

# MEDIA SPOTLIGHT



A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS & SECULAR MEDIA

## SPECIAL REPORT

# RENOVARÉ

## TAKING LEAVE OF ONE'S SENSES

by Albert James Dager

There is a growing hunger among Christians who are dissatisfied with the dead religiosity of many churches today, especially in the West. Many long for a deep personal relationship with God and believe that this is best attained through personal efforts to achieve holiness of thought and action. In many churches cell groups are springing up which offer opportunities for close-knit fellowship and the practicing of spiritual disciplines such as prayer and studying Scripture. Some are incorporating certain meditative and contemplative exercises into their groups, even stressing the need to study the lives of early Christian mystics as a means to learn how to pray and meditate.

Actively promoting the revival of the meditative and contemplative traditions among mainline Christians today is Renovaré (pronounced ren-o-var-ay, Latin meaning "to make new spiritually"), founded by pseudo-psychologist Richard J. Foster.

Like John Wimber of Vineyard International Ministries, it is out of the religious traditions of the Quakers that Foster has come with the message that today's Christians are missing out on some wonderful spiritual experiences that can be found only by studying and practicing the meditative and contemplative lifestyle.

Co-directing Renovaré at its start was William L. Vaswig, a Lutheran minister whose experience in the religious disciplines was gained through the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington D.C.

Several well-known and influential leaders within Christianity are, or have been, involved with Renovaré, including such notables as Lloyd John Ogilvie, Jack Hayford, G. Raymond Carlson (General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God), David Hubbard (President of Fuller Theological Seminary), Jamie Buckingham, Anthony Campolo, J.I. Packer, John Wimber, David and Karen Mains, and C. Peter Wagner, to mention just a few. For this reason, I felt it necessary to take an in-depth look at what Renovaré is all about. In order to do so, it is necessary that we first set the historical perspective for such a group.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

With the expansion of the Holy Roman Empire beginning with Constantine in the fourth century, the Word of God began to take a back seat to spiritual exercises acquired from the pagan cultures that were assimilated into the advancing "Christendom." While through the centuries Western Civilization under Protestantism maintained a quasi-biblical ethic for sound principles of business, government, education and socialization, it was never truly liberated from the traditions of unregenerate people forced into Roman



Richard J. Foster

Catholicism at the point of the spear and, later, the muzzles of the gun and canon.

Because unregenerate men ruled through the hierarchical structure of the Roman Church, physical force was employed as a means of advancing the papal mandate for world dominion. Being religious men, however, it was incumbent upon them to assuage their bloody consciences through the practice of personal self-denial. It was as if all the atrocities committed in the name of Jesus would be made acceptable to God if the men responsible for those atrocities could bathe their consciences in moments of spiritual renewal.

The Scriptures not offering any such means for salving one's conscience apart

from total repentance, it became incumbent upon the religious tyrants to devise ways to placate God. Certain pagan cultures into which they advanced offered such ways through ascetic religious traditions. This gave a mind to the Roman prelates to establish monasteries where whole orders of monks could study and practice the meditative and contemplative traditions of the church's pagan conquests. Contact with Asian nations through trade exposed Christendom to Buddhist meditation. It is no coincidence that the garb and religious practices of Roman Catholic monks is almost identical to that of Buddhist monks.

The asceticism adopted from eastern religion developed into vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which were eventually forced upon anyone who desired to serve God through the religious orders of Roman Catholicism. Monasteries and convents (nunneries) provided opportunities for those who wished to deny themselves full-time in the belief that they were dedicating their lives entirely to Christ. The monasteries and convents also provided spiritual havens for other religious and lay persons to escape part-time from the "demonic" physical realm and its cares, and to submit to the spiritual disciplines of a particular order of monks or nuns.

For Roman Catholicism these spiritual traditions have remained intact throughout the centuries. Monasteries and nunneries continue to exist to provide instruction in the meditative and contemplative disciplines. Spiritual retreats are common among Roman Catholics who seek relief from the stress of everyday cares.

Among non-Catholic Christians these contemplative traditions have played a relatively minor role for centuries. Some, of late, are lamenting this fact. They wish to return to what they call "the great contemplative traditions of early Christianity." But these traditions are neither first-century Christian nor biblical in origin. They are Roman Catholic, adopted from pagan traditions. When proponents of this "return" speak of "early Christianity" they really mean the apostate traditions that led to Roman Catholicism.

### RICHARD J. FOSTER

Richard J. Foster is perhaps best known among mainstream Christians for his best-selling book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Harper & Row, Publishers). In *Celebration*, Foster laments superficiality as "the curse of our age." He exposes the crass materialism of modern civilization as a hindrance to one's relationship to God, and calls for deeper spirituality to mark the lifestyle of the believer in Jesus Christ. That deeper spirituality, he says, can be attained through the practice of spiritual "Disciplines" which Foster maintains marked the truly spiritual giants of Christianity. These disciplines

include prayer, meditation, fasting and study, which Foster calls the “Inward Disciplines.” He also offers “Outward Disciplines” of simplicity, solitude, submission and service, and “Corporate Disciplines” of confession, worship, guidance and celebration.

There is much in Foster’s book with which biblically-oriented Christians would agree. But there are problems with the methodologies ascribed to some of these disciplines. We will deal with these problems in depth as we progress, but it would help to cite some specific areas with which we find problems with Foster’s understanding of what constitute spiritual disciplines.

### **Meditation**

One important area where we find Foster’s understanding lacking is in that of meditation:

Then there are those who feel that the Christian idea of meditation is synonymous with the concept of meditation centered in Eastern religion. In reality they stand worlds apart. Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind; Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it. The two ideas are radically different.

All Eastern forms of meditation stress the need to become detached from the world. There is an emphasis upon losing personhood and individuality and merging with the Cosmic Mind. There is a longing to be released from the burdens and pains of this life and be caught up in a pool of cosmic consciousness. Detachment is the final goal of Eastern religion. It is an escaping from the miserable wheel of existence. There is no God to be attached to or to hear from. Zen and Yoga are popular forms of this approach. Transcendental Meditation has the same Buddhist roots but in its Western form is something of an aberration. In its popular form TM is meditation for the materialist. You do not need to believe in the spiritual realm in the least to practice it. It is merely a method of controlling the brain waves in order to improve your physiological and emotional well-being. More advanced forms of TM do involve the spiritual nature, and then it takes on exactly the same characteristics of other Eastern religions.

Christian meditation goes far beyond the notion of detachment. There is need for detachment—“sabbath of contemplation” as Peter of Celles, a Benedictine monk of the twelfth century, put it. But we must go on to *attachment*. The detachment from the confusion all around us in order to have a richer attach-

ment to God and to other human beings. Christian meditation leads us to the inner wholeness necessary to give ourselves to God freely, and to the spiritual perception necessary to attack social evils. In this sense it is the most practical of all the Disciplines.<sup>1</sup> (emphasis Foster’s)

Foster attempts to paint a distinction between his brand of “Christian” meditation and eastern religious meditation by saying that the difference is that “Christian” meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it. Well, so is eastern religious meditation, which we will see later. But even if true, what happens during the interim while one is waiting for his mind to be filled? Foster doesn’t say. While Foster cautions against viewing meditation as an eastern mystical exercise, his description of “Christian” meditation as he sees it is identical to that of eastern mysticism.

There is no “law” that prescribes a correct posture. The Bible contains everything from lying prostrate on the floor to standing with hands and head lifted toward the heavens. The lotus position of Eastern religion is simply another example—not a law of posture. The best approach would be to find a position that is the most comfortable and the least distracting. The delightful fourteenth-century mystic, Richard Rolle, favored sitting, “...because I knew that I...longer lasted...than going, or standing or kneeling. For [in] sitting I am most at rest, and my heart most upward.” I quite agree, and find it best to sit in a straight chair, with the back correctly positioned in the chair and both feet flat on the floor. To slouch indicates inattention and to cross the legs restricts the circulation. Place the hands on the knees, palms up in a gesture of receptivity. Sometimes it is good to close the eyes in order to remove distractions and center the attention on the living Christ. At other times it is helpful to ponder a picture of the Lord or look out at the lovely trees and plants for the same purpose. Regardless of how it is done, the aim is to center the attention of the body, the emotions, the mind and the spirit upon “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).<sup>2</sup>

Foster is correct that there is no “law” of posture. In fact, much New Age meditation takes exactly the same approach as Foster describes, some even meditate upon Jesus as Master. What, then, is the difference between Foster’s description of Christian meditation and that of the New Age or eastern mysticism? Although Foster offers what he says “the Bible contains” as postures for meditation, he fails to cite any biblical instances. Strangely, the Bible is

relatively silent about posture, but meditation is almost always related to meditation on (study of) God’s Word (Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:2; 119:15; 23; 48; 78; 97; 148; I Timothy 4: 15). In two instances, the Psalmist speaks of meditating on the works of God (Psalms 77:12; 143:5). But nowhere in Scripture are specific instructions on posture related. Nor is meditation on a picture alleged to be that of Jesus mentioned. Nor is meditation on trees, plants, or nature mentioned. When the Psalmist said he meditates on the works of God, he is merely saying that he thinks about God’s glory which is declared by the heavens (Psalms 19:1). He did not practice emptying of his mind whether for filling or not.

But am I wrong in assessing Foster’s methodology for meditation as unscriptural? His use of imagination as essential to meditation reveals how unscriptural it is:

The inner world of meditation is most easily entered through the door of the imagination. We fail today to appreciate its tremendous power. The imagination is stronger than the conceptual thought and stronger than the will. In the West, our tendency to deify the merits of rationalism—and it does have merit—has caused us to ignore the value of the imagination.

Some rare individuals may be able to contemplate in an imageless void, but most of us need to be more deeply rooted in the senses. Jesus taught this way, making constant appeal to the imagination and the senses. In *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Francis de Sales wrote:

“By means of the imagination we confine our mind within the mystery on which we meditate, that it not ramble to and fro, just as we shut up a bird in a cage or tie a hawk by his leash so that he may rest on the hand. Some may perhaps tell you that it is better to use the simple thought of faith and to conceive the subject in a manner entirely mental and spiritual in the representation of the mysteries, or else to imagine that the things take place in your own soul. This method is too subtle for beginners.”

We simply must become convinced of the importance of thinking and experiencing in images. It came so spontaneously to us as children, but for years we have been trained to disregard the imagination, even to fear it. In his autobiography C.G. Jung describes how difficult it was for him to humble himself and once again play the imagination games of a child, and the value of that experience. Just as children need to learn to think logically, adults need to re-discover the magical reality of the imagination.

Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* constantly encouraged his readers to visualize the Gospel stories. Every contemplation he gave was designed to open up the imagination. He even included a meditation entitled “application of the senses,” which is an attempt to help us utilize all five senses as we picture the Gospel events, His thin volume of meditation exercises with its stress on the imagination had tremendous impact for good upon the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

I’ll say Ignatius of Loyola’s meditation exercises had a tremendous impact upon the sixteenth century, but it wasn’t for good. Ignatius of Loyola’s Jesuit order under his personal direction was responsible for the martyrdom of countless numbers of God’s saints who would not bow the knee to the papal demand for unconditional obedience.

It is remarkable that, in order to substantiate his model of meditation, Foster does not cite a single Scripture to validate it; but he cites ungodly men from Ignatius of Loyola to Carl Jung. Foster’s insistence upon the imagination as essential to meditation takes one out of the realm of God’s reality—especially the reality and proper understanding of His Word—into the subjective realm of one’s own misperceptions of what constitutes proper service to God.

Proper service to God is not based on subjective whims of one’s imagination. It is based upon God’s inerrant Word. The only valid service to God (and this includes our exercise of spiritual disciplines) is that service which God ordains. To offer what He has not ordained is to offer strange fire. And God’s wrath abides upon those who offer strange fire as it did upon Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-3; Numbers 3:4), and upon Saul (I Samuel 13:8-14).

Do not think that God will honor service that He has not ordained. Though we build to Him an altar of good intentions that rises to the clouds He will not answer (I Samuel 14:35-37). He may wink at our transgressions for a time, but if we persist in them without repentance, the day of reckoning will come.

Foster’s meditation exercises are nowhere ordained by God’s Word. And that is the only place to which we may look for guidance. His use of terms to describe his exercises are likewise not found in Scripture, but are consistent with New Age terminology:

This time is for learning to “center down,” or what the contemplatives of the Middle Ages called “re-collection.” It is a time to become still, to enter into the recreating silence, to allow the fragmentation of our minds to become centered.<sup>4</sup>

The term “center down” is a New Age reference to remaining absolutely still in mind and body, focusing on the silence of the universe—what Foster calls “the recreating silence.” This “recreating silence” is itself New Age terminology that has nothing to do with the reality of God.

Adherents to Foster’s methodology would argue that terms are not owned by any particular movement. If they fit the description of a valid spiritual exercise there is every good reason for Christians to use them. To this I would answer in the affirmative except for two major considerations: 1) how did such terminology enter into the churches if those who brought it in did not learn it from studying New Age disciplines? 2) Introduction of such terms is at best confusing, but most likely reflects on the true belief system of those who insist upon using them.

It is one thing to insist on using a biblical term that has been perverted by some aberrant system of belief; it is another thing entirely to adopt terminology that *originated* in some aberrant system of belief. As we further examine Foster’s instructions on meditation after having “centered down,” we find more unbiblical teachings that are closely akin to New Age mysticism, even pantheism:

After you have gained some proficiency in centering down, add a five- to ten-minute meditation on some aspect of the creation. Choose something in the created order: tree, plant, bird, leaf, cloud, and each day ponder it carefully and prayerfully. God who made the heavens and the earth uses His creation to show us something of His glory and give us something of His life, “The simplest and oldest way...in which God manifests Himself is...through and in the earth itself. And He still speaks to us through the earth and the sea, the birds of the air and the little living creatures upon the earth, if we can but quiet ourselves to listen.” We should not bypass this means of God’s grace, for as Evelyn Underhill warns:

“To elude nature, to refuse her friendship, and attempt to leap the river of life in the hope of finding God on the other side, is the common error of a perverted mysticity.... So you are to begin with that first form of contemplation which the old mystics sometimes called the ‘discovery of God in His creatures.’”<sup>5</sup>

Foster further convolutes reality by suggesting that we can usher Jesus into our presence through the use of our imaginations:

As you enter the story, not as a passive observer but as an active participant, remember that since

Jesus lives in the Eternal Now and is not bound by time, this event in the past is a living present-tense experience for Him. Hence, you can *actually* encounter the living Christ in the event, be addressed by His voice and be touched by His healing power. It can be more than an exercise of the imagination; it can be a genuine confrontation. Jesus Christ will actually come to you.<sup>6</sup> (emphasis Foster’s)

One can no more actually bring Jesus into his presence through such figments of one’s imagination than a Catholic priest can change wine into the actual blood of Jesus. The Lord cannot be manipulated by our whims of fancy. And contrary to Foster’s mystical ruminations, Jesus exists at the right hand of the Father during this present time. Those who think of eternity as “timeless” do not understand the reality of God’s nature or of His domain. Time does exist in eternity, and I would challenge Foster to show us from Scripture where this is not true.

Because God knows the beginning from the end does not mean that He is *perpetually* existing in every millisecond of time. This fanciful concept is convenient for those who want to manipulate reality with their particular brand of witchcraft, but it has nothing to do with God. We cannot alter the past and we have little influence upon the future apart from what God ordains for us to have.

For those still unconvinced that Foster’s meditation exercises are unscriptural and rooted in New Age philosophy (contrary to his denial), I would ask where God’s Word instructs His people to engage in astral projection and to teach others to do so.

A fourth form of meditation has as its objective to bring you into a deep inner communion with the Father where you look at Him and He looks at you. In your imagination, picture yourself walking along a lovely forest path. Take your time, allowing the blaring noise of our modern megalopolis to be overtaken by the sound of rustling leaves and cool forest streams. After observing yourself for a bit, take the perspective of one walking, rather than the one observed. Try to feel the breeze upon your face as if it were gently blowing away all anxiety. Stop along the way to ponder the beauty of flowers and birds. When you are able to experience the scene with all your senses, the path breaks out onto a lovely knoll. Walk out into the lush large meadow encircled by stately pines. After exploring the meadow for a time, lie down on your back looking up at blue sky and white clouds. Enjoy the sights and smells. Thank the Lord for the beauty.



After awhile there is a deep yearning within to go into the upper regions beyond the clouds. In your imagination allow your spiritual body, shining with light, to rise out of your physical body. Look back so that you can see yourself lying in the grass and reassure your body that you will return momentarily. Imagine your spiritual self, alive and vibrant, rising up through the clouds and into the stratosphere. Observe your physical body, the knoll, and the forest shrink as you leave the earth. Go deeper and deeper into outer space until there is nothing except the warm presence of the eternal Creator. Rest in His presence. Listen quietly, anticipating the unanticipated. Note carefully any instruction given. With time and experience you will be able to distinguish readily between mere human thought that may bubble up to the conscious mind and the True Spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart. Do not be surprised if the instruction is terribly practical and not in the least what you thought of as "spiritual." Do not be disappointed if no words come; like good friends, you are silently enjoying the company of each other. When it is time for you to leave, audibly thank the Lord for His goodness and return to the meadow. Walk joyfully back along the path until you return home full of new life and energy.<sup>7</sup>

Paul tells us that we may come boldly before the throne of grace for our petitions. But He did not mean we should practice astral projection to do so.

In later editions of *Celebration of Discipline* this portion has been expunged. But if it is of God, why was it not left in, in spite of the controversy it caused? If Foster came to realize his sin in urging Christians to exercise this witchery, why did he not publicly repent and explain why it is no longer in his book? Would that not be the scriptural thing to do?

In anticipation of claims by Foster's adherents that this is not astral projection because it was all in the imagination, I will remind them that Foster says that through the imagination you can "*actually* encounter the living Christ in the event, be addressed by His voice and be touched by His healing power. Jesus will actually come to you." Since he believes the imagination can create reality to the point of bringing Jesus down to us, does it not stand to reason that astral projection into God's presence is meant to be just as much a reality?

Astral projection is purely eastern mystical and New Age. It has nothing to do with biblical prayer or meditation. Even

New Age practitioners warn of the dangers inherent to such a practice. They are well aware that leaving one's body, whether actually or in their imaginations, opens it to possession by other entities, whether "good" or evil. There is even speculation that some who have had near-death and other out-of-body experiences have not returned, but have had familiar spirits take over their bodies. Whether or not this is true, the fact remains that Foster's meditation exercises have nothing to do with scriptural meditation.

Those who follow these instructions leave themselves open to terrible deception by demonic spirits.

### **Disclaimers**

Both Foster and Vaswig, who remains on the Ministry Team, insist that the Cross of Christ and the Resurrection must be central to their spiritual exercises:

Jesus Christ is the center of what we're talking about. We make Christ and the Resurrection the great center pole.<sup>8</sup>

Keeping company with the least of these my brethren—the hungry and the hurting—the people without jobs—the ones without medical care—these outcasts of our society. In the midst of that caring (and it's important—this is an important statement!), in the midst of that caring we do not cease to do what only the Church can do: tell them about Jesus!

There are all kinds of wonderful organizations that minister to the poor, but only the Church of Jesus Christ—the Body of Christ—can tell them about Jesus! And we'll never, we must never, put that on the back burner.<sup>9</sup>

This is, of course, true. Many Christians wish to serve God by serving others, but fail to minister the Gospel in the process. Yet at the risk of seeming contentious even while in agreement with Foster and Vaswig on this point, it is not possible to keep Jesus as the central focus of any ministry if, in that ministry, we incorporate unbiblical practices and philosophies.

Foster's disclaimers aside, the fact remains that the disciplines he offers, in the manner he offers them, are unbiblical.

The question we should ask those who promote unscriptural teachings and practices in the name of Jesus is, of which Jesus are they speaking? Paul states that there are those who preach a Jesus other than the Jesus he preached (II Corinthians 11:4). The Jesus of the Bible is not the Jesus of those who teach unbiblical philosophies. One may say that Jesus is the center of his work, but by straying from biblical truth, or by incorporating pagan methodologies, he has effectively removed Jesus not only from the center, but from the scene entirely.

Why is this so? Because God tells us that He has exalted His Word above His own name (Psalms 138:2); the integrity of His name is linked inextricably to the integrity of His Word. To incorporate unbiblical practices as a means to spiritual growth is to say that God's Word is insufficient in its instructions for our relationship to the Father. This is contrary to Scripture:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

*That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (II Timothy 3:16-17)*

When Jesus established the New Covenant He established all the terms of that covenant as contained in the writings of the apostles. I am not aware that He has established yet another covenant with new terms, new revelations or new methodologies that lead to spiritual maturity.

Is it merely accidental that nowhere in His Word does God instruct His people in such pagan mystical practices as visualization and meditation of the eastern religious type? No. God has purposely maintained a distinction between His requirements for His people and the religious practices of the world. He knows how vulnerable we are to evil and how Satan can come to us as an angel of light. When we stray from the guidelines set forth in His Word, or attempt to meld into our service practices and beliefs not clearly espoused in His Word, we leave ourselves open to deception. Scripture warns us not to learn the way of the heathen (Jeremiah 10:2).

