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HEART-TO-HEART

November 2006
A Pastoral Letter from Richard Foster



Dear Friends,

My concern in this letter is for us to think together about a matter of genuine personal and ecclesial significance: how we might help to bring the modern spiritual formation movement into a growing maturity. Some of us have been at this spiritual formation work for a while now, long enough to see quite a mixture of helpful and decidedly unhelpful things set forth. It is time to assess where we have come and to think together about the way forward.

Maturing the Modern Spiritual Formation Movement

The task of maturing the modern spiritual formation movement is complicated and will challenge our finest thinking and most creative energies. There are two reasons, at least, for the complication. To begin with, the continuing popularity of spiritual formation today has meant that all kinds of writing and speaking has now gone forth on the subject. Frankly—and I hate to say it in such a blunt matter—much that has gone out under the name of spiritual formation has been done by people who simply have not thought substantively on the subject, and (dare I mention it) we have to wonder if they themselves have been spiritually formed to any substantial degree. Hence, a great deal of “Holy Baloney” is out there now, and the average person is quickly going to despair at attempting to distinguish the good from the bad.

Then, secondly, people in general and Americans in particular are a fickle lot, and they tire quickly. Many, in fact, are already going on to the next fad. And let’s be honest: how many of us can truly wrap our minds around the notion of a forty-year journey into the subterranean chambers of the soul? That was Moses’s experience of character formation in the Egyptian desert, you recall. Forty years! Are we not tempted to opt instead for a short-cut or two? Impatience is a primary spiritual problem in our day.

These things need not discourage us, however. The human need—and longing—for substantive formation of heart and soul and mind and body into Christlikeness is always before us. It is not going to go away. No doubt our work will now be more difficult with those who feel they have tried spiritual formation, and it failed them, when all they really tried was some little “five steps to blessedness.” Remember, we are not presenting people with any “program,” but with a life. We simply and powerfully introduce them into an ongoing, interactive relationship with Jesus, their ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend. Apprenticed to Jesus they will be able to go forward from faith to faith and from strength to strength.

Here now are a few things to keep in mind as we continue our efforts at maturing the modern spiritual formation movement.

1. We take the long view . . . always. We think in terms of lifetimes and centuries. The soul lives forever. It is precious beyond imagining. Investing deeply in even a few folk will count for all eternity. Sure, many in today's religious climate will go on to other "more interesting" topics. We bless these folk and pray for their well-being and growth in grace. But, there are plenty (vast numbers, in fact) who are committed to the long haul. They really want to be like Jesus with all their heart and soul and mind and strength. These are the ones we invest in. And, believe me, investing in these precious lives will take all the energy and all the time and all the prayer and all the weeping and laughing and singing and hoping we can possibly muster.

2. We refuse to think of spiritual formation in terms of various practices . . . ever. In another era those practices were things like "a quiet time" and Bible study of one sort or another. Today it is *Lectio Divina* and "journaling." May I say as clearly as possible: Christian spiritual formation has nothing essentially to do with such practices. Many practices can be genuinely helpful in their place, but they are not "it." What is "it" is LIFE—life with Jesus, interactive relationship with the great God of the universe, inner transformation into Christlikeness. Now, this reality can happen with *Lectio* and with "journaling," and it can happen without them. It can, and it does! The tendency today, unfortunately widespread, is to think of spiritual formation exclusively in terms of practices of one kind or another. Please, dear friend, do not fall into this trap. It will only produce legalism and bondage, and it utterly defeats spiritual formation. Many of the familiar practices are useful, to be sure, and some more than others. But none is essential. We all are to walk with the living Christ and then "in humility regard others as better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3).

3. We engage in spiritual formation for the sake of the Church universal . . . always. Sectarian reform movements that cement an eternal split only become ends in themselves. We work instead for the transformation of the whole Church. We love the Church, the people of God, in all her multi-faceted expressions. Traditional. Contemporary. Liturgical. Charismatic. Emergent. Catholic and Orthodox and Protestant. Big church and little church, house church and crystal cathedral. We attempt no end run around the Church. God is with his people in all their waywardness and silliness, and so are we.

4. We do not center on curriculum based solutions . . . ever. Curricula of all sorts are important but they come way down the line in formation work. Curriculum must always be subservient to ideas and ideas must always be subservient to relationship. In *The Divine Conspiracy* Dallas Willard (rightly in my estimation) has a chapter entitled, "A Curriculum for Christlikeness." However, this is chapter nine and comes only after both a careful delineation of the unique qualities of the interactive relationship between Jesus and his apprentices and a careful explication of the central ideas related to this life in the kingdom of God. Far too many people rush to the curriculum program of chapter nine without establishing into their lives the foundations set forth so carefully in all that comes before. We must not leave out the curriculum work, but it never comes first and it must never be central. Nor can it ever be a "cookie-cutter" curriculum. Unique, individualized people require unique, individualized curricula. Frankly, "cookie-cutter" curricula are very much like cookies—all sweetness with precious little nutrition.

5. We draw wisdom and insight from the ancient sources . . . always. We reject the heresy of the contemporary. The people of God throughout history instruct us in the way eternal. Bible sources and post-Bible sources. We learn from Moses. We learn from Luther. We learn from Joseph of Arimathea. We learn from Catherine of Genoa. These are our teachers, our models, our inspiration.

