

GROWING EDGES

January 2001

As I begin this letter to you, I sit at the hospital together with family and friends waiting for the birth of a new baby girl, Autumn Hope. We can only sit and wait; Christy and Nate (our daughter-in-law and son) do the hard work of bringing a little one into the world. Christy especially. It is a long labor—twenty-four exhausting hours as it turns out. At one point in the dark of night monitors show the baby's heart rate slowing, and immediately nurses by the score rush in. They quickly make the necessary adjustments and the baby's heart rate returns to normal. At this point in time we don't know it, but half-a-dozen hours of hard labor still lie ahead. I'm exhausted, and I've done nothing but sit and wait!



Such wonderfully focused effort to bring forth this new life reminds me of Paul's words to the Galatians, "My little children, . . . I am . . . in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you (4:19). These words are the centerpiece for Christian spiritual formation. They are words of effort and pain and travail. But they also speak of hope and promise and new life. To experience the reality of Christ being formed in us does indeed take something like the travail of childbirth. But in the end it brings with it the **joy** of a life penetrated through by love, the **faith** that can see everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, and the **hope** to carry us through the most difficult of circumstances.

All of this brings me to the theme for this *Perspective*, namely, the great tradition of *De Imitatione Christi*, the imitation of Christ. In the early days of this tradition some five hundred years ago it was called the *Devotio Moderna*, the modern or the New Devotion. And it did indeed cut a new path for that day, a path that called for the soul's growth and development (formation if you will) into Christlikeness by prayerful imitation of Jesus' own life, thoughts, habits, and intentions. Now, this was no slavish imitation of externals. No, it was rather an interior emphasis upon humility, simplicity, and holiness grounded in a deep devotion to Jesus and intent upon developing an intimate relationship with God. Out of the rich spiritual experience of these folk known as The Brethren of the Common Life sprang *The Imitation of Christ*, a book that for half a millennium has been the unchallenged devotional masterpiece for Christians everywhere. It has been translated into more than fifty different languages and there have been many fine efforts to translate it into English. We feature three of those efforts in the pages that follow, one hot off the press by the husband of our own Emilie Griffin.

Why, you might ask, has this tradition had such an extensive and profound effect? Well, first of all, because it understands Jesus is a living Teacher showing us daily how to live our lives as he would live our lives if he were us. Then second, because it focuses not on any particular set of external actions but upon how we become a particular kind of person, namely, a person who will do naturally the kinds of things Jesus would do. And third, because it ushers us into living interaction with the living Christ who comes alongside us empowering us to be the right kind of people doing the right kind of things in the midst of everyday life.

Paul writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Herein lies the great challenge for us: to be such imitators of Christ that people can look at us and understand how Jesus would think, live, and act in the context of modern society. To do this takes the fullest of formation into Christlikeness. And such a mature formation by its very nature will involve work akin to the labor pains of childbirth. Oh, yes, Autumn Hope came into the world at her own pace at 7:28 AM, December 8, 2000, weighing in at 6 pounds, 7 ounces. Both she and the proud parents are doing fine.

Peace and joy,

Richard J. Foster

GROWING TOGETHER

This is our section devoted to praxis, of which *The Imitation* has valuable instruction. Right at the heart of this little book is a serious grappling with the virtue of **humility**. This is an issue which every century of Christians have taken with utmost seriousness with the single exception of our own. Which may also help explain why *The Imitation* has been held in such high regard in every century but ours. Which, I would suggest, is an excellent reason for us to take another look at its teaching here. Listen to these few sample passages:

- “If you want to learn something that will really help you, learn to see yourself as God sees you and not as you see yourself in the distorted mirror of your own self importance” (Book 1, Chapter 2, Creasy trans.).
- “But what if others discover your defects and throw them in your face? Well, that’s humility. And if you suffer that exquisite pain in silence, it’ll lead to, of all things, greater humility (Book 2, Chapter 2, Griffin trans.).
- “Love of self—that was the dagger that did me in. But seeking You and loving You, I found not only You, but also myself” (Book 3, Chapter 8, Griffin trans.).
- “Jesus: ‘Strive, my friend, to do another’s will rather than your own; always prefer to have less than more; always seek the lower place and be submissive in all things; always wish and pray that God’s will may be entirely fulfilled in you, for you see, the person who does all this enters a place of peace and rest’” (Book 3, Chapter 23, Creasy trans.).