God doesn't think the way man thinks. Most of man's religious traditions are based upon what man thinks will please God (however man perceives Him), and are more suited to placating man's spiritual needs. Man's religious traditions—even "Christian" traditions—are predicated upon the belief that the material aspect of our nature is evil—or at least less than acceptable to God. Conversely, the spiritual aspect is considered good and acceptable to God regardless of the origin.

This erroneous assumption has led to the formation of religious sects—Christian and non-Christian—which stress outward forms of piety, practices of self-denial (asceticism), and good works. Adherents to these sects perceive that these practices help them feel more holy and closer to God. Within the Christian tradition it is believed that, since God is Spirit, and they which worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), it is somehow necessary for us to deny our physical nature and to set aside our minds in order to truly worship God. The idea is that one should empty his mind so that God can fill it. Not that proponents of unbiblical practices would say that worship with the mind is totally unacceptable. They say it's just not as effective as

when we set our minds aside and just meditate or contemplate without rational thought.

It is true that the unregenerate mind has enmity against God. So it is natural that unregenerate religious men would devise traditions and practices that would appear holy while in fact being contrary to scriptural instruction in worship. For example, eastern mystical practices of meditation are designed to alter the brain waves in a manner that closes out the world and ushers the meditator into the presence of the “divine.”

Yet even these exercises cannot fully divorce one from his mind, simply because they require the mind to be exercised in some special way. They often incorporate visualization of some deity, or of some spiritual activity or action (such as healing) that the meditator wants accomplished.

Unfortunately, all these exercises serve to do is open the way to demonic influences that assuage the conscience with feelings of euphoria and even “love” emanating from the presence that has invaded the consciousness. This euphoria is believed to validate that the person is on the right spiritual path. It may result in visions, out-of-body experiences, stigmata, levitation, even healings and other seeming miracles.

While acknowledging Foster’s and Vaswig’s good intentions, it is nevertheless necessary that we examine their teachings and practices from a biblical perspective. In so doing, we hope our readers will come to a deeper understanding of the dangers inherent in these spiritual disciplines.

### **RENOVARE’S PURPOSE**

It is Richard Foster’s contention that the churches today are “anemic” because Christianity in the West is fragmented. He likens the work of Renovaré to that of the Holy Spirit bringing the many streams of Christian thought and practice into a single, mighty rushing river, similar to the great Mississippi River being the product of other, smaller rivers merging:

All of us in this room are spiritually anemic. And it isn’t our fault, really. I mean it is the product of the development of Christianity in the West in our century, because we have been isolated from each other.

There’ll be one little stream over here, say, of an emphasis upon holiness—a good emphasis, a biblical emphasis, a Christian emphasis. But it’s been isolated from the whole counsel of God. And then over here would be another little stream perhaps of concern about social justice, concern for the poor, concern for shalom. It’s a good emphasis, it’s a right emphasis, it’s a biblical emphasis, it’s a Christian emphasis. But it’s isolated and cut off by itself, and not receiving strength that can come from the other great streams.

And that is the way that Christianity has developed in all of our lifetimes, and we are the products of that kind of experience. Little rivers off by themselves—they’re not bad. But they lack the strength and the wholeness that comes from the full counsel of God. And we’re all affected by this cultural phenomenon.

I’m affected by it. You’re affected by it. None of us are left untouched by this reality. But what I want to say to you tonight is that all of that is changing. That spiritual centrifuge that I talked about last night is breaking open all kinds of new opportunities of life and power.

Historically we have seen wonderful combinations like this in the past, in groups like the early Franciscan Friars Minor, the early Quaker evangelists, the early Methodist circuit riders, and many other groups. But this powerful combination has not happened in our century. Not in this country.

You see, we’re such rugged individualists that we have not allowed this kind of thing to happen in our lifetimes.

But, you see, things are changing. God is afoot. Wonderful things are beginning to open up among us. For the first time, we’re being able to listen to each other, and to learn from each other. And this is not some kind of syncretistic religion of the lowest common denominator. Oh, no! This is a movement of renewal that holds high the lordship of Jesus Christ and gives specific content to that as Dallas [Willard] tried to do that this afternoon. It’s committed to historic Christian faith. And it’s seeking to live out the reality of Christian discipleship in the midst of daily life.<sup>10</sup>

Renovaré’s message is basically the same as that upon which all the aberrant “Christian” cults and various “restoration” messages are built: the Body of Christ has failed to reach its full potential because it is fragmented. The reason for the misperception that the Body of Christ has failed is that those who espouse this belief equate the visible church organizations as “the Church,” rather than recognizing that “the Church” is an erroneous concept in contrast to the Body of Christ as all believers grafted into Israel. The Body of Christ is made up of the small number of true believers scattered among these visible organizations called “churches” which, corporately, comprise this bogus “Church.” Consequently, the misguided leaders of organizations such as Renovaré attempt to infuse life into dead spirits by adopting spiritual exercises designed to heighten the

outward perception of holiness and unity. Such spiritual exercises God leaves to the pagan world, and so should we. Scripture tells us all we need to know to grow spiritually. To go beyond God’s Word and create a hybrid religiosity is anti-Christ.

The movements of which Foster speaks may have appeared to place an emphasis on one aspect of Christian life, but those who are truly of God already incorporate the whole counsel of God into their lives. There is nothing lacking among those who are truly Jesus’ disciples, apart from our penchant to sin even against our own will at times.

It must be remembered that we are few in number compared with the vast majority of those who call themselves Christians. If we keep our eyes on the unbelievers in the churches (even among the leadership) rather than upon the small flock of true sheep, we are bound to come to the same conclusion that something called “the Church” has failed to fulfill its purpose.

While there are problems even among true believers, I will state unequivocally that there does exist unity, love, self-sacrifice, and all the other marks of the Faith. But there is disunity between true believers and the religionists who insist upon acceptance of their unbiblical mandates for spiritual service.

### **PRACTICES**

Renovaré’s methodology employs four basic disciplines: prayer, meditation, contemplation and devotional reading. While diverse in their applications, all four disciplines are considered by Renovaré to fall under the basic heading of prayer.

The first—prayer itself—is said to be thoughtful communication with God through petition, praise, worship and other common elements that make up prayer as we know it from Scripture. In this Renovaré is correct.

The second—meditation—is said to be remaining still and letting God speak. It may or may not involve visualization of Jesus in one’s presence or visualization of an action such as healing that one may wish accomplished through this form of “prayer.”

The third—contemplation—is basically just sitting still, period, as a means of being “in the presence of God.”

The fourth—devotional reading—primarily involves the reading of selected “spiritual masters,” not Scripture—at least not primarily Scripture.

All four disciplines may be allowed to encroach upon one another. For example, one may begin with prayer, then devotional reading, and move through meditation and visualization into contemplation.

These are sketchy illustrations and, on the basis of this simple explanation, one might perceive that there is nothing seriously wrong with any of this. There are times when one may wish to sit still and let

his mind rest from the cares of the world. He may even meditate on the day's events and how he handled them. In the process he may pray and even picture the Lord in his mind as he does so. But picturing the Lord in our minds as we pray is not the same kind of visualization that Renovaré has adopted in its form of spiritual exercise. One cannot usher Jesus into one's presence by imagining Him there. He is at the right hand of the Father in Heaven and has sent the Holy Spirit to comfort us until He returns to the earth again. It is through the Holy Spirit that we have fellowship with Jesus and the Father until we come face to face. Except in the rare instance of Jesus appearing to Paul on the road to Damascus, and John on the Island of Patmos, there is no evidence that He has personally appeared to anyone else. And those rare instances were at Jesus' initiation, not Paul's or John's.

The visualization promoted by Renovaré is an occult form of visualization that may open one up to demonic spirit guides. Nor are Renovaré's methods of meditation and contemplation of the scriptural order. As we examine Renovaré's teachings on these exercises we find reason for concern.

### Prayer

Speaking at Renovaré's Second National Conference on Personal Spiritual Renewal, Bill Vaswig explained what he believes prayer should be.

Prayer means asking and savoring. Prayer is not self-improvement, like physical exercise or aerobic dance. We don't pray to become fulfilled, or acceptable, or interesting, or beautiful, or stable, or integrated, or healthy, or happy, or satisfied or positive. Self is not even the center of prayer. Prayer is turning away from self toward God and others. We're not reflecting here on prayer as kind of a general human phenomenon, but on Christian prayer. We're not considering prayer here sociologically or psychologically, or philosophically or even historically. We're asking the question, "What is prayer about for those of us under the impact of the Gospel?"

Prayer is a gift. It's a trainable gift; it's a dialogical gift. It's a gift of our relationship to God. Prayer in the New Testament is primarily petition-asking. I will also speak of meditation and contemplation. It's turning to God with everything. It's as Thomas Kelly so well said, "It is the continually renewed immediacy of God."<sup>11</sup>

If, as Bill Vaswig has said, "New Testament prayer" is basically petition, or asking, then it is centered upon ourselves, not upon God, is it not? Yes. But that's the way God intends it to be.

How unspiritual, the mystics would say. Prayer should be centered on God, not on man. But God doesn't need prayer, we need prayer. For prayer demonstrates to God and to ourselves our utter reliance upon the Father to meet our needs. This honors Him. Not to ask is to ignore the great gift of prayer that He has given us (John 16:24). To deny this greatly hampers one's relationship to the Father which Jesus gave His life's blood to establish.

Cognitive prayer plays a minor role in Renovaré's scheme of things. Not that those who direct Renovaré do not believe in it, but their agenda is to teach people better ways to pray than with consciousness. In fact, Vaswig's even mentioning "New Testament prayer" as something different from what he and his colleagues have to offer betrays the fact that their form of prayer is unscriptural.

### Meditation As Prayer

Also speaking at Renovaré's Second National Conference on Personal Spiritual Renewal, Richard Foster revealed that his concept of the most effective kind of prayer is not speaking to God, but listening.

You know, the whole rationale behind psycho-cybernetics is that the mind will always take on an order conforming to the order of whatever it concentrates upon. And if we simply allow ourselves to sink down into the milieu of the Holy Spirit, then our attention is focused. And we begin to take on a different order, and our preaching picks up the life of that.

Douglas Steer said, "to pray is to change." And people will perceive the change, as well as know when no change has occurred.

We're told, you remember, that the Sanhedrin saw the bold preaching of Peter and John and perceived that they had been, that they were men who had been with Jesus. How did they know that? I mean, was it because of their Galilean accent? No, I think it was more because they had been in the presence of a light in such a way, and for such an extent, that it had taken over who they were and what they were about. There was a new spirit of life; there was a new authority. They lived in a different realm, and even their enemies recognized it.

