devotional classic that has been abridged and updated for the modern reader. Next is a set of study questions designed to encourage further reflection on the reading. Then there is a Bible study section that goes along with the theme of the week.

If the reader finds a particular author helpful and would like to read more of his or her writings (and we hope they will), there is a section titled, "Going Deeper," which serves as a bibliography. Then, each selection concludes with a reflection from Richard Foster which seeks to bridge between the ancient writer and the modern reader.

This project has been a huge undertaking for Richard, myself, and all of the RENOVARÉ staff. But we are dedicated to making these writings available to any and all who want to grow deeper in the spiritual life.

James B. Smith

Personal Renewal

I have been using the RENOVARÉ Devotional Readings as a sort of touchstone around which I center my thoughts each week. I read a section or two from the selected reading each day, read the printed Scripture several times during the week, and choose Reflection Questions for thought and meditation, perhaps searching through other relevant Scripture for further insight.

Using the dominant thought from each author, I concentrate especially on the RENOVARÉ Common Discipline and Self-Examination Question that seems most nearly to coincide with that particular theme. At the end of the week, I devote one period to journaling on my impressions of the week, noting areas of need and growth.

This plan has been refreshing as I have lived with and learned from the spiritual experience of persons from St. Augustine in the fourth century to Dallas Willard in twentieth. Through this process I realized that my pilgrimage is not all that different from those of the devotional masters.

Eva Brightup

Corporate Accountability

Our Spiritual Formation Group began meeting in November of 1989. For the first six months we went over our covenant disciplines each week. Then we decided we wanted some type of study, and the RENOVARÉ Devotional Readings seem to best fit our needs.

We have done one reading a week with leadership rotating weekly. The length of the selection and Bible study have fit well into our one-hour meeting time. We have found that they make us think with both our heads and hearts!

The Readings provide an excellent opportunity to sample some well-known authors we would not have taken the time to search out on our own. The questions at the end of each selection have helped to keep us on track and to find the writer's message. We especially appreciate Richard Foster's reflections at the conclusion that give us good, solid insight.

We have recently recommitted ourselves to our covenant and plan to do Devotional Readings every other week with covenant disciplines between readings. They have been a real blessing to all of us.

Becky Grant, Judy Stanton, Elna Van Dyke, Wilma Ambrose, Deborah Phelps, Wanda Urquhart, Karen Self, Barbara Bausman, Linda Manderino

Going Places with Richard J. Foster

January 7-9--RENOVARÉ Spiritual Growth

Retreat for Christian Leaders, Rancho Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, CA

January 11--RENOVARÉ National Conference
Steering Committee Meeting, World Vision, Monrovia, CA

--Chapel, World Vision, Monrovia, CA

January 12--RENOVARÉ Spiritual Formation
Group Training Seminar, La Cañada Presbyterian Church, La Cañada, CA

January 13--Church Services, Lake Avenue Congregational Church, Pasadena, CA

January 29-31--Minster's Conference, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY

February 7-10--Center for Advancing Learning, Wesley Foundation, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

March 4-6--Bishop's Seminar on the Ministry, Highland United Methodist Church, Raleigh, NC

March 8-10--Retreat for Protestant missionaries, San Jose, COSTA RICA

March 11-15--Spiritual Emphasis Week, Spanish Language Institute, San Jose, COSTA RICA

March 22--Yokefellow Conference, Richmond, IN

March 24--Church Services, First Friends Meeting, Richmond, IN

Pastoral Insight

I think, and I find real hope and encouragement in this thought, that the efforts of RENOVARÉ to stimulate individual believers and churches in the knowledge and practice of spiritual theology may make it one of the most significant modern ministries to the Christian Church.

The Devotional Readings and suggested group structure offer good discipline for depth discipleship and an effective means of combating the curse of superficiality.

We are beginning to use the RENOVARÉ readings in small groups because we want to invest as much, and more, energy in spiritual development as we do numerical growth. We are finding the material well conceived and well done.

I am also very appreciative of the way in which the material introduces the reader to the great historical figures, the great practitioners and teachers, of Christian spirituality. Many people, with ties to Western Christianity, have turned to more fanciful traditions and "pop" movements because, being ignorant of their own heritage, thought it to be lacking in richness and depth of spirituality. The RENOVARÉ readings help to remedy this situation.

Larry Hart, Grace Community Church

Growing Pains

As many of you learned in our mailing last month, we are behind in the development of the Devotional Readings. Please be patient with us; we will mail the third and fourth quarters as soon as we can.

We continue to develop the model for RENOVARÉ Local Conferences on Personal Spiritual Renewal with the first scheduled for April 12-13, 1991, at First United Methodist Church in Wichita. We'll be mailing brochures for it as soon as they are printed.

The brochure for the National Conference in Pasadena (Oct. 23-26) will now be ready the last of January. Several samples were printed over the holidays for use in California.

In November we hired an assistant for Lynda Graybeal, Joy White. She helps in many areas including updating the data base, answering the telephone, transcribing letters, making bulk mailings. She is a real "joy" and help.

Do keep us in your prayers as we begin the new year, face many new opportunities, and make crucial decisions regarding the life of RENOVARÉ.