Perhaps these brief quotations are enough to help us see humility as a good thing. So then, how do we begin to grow in it? We are aware that humility is one of those things we cannot acquire by trying to acquire it! No, it comes indirectly. We receive the grace of humility by applying ourselves to other matters, matters which will place us in a more proper relationship with God, with others, and ultimately with ourselves. With regard to humility we learn:

- ❶ To contemplate God’s greatness and goodness. This will place us in a more proper relationship with God.
- ❷ To serve our family, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and even enemies. This will place us in a more proper relationship with each other.

- ❸ To understand ourselves in light of these more proper relationships to God and others.

Contemplating God’s greatness and goodness:

- ❶ Read Psalm 24 (“The earth is the Lord’s . . .”) and then take a walk outside. Look around you giving attention to what you see. The creation is constantly doing the will of the Father, so look and see the will of God in wind and sky, leaf and flower, and the little creatures that creep upon the earth. If you are in an urban setting, know that the power of God is over it too, even though we see it in a fallen and rebellious state.

- ❷ God’s greatness is revealed to us primarily in his goodness. With this in mind, contemplate Luke 7:36-50, the story of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Ponder Jesus’ acceptance and goodness toward her. Then, consider who in your life experience is like that woman and what attitude and actions you will want to take toward him or her.

Serving our family, neighbors, friends, colleagues, enemies:

- ❶ For seven days at the beginning of each day pray: “Lord, send me someone today I can serve”. Now, watch carefully who comes into your path in need of an act of genuine service.

- ❷ Instead of the world’s program of “random acts of kindness,” plan out *specific acts of kindness* to each family member, once a week for a month.

Understanding ourselves in light of a more proper relationship to God and others:

- ❶ Write out a list of the attributes of God. Study yourself—your deeds, actions, and accomplishments—in light of that list. This exercise is not meant to devastate you but to give you a more proper sense of place where you can rest easy under the rule of God. You are not the CEO of the universe, nor do you have to be.

- ❷ While you are serving others, watch yourself and see how the actions themselves begin to temper your own sense of self-importance and even your need to be recognized. Service is its own reward.

Richard J. Foster

TO GOD BE THE GLORY—2000 CONFERENCES

21-22 January—Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Since 1997 George Skramstad, RENOVARÉ Team Member and worship leader at most RENOVARÉ conferences, has been pining to organize a Regional Conference for Oklahoma City. Thanks to a Steering Committee and its Co-Chairs Christina and Steve Ayers, Linda Brinkworth, and Steven Graham, it happened in 2000. And in a big way! George, Richard Foster, and Dallas Willard led a record Regional Conference attendance of 1,200+ people representing twenty co-sponsoring churches through a joyous weekend at Crossings Community Church.



Lyle Smith Graybeal and friend Phil Adrian



The Valley Cathedral

18-19 February—Phoenix, Arizona

Peter Batchelder of Fuller Theological Seminary has brought together a number of great Regional Conferences, and this was yet another. Held at Valley Cathedral in Central Phoenix and organized locally by Valley's Sharon McNutt, James Bryan Smith, Richard, and George taught, learned from, and worshiped with a group of 400+ people representing ten co-sponsors and other churches. After tabulating the amount of book sales made at the conference, it was quite clear that people in Phoenix like to read!

10-11 March—Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania

The Oklahoma City Regional Conference may have been the most highly attended in 2000, but our time in Elizabethtown received the most registrations. Though only able to accommodate 840 people, Chair David Young and his excellent Steering Committee received an estimated 1,300+ registrations! (After 100 or so names were put on a waiting list, they stopped counting!) Held in beautiful Lefler Chapel on the campus of Elizabethtown College, Emilie Griffin, George, and Richard found those in attendance to be eager and engaged in the worship and lessons.