Well, what does prayer like that look like? I mean, what do we do? Do we intercede for others? Perhaps. But primarily, we are coming to enjoy God's presence. To learn to waste time with God. To sense, as Jean Pierre de Cousaude said, "the soul, light as a feather, fluid as water, innocent as a child, responds to the initiatives of divine grace like a floating balloon." To

learn the words of that song, "He walks with me, and He talks with me," to become not a pious phrase, but a living reality. To sink down into the light of Christ until we can become comfortable in that posture: worshipping, adoring, fellowshiping. Most of all, we're listening.

Francois Fenelon said, "Be still, and listen to God." Let your heart be in such a state of preparation that His Spirit may impress upon you such virtues as will please Him. Let all within you listen to Him. This silence of all outward and earthly affection and of human thoughts within us is essential if we are to hear His voice.

And couple that with the words of Søren Kierkegaard when he said, "A person prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking; but he became more and more quiet, until in the end he realized that prayer was listening."

Listening—that's the idea. Coming to the place where we can be baptized into an experience of the loving, awful, holy silence of God.

The old masters often called this "recollection," or "re-collection," where we are gathered together before God. A cultivation of gentle receptiveness to divine breathings. A reorientation of mind, of body, of spirit to the living reference of life.

We don't do violence to our rational faculties, but we listen with more than the mind. We listen with the spirit; we listen with the heart; we listen with the whole being....

Like the Virgin Mary, we ponder these things in our heart.<sup>12</sup>

Foster's comments require some analysis to demonstrate that his rationale is faulty. When he mentions the Sanhedrin's recognition of the apostles being with Jesus, it was not because the apostles had engaged in contemplative "prayer." There is no scriptural evidence that this form of "prayer" was ever practiced by God's people. It was because they had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit that they had the boldness to preach the truth. Until that happening they lived in fear and confusion. Just being with Jesus during His ministry did not equip them for the task of witnessing.

Foster's statement that we should let our heart "be in such a state of preparation that His Spirit may impress upon you such virtues as will please Him," is not an accurate description of the Holy Spirit's work. I say this because the Word of God is left out of the equation. The Holy Spirit impresses upon us the virtues that we learn by studying God's Word. That is why the Scriptures were given to us—so that we will know God's will. The Holy Spirit gives us instruction and understanding of the Word of



God. A subjective "listening" in a void can open the door for impressions from any spiritual source; if we do not couple our prayer with understanding of God's Word we can be sure that evil spiritual sources will take the opportunity to impress upon our minds ideas and concepts foreign to God's Word, such as the incorporation of unbiblical practices in our worship.

Also, Mary pondering the words of Gabriel in her heart does not mean she was practicing contemplative prayer or meditation. It merely means that she was content to wait and see how the words of the angel would be worked out.

In closing out this session on prayer, Foster made the statement that, "God does nothing but in answer to prayer." This is a cliché that has gained acceptance among Christians of late, but it is not true. God is sovereign; He does as He pleases. And, although Scripture relates instances of His answering prayer—and we know He does—there are many instances whereby He has acted contrary to one's prayer and where prayer had no bearing at all.

Certainly the creation of the universe was not an answer to prayer. And God's judgment upon the world was determined long before the Scriptures revealed them to us, although some of us may pray for His Word to be fulfilled.

His choosing of Abraham was not in response to prayer, nor were numerous biblical examples beyond counting. To say that God does nothing but in answer to prayer is to place more importance upon man's influence in the affairs of God than man deserves. And it robs God of His sovereignty. To do violence to Scripture in order to validate some unscriptural theory of prayer leads one away from the path of true righteousness toward deception. Failure to test the meaning of those Scriptures cited by teachers leaves one open to that same deception into which the teacher has fallen.

It is often stated by the mystically-minded that the best kind of prayer is listening, not speaking. But what did Jesus tell His disciples when teaching them to pray? He said, "When you pray, say." He didn't say, "When you pray, listen."

But, I suppose, Jesus didn't understand what real prayer is all about. Throughout His ministry on earth He failed to mention anything about "listening." He failed to mention meditation or contemplation. Every biblical example of Jesus, the apostles, prophets and other men of God praying incorporated worship, praise and petition. Somehow they neglected what the leaders of Renovaré consider of greater importance. In the true experience of prayer, biblically, one prays and listens at the same time. But to listen, one need not practice an eastern mystical form of meditative exercise. When we are in prayer, biblically, we find that the Holy Spirit does impress upon our minds those things He would have us know at the moment.

At Renovaré's 1991 Los Angeles conference, Foster took his audience through a prayer session in which he had them practice a form of contemplation which he calls "palms down; palms up." This incorporates relaxation and a quasi-trance-like state.

Speaking slowly, softly, Foster had his audience place their hands on their knees, palms down as a way of releasing any cares or anxieties they may have brought with them. After a time of waiting like this, he had them turn their palms upward as a gesture of receiving from God "whatever He would like to teach us."

What Foster was practicing here was not prayer, but what Buddhists call Zen (a particular form of meditation found among mystics of various religious faiths).

In his book, *Christian Zen: A Way of Meditation*, Irish Jesuit William Johnston, as does Renovaré, ascribes this form of "prayer" to the mystics of "early Christianity":

Some years ago, Arnold Toynbee declared that when the historian of a thousand years from now comes to write the history of our time, he will be preoccupied not with the Vietnam war, not with racial strife, but with what happened when for the first time Christianity and Buddhism began to penetrate one another deeply. This remark is profoundly interesting and, I believe, profoundly true. Christianity and Buddhism are penetrating one another, talking to one another, learning from one another. Even the stubborn old Catholic Church, in a flush of postconciliar humility, feels that she has something to gain by sitting at the feet of the Zen *roshi* [Zen master] and imbibing the age-old wisdom of the East. Surely this is progress.<sup>13</sup>

I have already spoken briefly about this *samadhi* [wordless contemplation] which flourished in the great schools of spirituality that drove their roots into the rich cultural soil of medieval Europe. There were schools of Cistercians, Dominicans, Carmelites, Franciscans, and the rest. Then there were the Victorines—the schools of mysticism in the Rhineland and in Flanders and even in stolid old England. To say nothing of the great Orthodox schools that gave us the *Philokalia* and taught the prayer of the heart. All these schools had their way of leading to contemplative silence and peace, beyond words, beyond images, beyond ideas, and beyond desire.<sup>14</sup>

Johnston was ahead of Renovaré by about two decades. At the time he originally wrote *Christian Zen* in 1971, he lamented the fact that the West had not yet caught up to the East in its practice of Zen:

In the technique of introducing people to *samadhi*, the western tradition differed considerably from Zen. There was no lotus position and little about bodily posture. There does seem to have been considerable interest in breathing, particularly in the Eastern Church and in the tradition that flourished around Mount Athos, but much of this was lost or forgotten, and the farther West one moves the more cerebral the whole thing becomes. People were introduced to meditation by reading the Scriptures and reflection on their contents. Gradually this discursive meditation would develop into something more simplified (like the repetition of an aspiration or word), and eventually into the wordless and supraconceptual silence which is contemplation—or, if you prefer the word, Christian *samadhi*. This was a stage at which everyone seriously devoted to mental prayer should arrive. It was the ordinary development of meditation.<sup>15</sup>

Johnston would laud Richard Foster today, for although Foster did not actually place his audience in the lotus position, he came as close to it as possible without risking alarm in those who might recognize it as Zen Buddhist in origin. By having them place their hands on their knees while sitting, he accomplished the best possible initiation into Zen while maintaining an outward detachment. But, in fact, Johnston also offers the sitting position as acceptable to Zen. And Zen breathing techniques are also offered by Foster as part of his meditative exercises.

Initiation into "Christian" Zen is what Renovaré is all about. And since Foster has blurred the distinction between prayer and meditation, we will leave the subject of prayer in the biblical sense and address Renovaré's emphasis upon prayer as meditation and contemplation.

It is interesting to note that Johnston describes his initiation into Zen through meditation on the Bible. In response to a question about how to answer those who say meditation is a New Age technique, Bill Vaswig, in a voice that suggested coyness to the extreme, stated:

The New Testament's the best thing; it works real well...Give them a passage from the New Testament to meditate on. Say, "What do you think this really means? Sit and look at this and let it sink in..." People can't get you for saying "meditate on the Bible." They can't get you for it.<sup>16</sup>

Attempting to give his form of meditation validity, Vaswig states:

It's too bad that the eastern religions have brought in their own

form of meditation, in a way. These people have gotten all scared about that and they think that Christian meditation is not, but it's always been in the Church in its history from the beginning.<sup>17</sup>

Here Vaswig, who first learned meditation from Agnes Sanford, a pantheist and adherent to eastern mystical concepts [see the Media Spotlight special report, *Inner Healing: A Biblical Analysis*], implies that such meditation is essentially Christian in origin. By saying that it's too bad that the eastern religions have brought in their own form of meditation Vaswig gives two erroneous impressions that deny these historical facts: 1) eastern religion incorporated this form of meditation centuries before apostate Christianity did; 2) there is no essential difference between the eastern form of meditation and Renovaré's form.

Vaswig's coy remark about "they can't get you for saying 'meditate on the Bible'" plays into Satan's hands for leading Christians into deception. It sets the stage for the same initiation into eastern mysticism that William Johnston describes in his initiation as a Jesuit priest:

This is the way I was taught to meditate when I entered the novitiate (or joined the party) somewhere out in the bog. I was told to take the Bible, or some book about the Bible, and to chew and ruminate and digest and pray. For a start, this was pretty good, and I would recommend anyone to begin this way. My only complaint is that in religious orders at that time, and now also, nothing further was taught. The old medieval tradition of leading people through various stages to *samadhi* was more or less lost. It just was not customary to introduce people to supraconceptual forms of prayer; and as for "mysticism," this was not a good word. Needless to say, if people stumbled on *samadhi* or got there under their own steam, as many did, there was nothing to stop them, but skilled direction and efficient methodology was greatly lacking.<sup>18</sup>

While the process to *samadhi* may have been lacking in Johnston's days as a novitiate, he cited the same "early Christian" mystics that Renovaré cites as examples of having attained the ultimate in spiritual renewal.

Such notable Roman Catholic mystics as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross (whom Johnston calls, "my great guru"<sup>19</sup>), Thomas Merton, Gregory of Nyssa, etc. are put forth by both Johnston and Renovaré as examples for those seeking the "deeper spiritual experience."

There is a valid form of meditation, to be sure; meditation in its purest sense merely means to think upon something.