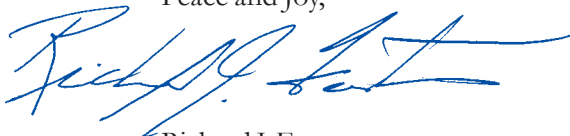
6. We do not aim at outward action . . . ever. It is the renovation of the heart we are after. This inward work is much harder than mere outward conformity . . . and easier. Harder because we cannot see it, test it,

control it. We cannot program the heart of another human being. We cannot program our own heart. But this is what makes it easier. God is the One who sees the heart. God is the One who tenderly programs the heart . . . always allowing time and space for our will to turn and respond to divine Love. We are working in conjunction with a greater Plan, a greater Planner. We are part of God's great Renovation project for human beings. And so we can work resting. We can labor under God's abiding grace.

7. We are keenly aware that true inward transformation will incline our hearts toward suffering humanity . . . always. Deep suffering is found everywhere; among the down and out *and* the up and in. As our hearts are increasingly renovated, they will become increasingly tender toward the bruised and the broken, the helpless and the hopeless. We then will find ways to move outside our insulated bubbles of security. Trevor Hudson, a South African pastor and writer, during the darkest period in his country's history of apartheid developed an eight-day experiential program designed to help young South Africans reflect upon the meaning of their faith and discipleship within the harsh and oppressive sociopolitical realities of their nation. Trevor calls this experience "The Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope." Oh, may we find ways to come alongside suffering human beings and together walk the pilgrimage of pain and hope!

Friends, right now spiritual formation is popular and much sought after. This time *will* pass, and when it does we will continue on. Frankly, whether we are in the limelight or in obscurity is of no consequence whatever. Such matters are wood, hay, and stubble. We seek everlasting results: gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12). So, dear friends, live faithfully to the end. Be constant in season and out. Proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Walk cheerfully over the earth.

Peace and Joy,



Richard J. Foster

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.

An Update on the Presidential Search

Several years ago the RENOVARÉ Board, led by the Clearness Committee, began to work on leadership transition. This past July we invited all who were interested to send a recommendation or to submit an application for the position of President.

We have talked with and met with many people—men and women, pastors, priests and lay people. They all have in common: a faithful devotion to Jesus Christ and a willingness to serve as he leads. What an encouragement and joy for us to spend time with these people.

We now have several strong candidates, but have not yet come to clearness concerning whom to ask to serve as President. What we are clear about is our need to ask God for guidance. We are learning to wait on God and to work cooperatively with him—one step at a time. This is part of our training in prayer and it is a wonderful adventure. Would you join us in praying for guidance?

If so, please download the RENOVARÉ Prayer Guide from the website or call Courtney to request a hard copy. Thank you.

Margaret Campbell



Clearness Committee Chair

Cut the sections apart and keep this portion as a reminder. All gifts are tax deductible.

My Commitment to RENOVARÉ:

G Financial Support

Single Gift.....\$ _____
 Monthly Gift.....\$ _____
 Quarterly Gift.....\$ _____

G Regular Prayer Support.

Make checks payable to RENOVARÉ and mail to
 RENOVARÉ, 8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102,
 Englewood, CO 80112-5624 USA,
 or call Marian at 303-792-0152 to authorize payment by credit card.

Send this section to RENOVARÉ in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

My Commitment to RENOVARÉ:

G Financial Support.

Single Gift.....\$ _____
 Monthly Gift.....\$ _____
 Quarterly Gift.....\$ _____

Check
 Credit Card: (Circle Type) AmEx MC Visa Disc

Card # and Security Code (3 or 4 digit code on back of card) _____ Expiration mm/yy _____

G Regular Prayer Support.

G Please send me a RENOVARÉ Covenant Card so I can read, consider, and sign it.

Please be sure to fill out all personal information and include your signature.

Name (Please print clearly)

Phone

Address

City, State, Zip

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November 2006



Dear Friend,

I don't know how to be really clever or persuasive in asking for support. All I know is to tell you how real the need is and how wonderful the opportunities are. We have never seen more open doors, both in this country and beyond. The fields are indeed white for harvest! We don't know how long these open doors will be available to us, and we believe we should walk through them now! But to do so requires resources, substantial resources. Can you help us?

As at the end of previous years a group of RENOVARÉ friends is putting together a Matching Fund Challenge, thus increasing the good you and I can do for RENOVARÉ with each donation. Because I am leaving soon for extended ministry in Korea, I do not know the exact amount of the Matching Fund at this writing, but I expect it to be around \$75,000. What a wonderful grace this is, allowing our gifts of \$25, \$50, \$100 or more to have maximum impact.

I want you to know that RENOVARÉ needs every dollar if we are to move into the new year in a strong financial position. We normally receive around \$100,000 in year-end gifts. This year we estimate a more substantial need, closer to \$150,000. In 2007 there will be unanticipated expenses related to the RENOVARÉ leadership transition, and we need to be ready. Our increased level of activity in responding to new opportunities requires more resources. Rewarding our present staff for work well done and the cost of "doing business" means the RENOVARÉ budget has grown just a bit for next year. All of these expenses are necessary for a successful 2007, and we need year-end 2006 giving to be stronger than ever.

Year-end giving of \$150,000 would be a huge step for us. RENOVARÉ has never raised such a sizable amount in a year-end request. Still, we believe, under God, it is possible and that now is the time. RENOVARÉ is moving onward and upward, even in the midst of transition. Will you help us? Thank you.

Peace and Joy,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard J. Foster". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Richard J. Foster

P.S. I have asked Margaret Campbell (Co-chair of our Board of Trustees and Chair of our Clearness Committee for Leadership Transition) to give you a progress report on our leadership transition efforts. You will find this exciting report on the back page. RJF