Singing "Grace to You" on Friday night



A Spiritual Formation Group

5-6 May—Corpus Christi, Texas

Marti Ensign, Richard, and George received yet another taste of Texas hospitality and interest in RENOVARÉ during this weekend on the Gulf Coast. Held at historic First Baptist Church and organized by Grover and Jana Pinson and a super Steering Committee, 500+ attendees listened attentively to Marti's stories, Richard's jokes, and George's solos. Once again the RENOVARÉ Team found out that everything is bigger in Texas, even the hospitality baskets!

23-24 June—Bothell, Washington

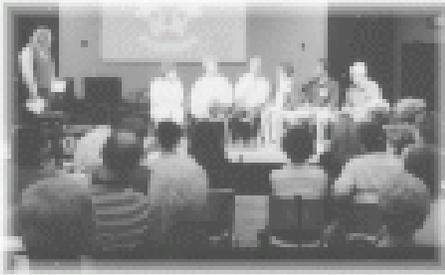
When Ward Gasque of the Pacific Association for Theological Studies heard that the October 1999 Lynden, Washington, Regional Conference could have registered 500 more people than they had seats for, he knew there was an opportunity for a second RENOVARÉ conference in the Seattle area. Ward, Scharme Hettinga of conference host Northshore Baptist Church, Dan Eernisse of Pacific Association, and others from Northshore and additional churches put the conference together in just over six months. 700+ people learned and worshiped sitting under the leadership of Richard, Marti, and George.



Book table patrons

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An annual, tax deductible gift of \$15.00 is welcome to help cover publishing expenses. If you cannot help, we understand. Some will be able to give more and in this way the unity of the Body of Christ will be maintained.



Richard Foster and model Spiritual Formation Group

22-23 September—Chattanooga, Tennessee

Kelsey Burke and Bettye Taylor worked with a Steering Committee representing twelve Chattanooga-area churches to bring together this Regional Conference. Held at First Baptist Church in downtown Chattanooga, Donn Thomas, George, and Richard—along with Margaret Campbell and Glandion Carney who were also in town for the event—shared with nearly 400 attendees the RENOVARÉ balanced vision of Christian faith and witness and practical strategy for spiritual growth.

6-7 October—Laguna Hills, California

Host Lake Hills Church member Gary Plooster, with assistance from Associate Pastor Brian Anderson and other Lake Hills staff, led a Steering Committee representing twelve plus co-sponsors in bringing together this Regional Conference. Dallas, George, and Richard led a group of 1,000+ registrants including a number of Korean-speaking pastors and 100+ graduate students from Azusa Pacific University in deep thinking and lively worship. Especially memorable during this weekend was the lovely Saturday “lunch on the greens” at Lake Hills.



George Skramstad and the Worship Team



Refreshment time

3-4 November—Charlotte, North Carolina

Glandion Carney, Richard, and George led a group of nearly 400 attendees in this Regional Conference. Held at Providence Baptist Church and co-sponsored by a number of churches, Chair Lynda Voss—who had to move to Orlando, Florida, partway into the conference organizing process—was assisted by John and Liz Propst, Doug Haney, and others on the Steering Committee from ten co-sponsors to bring together a flawless event.

Descriptions by Lyle SmithGraybeal

For a list of upcoming RENOVARÉ Conferences, see the back page of this issue of the *Perspective* or, for a more complete listing, go to the “Conferences and Events” section of our web site at www.renovare.org.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

We have four dates open in 2001 for RENOVARÉ Local Conferences:*

◆ September 22

◆ October 20

◆ October 6

◆ November 3

Speakers Available:

Glandion Carney
Marti Ensign
Roger Fredrikson

Emilie Griffin
James Bryan Smith
Donn Thomas

Local Conferences are sponsored by one to two churches that invite the community to participate. They are held on one day (Saturday from 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. or Sunday from 1:30 p.m.-9:00 p.m.) for typically around 150 people. Costs include speaker’s fees and travel expenses, registration materials, and RENOVARÉ overhead.