And here it is necessary to explain what proper meditation on Scripture involves. First of all, it does not involve turning over a verse or a passage in our minds for time on end. What it does mean is studying the Scriptures and thinking upon what is read *within the context* of its overall message. No true believer is against meditating on Scripture in this fashion. This is, in fact, in keeping with Paul's admonition to "study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). Proper meditation upon Scripture has as its purpose the infusing of the Word of God *properly understood* into the consciousness of the believer. This is not the same form of meditation put forth by Renovaré. In fact, Scripture is offered as an aside for meditation. For the most part Renovaré instructs its adherents to meditate on the writings of Roman Catholic mystics and a few truly Christian notables.

### Contemplation

Moving from Meditation to Contemplation we find further evidence of so-called "Christian Zen" at the heart of Renovaré's system. Richard Foster explains how he began to study the contemplative traditions. Relating his frustration at not having anything else to teach after he had pastored for his first three months, he states:

And so when people ask me, "How did you begin to go to the devotional masters," I say, "Desperation." I didn't know what else to do. And somehow—maybe instinctively—I began to sense that the great writers of the Christian life and experience had something that I needed to learn. so I began to study in the contemplative tradition.

I'd read *The Little Flowers* of St. Francis—it would absolutely blow my mind. I'd read Augustine's *Confessions*. I'd read Fenelon's *Christian Perfection*.<sup>20</sup>

It is amazing that Foster couldn't find more than three month's worth of sermons (14 at the most) from Scripture. Apparently his seminary training was greatly lacking in a biblical foundation.

As an example of his love for the "contemplative masters," Foster cites as if they were history, "St." Anthony's physical and spiritual struggle against demons, and Francis of Assisi's conversation with "brother wolf" whom he allegedly brought to peaceful terms with a village the wolf had been terrorizing.

These "Christian" fables have nothing to do with reality or God's truth. Francis of Assisi's understanding of man's relationship to nature and to animals was more akin to animism than to scriptural truth.

During the October, 1991, Renovaré conference, it was mainly left to Bill Vaswig to explain the contemplative aspect

of Renovaré's spiritual disciplines. We find that the basic difference between meditation and contemplation is that the former employs some thought processes, while the latter is largely non-cerebral. His description is an example of the blind leading the blind:

Then I find out there's another kind of prayer called contemplation. And that's the Christian life, or it's life lived in the presence of the Lord. And the reason why I didn't tell you how to do it is because I'm not sure. I really am not. I'm trying, I try different methods. The first thing I do in the morning when I get up is go up to my study and I sit down there, and I *look*—I sit and *look*. Like, I get a cup of coffee first, so that I don't fall asleep [how did the apostles ever manage without coffee? Or the "great contemplative masters," for that matter?] And, it's a big cup. Two cups. And it's stiff coffee. And it's got honey in it. And I sit there and *look*, and say, "Lord," or, "How are you today?" Or, I just, anything that comes to my mind I do, and then I get out my year-round Bible, and sort of get into the mood a little bit by reading that.

I read through the Bible every year, and, this is the first thing in the morning. After I'm done with that, I kind of pray around about different things. Whatever comes to my mind. I take about an hour. Forty-five minutes to an hour in the morning. But, I don't get into much contemplation there, even meditation. I kind of just, Scripture, and prayer, and kind of petition, and ask the Lord to bless the day, and that stuff.

Then when I get down to work, I go and sit. I get there at eight-thirty and my secretary doesn't get there 'til nine. And I sit down in a chair, and I just sit and *look*.

I may say the "Jesus Prayer" that I used with you guys: "Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Light of the world; fill my mind with Your peace and my heart with Your love." Until I quiet down.

I can tell when I go from beta to alpha. You know, the brain issues certain waves. And I'm right now, hopefully, in beta. My mind is quite active, I would guess, and it's issuing beta waves.

Well, when you calm down you can go down into alpha. If I can get into alpha, then I can, I can be, sort of, in the Presence. I can place myself in the Presence.

I don't have to pray, I don't have to do anything—I can just sit.



Sometimes I start out by visualizing Jesus in the chair across from me. Especially if things aren't too hot, I might say, "Jesus, I, you know, I don't know if I'm mad, or if I'm discouraged, or what it is. What shall I do?"

Sometimes I just lay down [*sic*] on the floor on my face. Sometimes I go down on my knees. Sometimes I start talking out loud to Jesus. But most of the time it ends up where I'm just, I have placed myself in the presence of God. And I don't try to hear things, I don't try to think about a Scripture, I don't try to do anything. I just sit.

And that, sometimes, I really feel a tremendous awareness of the Presence.<sup>21</sup>

What Vaswig is describing here is what New Agers or those familiar with eastern mysticism would call "being there." It is a state of mind that is essentially uncluttered by rational thought; through this existential condition one finds that, without trying, "everything works."

Vaswig continues:

I've done this for fifteen years and I know now if anyone is going to be healed it isn't because old Vaswig prayed for them. It's going to be because Jesus wants to heal them. And so I just kind of empty out. I just sit there.

And I'm not under very many pretensions about it. I'm a very earthy person who might belch right in the middle of it, or whatever.

You know, I mean, I'm just not real "holy-holy-holy" in the sense that I'm pretty earthy. But I, that's kind of the way it is.

Now, during the rest of the day I do that before the first one, then I listen to people and pray for them, and then I do it again before the second person I see at two o'clock. I usually start about one-thirty or so, and sit there in the Presence.

And sometimes when I'm praying with a person, like I'm a spiritual director for a number of people now, people who were once my patients, who were sometimes very ill, they become spiritual directees, then, and they come once a month for spiritual direction.

And with them I can practice all kinds of stuff, and we then kind of learn how to just sit.<sup>22</sup>

In explaining his contemplative method, Vaswig lauds psychologist Carl Jung whom he calls a "great psychiatrist." He attributes the healing of Jung's patients to Jung's insistence that they practice sitting in silence for a period of time every day. Then he concludes, "Just be in the Presence."

I'm at a loss to find the connection between Carl Jung's therapy and being in the presence of God. Jung was an occultist who attributed his psychological theories to spirit guides from the astral plane. His mentors were demons. Into whose "presence," it may legitimately be asked, does this exercise place one?

William Johnston gives additional insight into "Christian" contemplation as he relates a conversation with a Buddhist friend at an ecumenical conference in Oiso, Japan:

When the time came round for the next meeting, this time to be held in Kyoto, it seemed to me that we should leave the subjective realm of religious experience and get down to something objective. Perhaps the whole discussion could center around the problem of ultimate reality—we Christians could explain what we meant by "God," pointing out that we did not believe in an anthropomorphic being "out there" but in the supreme source of existence in whom we live, move, and are. The Buddhists, on the other hand, could explain what they mean by nothingness, emptiness, the void, and so on. In this way a lot of misunderstanding might vanish like smoke; we might discover that we had something in common after all, and what a break-through this would be in religious thinking! Now I realize that I was naïve. Or a victim of my Hellenistic education.

Anyhow, with this in mind I spoke to a Buddhist friend who was to be a participant. He listened kindly, and his answer, typically Buddhist and deeply interesting, was more or less as follows. "Do you really think that you can talk about nothingness, emptiness, or the void? Do you really think you can talk about God? Of course you can't. You are a part of the void; you are part of nothingness; you are part of God. All is one."

And here I found clearly and directly expressed something that runs all through Zen, whether it be in the thinking of the simplest Master or the most sophisticated scholar: that is to say, there is no duality, no "I and Thou" (alas for Martin Buber), that underlies all Mahayana Buddhism. Let me illustrate it further with a story about the great Dr. Suzuki.

One time the old philosopher gave a talk on Zen to western people in Tokyo. He spoke of the silence, the emptiness, the nothingness, and all the rest, together with the deep wisdom that comes from *satori*. When he had finished, one of his audience rose to his feet and, not

without a touch of irritation, exclaimed, "But Dr. Suzuki, what about society? What about other people? What about the other?"

Whereupon Suzuki paused for a moment, looked up with a smile, and remarked, "But there is no other!"

There is no other, and there is no self. This is the answer he had to give, and this basically was the answer of my Buddhist friend. What they meant by it (for it is by no means as simple or as terrible as it sounds) I would like to discuss later; for the present, let us return to the dialogue.

We met in Kyoto, where we spent a wonderful week, fifteen of us. The atmosphere was permeated with good will and deep religious faith. Not only did we talk together, we also sat together in a wordless dialogue of silent communication. The meeting was highlighted by a talk from an eminent *roshi* who described with great enthusiasm the experience of enlightenment that had made him wild with ecstatic joy. His head seemed to be shattered and for several days he did not know where he was or what he was doing. *Satori* could never be described or explained, he said, but there was undoubtedly enlightenment in the words of Jesus:

Before Abraham was, I am. This, he said, was perfect enlightenment—no object, no duality, just "I am."<sup>23</sup>

When we examine Vaswig's contemplative exercise we find at its heart the very essence of Zen as described by Johnston:

True to these principles, Zen inculcates a renunciation or asceticism that is truly extraordinary. One must be detached from everything, even from oneself. Nor does Zen detachment simply mean doing without alcohol and tobacco (this is the usual Christian understanding of the word); it goes much deeper to include detachment from the very process of thinking, from the images and ideas and conceptualization that are so dear to western man. And through this detachment one is introduced to a deep and beautiful realm of psychic life. One goes down, down to the depths of one's being—or, if you want a Zen physiological explanation, to the pit of one's stomach. As the process continues, one becomes detached even in those subliminal regions in which are found infantile fixations, unconscious drives, and all the rest. When detachment sets in here, Zen has something in common with psychoanalysis and can even be therapeutic

for those who are able and willing to take the medicine....All I want to say is that so far as detachment is concerned it resembles greatly the Christian contemplative path of John of the Cross. So striking indeed is the similarity that some scholars hold that John of the Cross received Buddhist influence through Neoplatonism. But this is by no means certain.<sup>24</sup>

Now we understand what Bill Vaswig means when he says that he begins his day with cognitive prayer, then moves on to meditation, then to contemplation where he just sits and looks. This is from where "healing power" comes. He is practicing "Christian Zen."

William Johnston reveals further, that Foster is incorrect when he attempts to separate his form of contemplation, or meditation, from Zen Buddhism:

Anyhow, detachment is only one side of the coin. One becomes detached in order that something else may shine forth. In the Buddhist this is his Buddha nature. For, contrary to what is often said, true Zen is based on a very great faith—faith in the presence of the Buddha nature in the deepest recesses of the personality; faith that, as the Four Noble Truths point out, there is a way out of the morass of suffering and that man can be transformed through enlightenment....

In Christian Zen this faith may take the form of a conviction that God is present in the depth of my being or, put in other words, that I am made in the image of God. Or it may express itself in the Pauline words, "I live, now not I; but Christ lives in me." The deepest and truest thing within me is not myself but God. As Christian Zen develops, self disappears (here is the Christian *muga* or nonself situation), and God lives and acts within me; my activity is no longer my own but the activity of God who is all in all. In the last analysis there is nothing except God.<sup>25</sup>

So Zen is not emptying one's mind with no intent to fill it, as Foster asserts. Detachment from one's physical surroundings is necessary in Zen in order that one may be filled with the knowledge of the Buddha or, as New Agers say, the "Christ" within. When one practices Zen he is entering into what Buddhists perceive as the only true reality. Nothingness is not nothingness as we understand nothingness. To the Buddhist, nothingness is everything—or everything (including "God") is nothingness. If all this seems a bit confusing, I'm sure most of us have heard some pastor preach that "this world we live in isn't real; the real world is the spiritual world where

God dwells," or something to that effect. They are unknowingly teaching Buddhism from their pulpits. God did not create unreality. He created reality. And He placed us within that reality to live and function as His emissaries to a world lost in the quagmire of just such philosophies as those espoused by Renovaré.

### Devotional Readings

A large part of Renovaré's spiritual disciplines involve meditation on the writings of selected spiritual masters associated with the "Christian" contemplative tradition. Most, of course, are Roman Catholic, particularly those mystics from the fourth through the fifteenth century. A list of authors for Renovaré's Devotional Readings follows:

Thomas à Kempis	Toyohiko Kagawa
Lancelot Andrews	Thomas Kelly
John Baillie	Søren Kierkegaard
Benedict of Nursia	Frank Laubach
Bernard of Clairvaux	William Law
Dietrich Bonhoeffer	Brother Lawrence
John Bunyan	C.S. Lewis
George A. Buttrick	Martin Luther
John Calvin	Thomas Merton
Catherine of Genoa	Henri Nouwen
Catherine of Siena	Blaise Pascal
John Chrysostom	Isaac Penington
Jean-Pierre de Caussade	Richard Rolle
Francis de Sales	St. Augustine
John Donne	Sadhu Sundar Singh
Jonathan Edwards	Charles Spurgeon
Francois Fenelon	Douglas V. Steere
George Fox	Jeremy Taylor
Francis of Assisi	William Temple
Gregory of Nyssa	Teresa of Avila
Jean Nicholas Grou	Theologia Germanica
Madame Guyon	Friedrich von Hügel
Ignatius of Loyola	Evelyn Underhill
John of the Cross	John Wesley
E. Stanley Jones	Dallas Willard
Julian of Norwich	John Woolman

Obviously Renovaré has thrown in a few sane people among the bunch. But I can't come to picture John Wesley, Martin Luther and Charles Spurgeon (among a few others on this list) embracing Ignatius of Loyola. Loyola founded the Jesuit Order which was responsible for the persecution of many true brethren in Christ who would not bow down to the papacy. And this during the times most of the Roman Catholic mystics were practicing their spiritual exercises. Perhaps if we visualize their reconciliation it will become historical fact. But I don't think Ignatius would want unity with those he martyred either.

As one reads through the selected writings of these people it becomes evident that their mystical terminology clouds what they mean. Much of what Renovaré puts forth in these writings are philosophical and prayerful, but the full impact of the theology held, for instance, by Ignatius of Loyola, or Thomas Merton, or Gregory of Nyssa, is lacking. Roman Catholic theology is exor-

cised and pagan mystical influences glossed over for the purposes of these particular devotions. But that doesn't negate the truth that many of these people to whom Foster, et al, look for inspiration were hardly spiritual giants in the biblical sense.

In the religious or spiritual sense, yes. They were certainly religious and spiritual. But when one considers the whole of their lives and beliefs one is hard-pressed to reconcile them with Scripture.

Is it not a little disconcerting that Renovaré places more emphasis upon these people's mysticism than upon God's Word? While Renovaré is careful to assert that meditation upon Scripture is good and helpful, this is no different than what many cults teach. To the mystic, Scripture is seen as the starting point, but true spiritual growth comes when one has graduated beyond rational contemplation of Scripture to meditation upon a word, a phrase, even the writings of mere mortals.

Space does not allow for us to disclose the various philosophies of the people on Renovaré's Devotional Readings list. But is it merely coincidental that Johnston records a letter he received from Thomas Merton, one of Renovaré's spiritual masters, which reveals his penchant toward Zen?

DEAR FATHER JOHNSTON,

Many thanks for your kind letter. I was interested to hear about the *sesshin* [spiritual retreat]. I myself think that the lotus posture is quite unimportant. But perhaps Father Lasalle and yourself want to look like the real thing in the eyes of the Japanese and for this reason it may have some relevance. The problem of *satori* [enlightenment] is more delicate.

Though I am far away and have no direct knowledge of what is going on in Japan, I will attempt to give an opinion that might have some value.

Possibly the Zen people have their own idea of what we mean when we say that we believe in God. Perhaps they think that it necessarily implies dualism and the establishment of an I-Thou relationship—something concerned with subject and object. And of course this would make *satori* impossible. I wonder if they know about Eckhart who says that it is possible to be so poor that one does not even have a God. And Eckhart is not here propounding Christian atheism and the death of God. He is simply speaking about an experience that is found clearly in all forms of apophatic mysticism. Also the Zen people may think about Christian mysticism in terms of the bride and the bridegroom. And this takes us pretty far from *satori* too.

But let's look at the thing from another standpoint. Perhaps someone like Father Lasalle who wants as a Christian to get *satori* ends up in a situation which makes *satori* psychologically impossible. Because to get the true *satori* one must have no plans whatever about a Christian getting *satori*—one must be completely detached from such plans. Perhaps the Zen people have a kind of intuition that Christians practising Zen are in such a psychological position.

I myself believe that a Christian can get *satori* just as easily as a Buddhist. It is simply a case of going beyond all forms, images, concepts, categories and the rest. But it may be that the type of Christianity we now have makes this difficult. Probably the best thing to do is to use Zen for purposes of inner purification and liberation from a system and conceptual thinking without bothering about whether or not we get *satori*. At the same time, if Father Lasalle feels that it is his vocation to get there, I am all for him. Please tell me more about all this. Have the German books Dumoulin and Lasalle been translated into English? I'm trying to review them, but my German is not so good.

With every best wish, Yours in Christ

THOMAS MERTON<sup>26</sup>

Merton's denial of the "I-Thou" relationship of the believer to God is telling. Contrary to Merton's belief, our relationship to God is "I-Thou." God is distinct from His creation. But, as Merton says, such a relationship "would make *satori* [enlightenment] impossible." This is because Merton's definition of enlightenment is eastern mystical, not biblical.

Additionally, to ascribe the term "dualism" to separate natures and personalities of God is a grave error. Dualism posits two opposite but equal entities in conflict with one another. But man, by nature, is in conflict with God; he is not equal with God.

Such a use of the term "dualism" also begs the question. It implies a Hellenistic pagan concept as opposed to an eastern concept of unity or universalism, where all things are part of a single whole (e.g., all things are part of God). It posits a question predicated upon the presupposition that the western model is erroneous while the eastern model is true. But this implication is stated without providing evidence why this must be accepted as true, other than the fact that the mystical attributes of the eastern model are more desirable to its proponents. The real problem lies in man's attempts to fit biblical truth into one or another form of human philosophy (either western dualism or eastern universalism), when neither is

applicable. Biblical truth stands alone as the true revelator of God's nature and His relation to creation and man. The "I-Thou" relationship of God to man is not "dualistic." It is realistic; it is truth; it is biblical.

Merton's advocacy of Zen betrays an eastern mystical bent that confuses elements of biblical truth with Buddhism.

When Buddhists talk about *satori*, they are not talking about anything remotely associated with enlightenment by the Holy Spirit. *Satori* is a form of enlightenment associated with self-realization, or realization of oneness with the divine. It is the culmination of one's spiritual quest for himself as God or part of God. Thus Merton says truthfully that the I-Thou concept of man's relationship to God makes such enlightenment impossible. But to reject the I-Thou concept is to embrace the concept of enlightenment, or attainment of godhood.

If it seems incongruous that people who affirm the deity of Christ, the Cross, and the Resurrection can also believe in themselves as God, or part of God, it's because most Christians are too naïve to think that such concepts can be mingled in anyone's mind. Agnes Sanford is an example of one such person, as is William Johnston. It is not far removed from the word-faith teaching of Kenneth Copeland that we should think of ourselves as equal to God. (See our special report, *Word-Faith*.)

Johnston sums up his faith in Jesus in the same breath that he says truth can be found in all religions:

To us Catholic Christians the Vatican Council brought the refreshing news that we are still seekers, members of a pilgrim Church, and so we can join hands with other searchers, whether they be Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or anything else, in our common quest for truth. Needless to say, we have Christ, who I believe spoke of God as no man ever spoke; but I do not think we can claim to understand the revelation of Christ in all its fullness. Perhaps we are still at the beginning. Moreover I also believe that in sundry times and in diverse ways God spoke to our fathers through the prophets, and these include prophets whose voices echo beautifully in the *Gita*, the *Lotus Surra*, and the *Tao Teh Ching*.<sup>27</sup>

Christians must not accept one's word for being a brother in Christ, no matter how many endorsements he receives from leaders in the Christian community. Leaders within the Christian community are among the most naïve, uninformed and undiscerning when it comes to understanding and separating truth from error. Because someone claims to believe the cardinal doctrines of the Faith does not mean he applies a biblical interpretation to those doctrines. He most probably believes he does apply a bib-

lical interpretation, but only our personal scrutiny of what he believes will bear out whether or not he truly does. And even if his interpretation is biblical, there are pitfalls to watch out for: 1) he may be a deceiver intent on bringing error into his realm of influence, using truth to gain the confidence of his hearers; 2) he may be merely deceived himself, but the results would be the same for those who receive his teachings.

## Psychology

Richard Foster, though not a licensed psychologist, integrates psychotherapy into Renovaré's methodologies. Throughout its seminars references are made to secular psychologists as having learned how to incorporate God's methods of healing into their practices. Often mentioned is Carl Jung, a favorite among "Christian" psychologists because of his spiritual emphasis.

Siang Yan Tan, a psychologist who spoke at Renovaré's conference in Los Angeles, stated that everyone needs therapeutic experiences. Of course, being able to command a rate of \$100 per hour or more gives good reason for him to believe that. Now, if we assume that what Tan means by "therapeutic experiences" is broad enough to include all forms of emotional support such as that given by personal friends, family and biblical ministers, we agree with him. But his emphasis upon secular psychologists as offering valid therapy for Christians clouds his meaning.

Tan likens secular psychologist Carl Rogers' "unconditional positive regard" to agapé love, and offers thanks to God for the Roman Catholic practice of confession to a priest. I use Tan's message as an example, but it is not the only instance of secular psychology's influences upon Renovaré. They are too numerous to mention.

## PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS

As we examine the meditative and contemplative exercises of Renovaré, it stands to reason that there must be a philosophical basis to the very concepts of meditation and contemplation. Since neither of these disciplines as taught and practiced by Renovaré is found in Scripture, and since they are easily found in Buddhism and other eastern mystical religions, what might we learn about their underlying philosophy?

The *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* says this about contemplation:

From the Latin *con* and *templum* (a space set aside for the observation and interpretation of signs and portents). Although the interpretation of the term has changed, its religious origin has not been entirely lost. The interpretation of *theoria*, or theory, in Greek philosophy, merely enlarged it with a truth-related aspect....

Hugh of St. Victor regarded *contemplatio* as the third and final



stage of knowledge in the ascent of the soul, which must first pass through *cogitatio* and then through *meditatio* in preparation....

In the broader scheme of things the tradition of mysticism both of the East and of the West, has for millennia stressed contemplation or meditation as the means to enlightenment, *moksha*, or *satori*.<sup>28</sup>

The three phases expounded by Hugh of St. Victor, *cogitatio*, *meditatio*, and *contemplatio*, would be equivalent to Renovaré's stages of cognitive prayer, meditation and contemplation. The objective is to move from conscious communication with God to being "in the Presence," as Bill Vaswig puts it. The Buddhist equivalent of being in the Presence would be to reach total enlightenment and, eventually, Nirvana or assimilation into the divine where one loses his identity entirely and is melded into the all-knowing Mind or Force of the Universe.

But are Foster's and Vaswig's beliefs really influenced by Buddhism; are they really advocating "Christian Zen"? Or is it merely coincidental that what they and William Johnston teach are so similar?

In both of his addresses to the Renovaré Conference in October, 1991, Vaswig mentioned his education at the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C., and that his professor there is Gerald May. An understanding of the Shalem Institute and what May teaches should open one's eyes to the nature of Vaswig's spiritual training.

## SHALEM INSTITUTE

**R**enovaré's spiritual formation groups are patterned after those found at spiritual renewal centers which blend the philosophies of the world with Christianity to produce a hybrid form of spiritual enlightenment. Through Bill Vaswig, one such center in particular, The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, has affected Renovaré's curricula.

Vaswig is very open about his association with the Shalem Institute and states that this is where he learned his meditative and contemplative practices through which he put his audience.

Shalem (Sha-lame) is a Hebrew word that, in the Institute's words, "speaks of wholeness: to be complete, full, sound."<sup>29</sup>

Among the courses offered by Shalem Institute in its Winter, 1991 catalog can be found a course entitled "Pure Contemplative Presence," taught by Gerald May (Vaswig's mentor). The course description states:

Insights and support for our presence together will be drawn from Christian contemplative and Tibetan Buddhist *rDzogs-chen* (*Mahamudra*) traditions.<sup>30</sup>

This particular course was taught at Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville, Maryland, a Roman Catholic spiritual center at which the Shalem Institute holds many of its courses.

It's noteworthy that Foster and Vaswig outwardly express disapproval of the New Age Movement when asked about it, and disavow any New Age leanings. Yet Vaswig's association with the Shalem Institute and his acknowledgment of May as his mentor belies any such claim. When they speak of "practicing the presence of God," which is a major facet of Renovaré's spiritual exercises, we find that what they mean is Zen meditation.

Another facet of Shalem's work is what is known as "body prayer." Body prayer is taught by Isabella Bates through a course entitled "Incarnate Presence for God: Body Prayer." The intent of this course is to "provide a way to release the limits and tensions of our mental constructs and physical holding patterns so that the loving and aligning presence of God can unfold within us. Allowing the breath to release and expand, we become deeply nurtured and empowered. Each class will have a rhythm of chant, body prayer practice, meditation, reflection and journaling."<sup>31</sup>

Isabella Bates' credentials are stated thusly:

Quaker, professional voice teacher, Reiki practitioner, graduate of Shalem Spiritual Guidance Program.<sup>32</sup>

The practice of Reiki is described in the New Age publication, *Common Ground*:

Reiki (ray-key) is the Japanese word for "Universal Life Energy." Reiki is an ancient natural healing art re-discovered by Dr. Mikao Usui when studying sacred Tibetan sutras in the late 1800's.

Many people have experienced the Reiki energies as an assist to their personal inner clearing and transformational process. During the First Degree workshop, a series of four attunements are given by a Traditional Reiki Master, which will align and tune in the energy centers of the student. After this process is completed, the Universal life Force becomes amplified when drawn through the hands.<sup>33</sup>

*The New Age Catalogue: Access to Information and Sources* says about Reiki:

Reiki is an effective technique for prevention of diseases and energy imbalances on all levels of your being. Reiki is also a unique, highly effective tool for personal transformation, growth, and change. Reiki is a natural energy-balancing and renewing method that can be

used in conjunction with any other technique of health-care treatment as well as with any other personal growth therapy.<sup>34</sup>

The term "all levels of your being" is a New Age description for wholeness of body, mind and spirit. Like most New Age and eastern mystical practices, it claims to be non-religious. That claim aside, Reiki is designed to bring about wholeness through the spiritual realm. It is an unbiblical exercise that opens one up to demonic entities, as do all spiritual exercises not specifically taught in Scripture. And the only ones taught in Scripture are prayer (cognitive prayer involving praise, worship and petition), fasting, and studying God's Word. The only commands we have are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbors as we already love ourselves (Mark 12:29-31).

All this other stuff is superfluous at best, and certainly demonic in origin.

More about the Shalem Institute: its Director for Spiritual Guidance is **Rose Mary Dougherty**, a Roman Catholic nun. Some of its staff are the following:

**Carole Crumley**, Codirector, former Canon pastor, Washington National Cathedral;

**Kathy Spaar**, leads workshops on Celtic and women's spirituality;

**Elise Wiarda**, massage therapist, Rosen Method Bodywork and Reiki practitioner;

**Gerald May**, Shalem's Senior Fellow in Contemplative Theology and Psychology;

**Barbara Osborne**, clinical social worker, Reiki practitioner, and spiritual guide.

These are just some of the New Age influences at Shalem. Carole Crumley has conducted "Presence Through Sacred Image: Icon Prayer Group," which centered on prayer and meditation around sacred icons of the Eastern Orthodox Church. These icons are looked upon not as art only, but as windows into the spiritual realm.

The Shalem Institute is merely one of many such spiritual renewal centers to be found throughout the world. In the United States there is a growing interest in such centers that offer people under stress opportunities to engage in silent meditation and contemplation. These centers offer a response to the need for spiritual strength in an age of materialism, albeit the spiritual strength they offer is not of God.

Washington D.C., where the Shalem Institute is located, is a natural choice for such centers to flourish. In a *Washington Post* article for September, 1989, Susan Porter Robinson, an editor with the American Council on Education, focused on the major spiritual renewal centers in and around our nation's capitol. Of the eleven cited by Robinson, seven are Roman Catholic, one Episcopal, one Church of the Savior/ecumenical, one Christian/ecumenical, and one (Shalem) merely "ecumenical."

Robinson's article points out the emphasis on human psychology that characterizes such centers:

Once thought to be the province of monks, spiritual direction centers have gained wider acceptance in the lay world during the last 15 to 20 years. While most spiritual directors are not psychotherapists, they usually have some training in human psychology as well as in pastoral insight.<sup>35</sup>

A strong New Age spirituality and acceptance of all religious traditions overshadow the very concept of the spiritual retreat center. Two examples of the non-Catholic but ecumenical centers that incorporate psychology, Buddhism and New Age philosophy are Dayspring Retreat Center in Germantown, Maryland, and the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C. Robinson describes the activities at Dayspring and Shalem:

Dayspring Retreat Center in Germantown, Md., is another residential setting for area retreatants. Sponsored by the Church of the Savior, the center is ecumenical in its orientation and offers weekends that focus on a variety of themes, including marriage, centering prayer, peace and justice, stewardship of the Earth, Native American spirituality, Buddhist meditation and Jungian psychology, as it applies to Scripture and spirituality.<sup>36</sup>

Shalem (pronounced "shalame") is a Hebrew word connoting wholeness and completeness, a name appropriate to the institute's varied approach to the spiritual life.

This fall, for example, programs there range from prayer and Scripture groups to a 30-week course on body prayer, a psychology and spirituality workshop, and an Advent quiet day of guided and silent meditation....

Shalem director Tilden Edwards reflects on vacations (from the Latin word for freedom) in the institute's quarterly newsletter: "Each of us has our own vision for this time. Often it will include a physical location that invites perspective, spaciousness, and healing, like a body of water or a hill top or quiet valley."<sup>37</sup>

## STRATEGY

**B**orrowing from the format of these spiritual retreat centers, Renovaré has developed a strategy to bring the meditative and contemplative life into as many churches as possible through the development of spiritual formation groups. These groups operate in the same fashion as does a spiritual retreat center, except that

their schedule is weekly and held in churches or in private homes. Lacking spiritual directors, Renovaré has designed their spiritual formation groups to operate along the lines of group therapy sessions with as little oversight from a director as possible. Richard Foster explains his strategy which is tied to the concept of micro churches operating within the macro church structure:

I want to submit to you that these two experiences that we see going on are part of the same phenomenon: that the macro churches are made up of thousands upon thousands of micro churches. Pastor [David (nee Paul) Yonggi] Cho's church I think has 50,000 small groups functioning every week. So all of this is happening.

Now, a second phenomenon tied to that has been the interest in spiritual direction, and the training of spiritual directors (and I've taught courses on training spiritual directors), but one major flaw in that kind of strategy is simply that we'll never get the job done if we are trying to train full-blown spiritual directors.... That takes years to get them really to that place in their lives. And we really wrestled with that for a long time until we began to see that there is the possibility of group spiritual direction. There's still the need for well-trained spiritual directors, but these things can proliferate very rapidly based upon the insights that we gained on group spiritual direction.

So just to see that larger picture, I want now to share with you the strategy. Very simple—three major elements to it: covenant, common discipline and self-examination questions. And there is a rationale behind every one of these.

First the covenant. The covenant is a simple, one-sentence statement: "In utter dependence upon Jesus Christ as my ever-living Savior, teacher, lord and friend, I will seek spiritual renewal—constant renewal—through spiritual exercises, spiritual gifts and acts of service."<sup>38</sup>

Foster goes on to describe common discipline as the means by which one is held accountable to the group for one's spiritual exercises, working within the group format. The self-examination questions focus on what one has done or is doing to fulfill his direction toward spiritual growth.