To explore holding a RENOVARÉ Local Conference in your area, contact Joan Skulley (in office Thursdays and Fridays).

Phone: 303-792-0152 ◆ Fax: 303-792-0146 ◆ E-mail: renovare@compuserve.com

* Dates are negotiable based upon availability of speaker.

Following is an excerpt from the three versions of *The Imitation of Christ* that we are featuring. In the left column is a more traditional work edited by Harold C. Gardiner that has been available since 1955 (New York: Doubleday/Image). In the middle column is a translation by William Creasy that is described as using the reader-response

theory which brings forth the fifteenth-century reader's response to major themes (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1989). And in the right column is a contemporary translation/paraphrase by William Griffin that uses linguistic idioms and literary devices peculiar to American culture (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 2000).

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST **by Thomas à Kempis**

Book 1, Chapter 16

Of Bearing Other Men's Faults

Such faults as we cannot amend in ourselves or in others we must patiently suffer until our Lord of His goodness will dispose otherwise. And we shall think that perhaps it is best for the testing of our patience, without which our merits are but little to be considered. Nevertheless, you shall pray heartily that our Lord, of His great mercy and goodness, may vouchsafe to help us to bear such burdens patiently.

If you admonish any person once or twice, and he will not accept it, do not strive too much with him, but commit all to God, that His will may be done, and His honor acknowledged in all His servants, for by His goodness He can well turn evil into good. Study always to be patient in bearing other men's defects, for you have many in yourself that others suffer from you, and if you cannot make yourself be as you would, how may you then look to have another regulated in all things to suit your will?

We would gladly have others perfect, yet we will not amend our own faults. We desire others to be strictly corrected for their offenses, yet we will not be corrected. We dislike it that others have liberty, yet we will not be denied what we ask. We desire that others should be

Of Putting Up With Others' Faults

What we cannot change in ourselves or in others we ought to endure patiently until God wishes it to be otherwise. Perhaps it is this way to try our patience, for without trials our merits count for little. Nevertheless, when you run into such problems you ought to pray that God may find it fitting to help you and that you may bear your troubles well. If anyone who is spoken to once or twice will not listen and change his ways, do not argue with him, but leave it all to God, for he knows well how to turn bad things into good. He knows how to accomplish his will and how to express himself fully in all his servants.

Take pains to be patient in bearing the faults and weaknesses of others, for you too have many flaws that others must put up with. If you cannot make yourself as you would like to be, how can you expect to have another person entirely to your liking? We would willingly have others be perfect, and yet we fail to correct our own faults. We want others to be strictly corrected, and yet we are unwilling to be corrected ourselves. Other peoples' far-ranging freedom annoys us, and yet we insist on having our own way. We wish others to be tied down by rules, and yet we will not allow ourselves to be held in check in any

Putting Up With Putting Down

Some things you just aren't strong enough to change either in yourself or others. What can you do but patiently endure until God orders otherwise? Yes, this is a trial, and it's meant to prove your virtue under fire. Without experience in long-suffering, such merits as you have won't amount to a hill of beans.

What you might want to do is ask God for more annoyance rather than less. Perhaps then He'll think it worth His while to come to your aid. In the meantime bear up and be benign.

Once someone has been admonished a couple of times, he becomes anxious. Don't mess with him. Instead, commit yourself totally to God. Pray to God that His will and honor will appear in Him and all His servants. But how can He do this? Well, He's converted bad wine into good on at least one festive occasion!

Strive to be patient by putting up with the defects of others. Why? Because you've saddled onto others the infirmities that are dragging you down.

If you can't express approval of others, how can you possibly expect them to return approval of you?

We're quick to want others to appear polished, but why is it that we're so slow to hammer out our own dents?

We want others to be held to the letter of the law. Ourselves? We want to swan around barely

restrained according to the laws, yet we will in no way be restrained. And so it appears evident that we seldom judge our neighbors as we do ourselves.

If all men were perfect, what would we then have to put up with in our neighbors, for God's sake? Therefore, God has so ordained that each one of us shall learn to bear another's burden, for in this world no man is without fault, no man without burden, no man sufficient to himself, and no man wise enough of himself. And so it behooves each one of us to bear the burden of others, to comfort others, to help others, to counsel others, and to instruct and admonish others in all charity. The time of adversity shows who is of most virtue. Occasions do not make a man frail, but they do show openly what he is.

Richard Whitford's translation of *The Imitation of Christ* in 1530 is known for its influence on the English language. Harold C. Gardiner, the editor of this edition, has built on the limpid beauty and pure devotion of that original translation. He was the literary editor of *America* and a member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

way at all. It is evident how rarely we think of our neighbor as ourselves!

If everything were perfect, what would we have to endure from others for God's sake? But now God has so arranged things that we may learn to bear each other's burdens, for no one is without faults, no one is without burdens, no one is wholly self-sufficient, no one has enough wisdom all by himself. That being the case, we must support and comfort each other; together we must help, teach and advise one another, for the strength that each person has will best be seen in times of trouble. Such times do not make us weak; they show what we are.

William Creasy holds a doctorate in English from UCLA where he is a member of the faculty. His research and teaching interests include manuscript reconstruction and textual analysis, fifteenth- to seventeenth-century devotional literature, the English Bible, and Renaissance poetry and prose.

observing the spirit of the law.

Worse, the uncontrollable behavior of others has spread through the populace like a plague. Better, our own errant behavior has swept over the lowlands like a flood. Clearly the latter is to be preferred to the former.

We want those others to be surrounded with strictures. We want our own behavior to know no boundaries.

Rare it is that we put ourselves on a par with our neighbor, allowing him the same amount of slack as we've come to expect ourselves.

If all the world and all the worldlings were perfect, what glory could we give to God! After all, the source of our spiritual progress is all those neighbors who are annoying us to death.

God has ordained it, and Paul has written to the Galatians (6:2). We should learn "to carry the burdens of another."

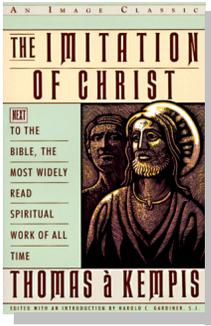
No one's without a defect, no one's without a burden, no one's sufficient unto himself, no one's wise enough to represent himself. Pauline wisdom to the Galatians (6:2) and Second Corinthians (3:5)!

We should carry each other, console each other, help, instruct, admonish each other. That's the sort of wisdom found in Proverbs (3:7), Colossians (3:13), and First Thessalonians (5:11).

The more virtue you have, the more adversity you'll encounter. Confrontations result. They shake a man up, but at the same time they reveal just what kind of man he is.

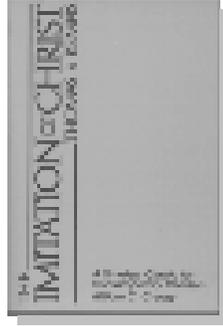
William Griffin has edited a thousand general and religion books at Macmillan and Harcourt publishers, completed major biographical works on C. S. Lewis and Billy Graham, and covered religious publishing in *Publisher's Weekly*. He and his wife, Emilie, live in Alexandria, Louisiana.

GOING DEEPER



The original translation of *The Imitation of Christ* by Richard Whitford came at a crucial juncture in the development of the English language. Recent research has set his translation in its proper perspective as a source of much of the beauty of the English language as well as a superb translation of a timeless classic.

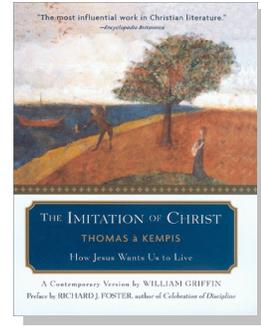
But with the passage of more than four centuries and the consequent growth and diversification of the English language, many of the expressions became archaic and meaningless to twentieth-century readers. Harold C. Gardiner's editorial work retains the beauty and devotion of Whitford's translation while adapting it to the ear and mind of the modern reader.



William Creasy's version of *The Imitation of Christ* is more than a new translation of a timeless work. It is a re-creation of a 560-year-old classic that infuses it with life and meaning for contemporary readers.

Working from the 1441 autograph manuscript, Creasy succeeds in creating a dramatically different interpretation of *The Imitation* by working through its historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts. For Creasy, Thomas à Kempis offers profound insights into a person's relationship with God.

Creasy's is a faithful translation, even to the point of replicating rhetorical devices, stylistic patterns, and figures of speech used by Thomas à Kempis.



“Although there have been many English translations, this fresh effort by William Griffin is a genuine cause for celebration. Mr. Griffin takes with utmost seriousness the need for a translation that will elicit in us an emotional experience similar to that of the original readers. This is not a simple task and one fraught with many dangers, but it is one in which William Griffin has succeeded. This fresh rendering causes *The Imitation* to once again become a *devotio moderna*, a modern devotion, constantly challenging us to new spiritual depths,” writes Richard J. Foster in the preface.

Griffin's translation recreates the spirit of this remarkable work, bringing to life its wealth of wisdom and spiritual guidance.



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Quantity	Item	Sugg. Donation Each		Total
	<i>The Imitation of Christ</i> , edited by Harold C. Gardiner (quality paperback)	\$ 9.00	\$ 20.00	
	<i>The Imitation of Christ</i> , translated by William C. Creasy (quality paperback)	9.95		
	<i>The Imitation of Christ</i> , translated by H. William Griffin (hardback)	20.00		
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GOING PLACES WITH RENOVARÉ

Date	Event	Location	Staff	Contact & Information
2-3 Feb. 2001	San Francisco Bay Area Regional Conference	First Presbyterian Church 2407 Dana Street Berkeley, California	Glandion Carney Richard Foster George Skramstad	Dick Laine/Terry Smith 510-848-6252, ext. 510 renovare@fpckerkeley.org
23-24 Feb. 2001	Northern Louisiana Regional Conference	Trinity United Meth. Church 1000 Woodward Avenue Ruston, Louisiana	Marti Ensign Richard Foster George Skramstad	Fred Wideman 318-251-0750
9-10 Mar. 2001	Eastern North Carolina Regional Conference	First Baptist Church 200 S. Church St. Rocky Mount, North Carolina	Glandion Carney Roger Fredrikson Donn Thomas	Dan Davis 252-972-2722 lindan@aol.com
9-10 Mar. 2001	Sacramento Metro Regional Conference	Oak Hills Church 1100 Blue Ravine Road Folsom, California	Richard Foster George Skramstad Dallas Willard	Dave DeRoos 916-355-1385, ext. 101 dderoos@citygateassociates.com
30 Mar.-17 Apr. 2001	Meetings in England		Richard Foster	
27-28 Apr. 2001	Kansas City Metro Regional Conference	United Methodist Church of the Resurrection 13720 Roe Boulevard Shawnee Mission, Kansas	Richard Foster George Skramstad James Bryan Smith	Jim Christiansen 816-373-6841
22 Sept. 2001	Local Conference	Sponsor yet to be scheduled		
5-6 Oct. 2001	Denver Metro Regional Conference	Cherry Hills Community Church 3900 East Grace Boulevard Highlands Ranch, Colorado	Richard Foster George Skramstad Dallas Willard	Geoff Craig 303-843-3815 or RENOVARÉ (see front)
6 Oct. 2001	Local Conference	Sponsor yet to be scheduled		
12-13 Oct. 2001 <i>Date change!!</i>	Northern Minnesota Regional Conference	To Be Announced Grand Rapids, Minnesota	Richard Foster George Skramstad 3 rd Team Member TBA	Linda Pierson 218-245-2281 lpierson@uslink.net
20 Oct. 2001	Local Conference	Sponsor yet to be scheduled		
3 Nov. 2001	Local Conference	Sponsor yet to be scheduled		
9-10 Nov. 2001	San Antonio Regional Conference	To Be Announced San Antonio, Texas	Richard Foster George Skramstad 3 rd Team Member TBA	Kathy Orr 210-226-0215 KathyO@fpcsat.org

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