It seldom occurs to Christians that such groups are actually usurping the roles of elders within the assemblies. It is not up to people specially trained in the spiritual disciplines of the nature Renovaré and spiritual renewal centers offer to disciple oth-

ers. Scripture has established the means by which the believer is brought to maturity in the faith:

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ:*

*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*

*From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,*

*Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:*

*Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

*But ye have not so learned Christ;*

*If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:*

*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;*

*And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;*

*And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:11-24)*

We have the testimony of the apostles, the Scriptures; the admonition of the prophets who came both before and after Messiah, plus the prophetic voices which bring correction within the local assemblies; the work of the evangelists who bring the message of salvation; and the work of the shepherds and teachers (the elders) to oversee our spiritual growth. The role of spiritual director within Renovaré usurps the role of

the elder and places it in the hands of men and women who do not meet the scriptural criteria for eldership. They are not instructed in the Word of God, they are instructed in spiritual exercises of an eastern mystical nature, coupled with meditation on "early Christian" mystics, most of whom were Roman Catholic.

If this remains in dispute within some minds, consider whether one (such as Foster) is qualified to be a spiritual leader who lauds as a great Christian brother the pope (who has given credence to pagan faiths as valid means to learn truth, who has dedicated his life and work to the Roman Catholic "Virgin" and who has called for strong resistance against evangelical "sects" in Roman Catholic countries).

### ECUMENISM

One of the essential elements of Renovaré's strategy involves ecumenism without regard to doctrine. While Renovaré has thus far not incorporated into its ranks anyone who is openly an adherent to a pagan religion, it does have elements that consider dialogue with non-Christian religions of mutual benefit.

One such is a Roman Catholic nun, Sister Thomas Bernard of the order of St. Joseph of Carondelet. Bernard is actively pursuing dialogue with Buddhism through her office of Director of the Spirituality Center for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

In her message to the Conference which we mentioned earlier, she extolled the doctrine of John of the Cross whom she called, "one of the great Spanish mystics of the 16th century." According to Bernard, John of the Cross "built his whole spirituality on the concept of the Nada and the Todo—the Nothing and the All. And he kept saying that: that it is in the Nothing that we will find the All."<sup>39</sup>

This, too, demonstrates the mysticism of one who lacks proper understanding of God's nature. It is essentially Buddhist.

God is not "Nothing." Nor do we find Him by doing "nothing." He reveals Himself to us through His Word as a transcendent God with will and intellect, wholly distinct from His creation. He is unknowable except through His own volition in making Himself known to man. And it is through Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures—not in visualization or contemplation—that we know Him.

It is little wonder that Foster, a Quaker, would institute such mystical practices in Renovaré's curricula. The history and philosophy of Quakerism are marked by the mystical. Early Quakerism especially was given over to the inducement of trances, violent shaking (hence, the name "Quakers"), glossolalia, visions and mindless ecstasy.

Quakerism is close to Buddhism in its philosophical understanding of God, holding the belief that something of God is in everyone. Thus its historical approach to

non-violence as a means to achieve its ends in society. Thus, too, its well-known penchant toward good works. This belief is not lost to Sister Bernard, who states that, as we draw closer to God through contemplation, we will begin to see God's face in the face of others.

My comments must not be construed to mean that I am for violence and against good works. I merely state these as examples of the underlying belief of the "divine center" within all men by the Quakers and other ecumenists. The similarity of Quakerism to Buddhism did not escape William Johnston either. Speaking of the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, Johnston attributes much success to the Quakers:

The dialogue with Zen owes much to the initiative and enterprise of the Quakers, to whom we are all eternally grateful. No doubt the great similarity between Quaker meditation and Zen (though there are great differences too) was instrumental in prompting their ecumenical interest. The first meeting was held in Oiso, near Tokyo, and the participants talked frankly about their personal religious experience, searching for a link that might bind them together. Conducted in a spirit of great charity, it revealed that the interior life of Buddhists and Christians has much in common; they can be united at the deepest part of their being, at the level of psychic life which Eliot calls the still point of the turning world.<sup>40</sup>

During the aforementioned conference, Richard Foster extolled the virtues of Roman Catholicism and Pope John Paul II. His statements were concurred with by Lloyd John Ogilvie and Jack Hayford, both of whom praised Richard Foster and his outreach through Renovaré. Ogilvie stated with pride that his is the first church in America that has a pastor of spiritual formation, Dorothy Cross.<sup>41</sup> Calling Bill Vaswig a "God-gifted man," Ogilvie stated that "if I ever needed an anointing of the power of the Spirit, those are the hands I'd want put on my head."

Jack Hayford also extolled the virtues of Renovaré and affirmed his commitment to ecumenism. Calling himself a "word-centered person," Hayford credited Richard Foster with helping him overcome his aversion toward Roman Catholicism as something "other" in terms of beliefs. His eyes being opened now, Hayford said of Roman Catholicism, "the other camp didn't seem so 'other' to me."<sup>42</sup>

Renovaré's ecumenical compromises with Roman Catholicism and Buddhist philosophy disqualify it as a source for instruction in righteousness and holiness. Renovaré itself is tossed about by every wind of doctrine.

But, it would be argued, Renovaré stresses the Cross of Christ and the Resurrection. Well, so does Roman Catholicism, so does Mormonism, so does virtually every cult that calls itself "Christian."

We should not be so naïve to think that Satan does not come as an angel of light. He has a message for everyone. Some messages contain 99% truth; some contain 1% truth; many fall somewhere in between. But, as the Scriptures say, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. And when 1% of error is of a nature serious enough to dispel the 99% of truth, that error brings death.

When truth is blended with error only the truth suffers; the error never suffers. Because the truth is no longer the truth; it has been corrupted by the error in its midst much as a barrel of apples is spoiled by one rotten apple allowed to remain within. It is a fact of life within this sinful universe that everything is in a state of decay. Mankind is not moving toward a greater spirituality in the biblical sense; he is moving toward a greater spirituality in the human or satanic sense. God's truth is more and more being blended with error from the philosophies of the world—eastern mysticism, Roman Catholicism, secular psychology. And each step leads further away from the point of pure doctrine in Christ Jesus to being melded into the one-world religious system, Mystery Babylon. Herein Roman Catholicism will lead the way. And Renovaré's philosophy will play a role in the move back to Rome.

To be sure, the outward manifestations of these errors are often perceived as good because they focus on good works toward our fellow man. But this is a doctrine inherent in virtually all religions. And there are loving, caring, giving people within every philosophical discipline. Some New Agers are more loving and caring than many Christians. Their manner is not dissimilar to that of "Christian" mystics who stress outward works of piety and who exude "love."

We cannot afford ourselves the luxury of following after kind, loving people who offer extra-biblical and unbiblical ways of inducing feelings of self worth and closeness to God. And we must not be fooled by those who say they stress the Cross and the Resurrection. They may have a different understanding of the Cross and of the Resurrection. The only safeguard we have against these errors is God's Word.

### RENOVARÉ'S PERSONNEL

The following persons comprised Renovaré's Steering Committee, Board of Reference, and Speaking Platform at our original writing. Some have passed on or have been replaced.

While it seems highly unlikely that those of such stature would be unable to perceive problems with Renovaré's teachings and practices, we must allow that there are some rather naïve and ignorant people among the leadership in the churches.



## Original Steering Committee

- **Sister Thomas Bernard**, Director, The Spirituality Center, Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles
- **Isaac Canales**, Assistant Director, Hispanic Ministries, FTS\*
- **T. Eugene Coffin**, Counselor, Memorial Gardens, Crystal Cathedral
- **Richard Felix**, President, Azusa Pacific University
- **David Allan Hubbard**, President, Fuller Theological Seminary
- **Anne Huffman**, Marriage & Family Intern, Harbor Community Psychological Services
- **Jerry Johnson**, Executive Pastor, Lake Avenue Congregational Church
- **H.B. London**, Senior Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena, California.
- **Robert Munger**, Professor Emeritus, Evangelism & Church Strategy, FTS\*
- **Charles Mylander**, General Superintendent, Friends Church Southwest, Yearly Meeting
- **Lloyd John Ogilvie**, Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, California
- **William E. Pannell**, Director, Black Ministries, FTS\*
- **Patricia Rexroat**, Director, Southern California Extended Education, FTS\*
- **Robert A. Seiple**, President, World Vision, Inc.
- **Siang Yang-Tan**, Director, Dr. of Psychology Program, FTS\*
- **Janine Tartaglia**, Pastor of Senior Adults, First Church of the Nazarene, Pasadena, California
- **“Rev. Msgr.” Royale M. Vadakin**, Director, Commission on Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs, Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles

\*FTS: Fuller Theological Seminary

## Original Board Of Reference

Jamie Buckingham	David L. McKenna
Anthony Campolo	Calvin Miller
G. Raymond Carlson	Henri J. M. Nouwen
Ted W. Engstrom	Lloyd John Ogilvie
Gary Fawver	J.I. Packer
Richard Felix	William Pannell
Faith Forster	Eugene H. Peterson
Roger Forster	“Fr.” Michael Scanlan
William C. Frey	Ronald J. Sider
Millard Fuller	Arthur Simon
Henry Garipey	Lewis B. Smedes
Michael Harper	Howard A. Snyder
Roberta Hestenes	Russell P. Spittler
Jerry R. Kirk	Ingrid Trobisch
Clarence A. Kopp, Sr.	Tommy Tyson
David LeShana	C. Peter Wagner
Peter Lord	Thomas Wang

Carl H. Lundquist      Robert Webber  
David & Karen Mains      Richard B. Wilke  
Martin Marty              John Wimber

## Renovaré’s Speaking Platform

(October, 1991, Los Angeles Conference)

- **Sister Thomas Bernard**, Director, The Spirituality Center, Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles
- **Isaac Canales**, Assistant Director, Hispanic Ministries, Fuller Theological Seminary
- **Sister Dolores Cazares**, Coordinator, School of Spiritual Direction
- **Eugene Coffin**, Quaker, Counselor for Memorial Gardens, Crystal Cathedral
- **Murray Dempster**, Professor of Social Ethics, Southern California College
- **Gary Dennis**, Senior Pastor, La Canada Presbyterian Church
- **Edward England**, Renovaré Team Member
- **Marty Ensign**, Renovaré Team Member
- **Richard Foster**, President, Renovaré
- **Roger Fredrikson**, Renovaré Team Member
- **Jack Hayford**, Senior Pastor, The Church on the Way, Van Nuys, California
- **David Hubbard**, President, Fuller Theological Seminary
- **Jerry Johnson**, Executive Pastor, Lake Avenue Congregational Church
- **Carolyn Koons**, Director, Institute for Outreach Ministries, Azusa Pacific University
- **H.B. London**, Senior Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena
- **Don Moomaw**, Senior Pastor, Bel Air Presbyterian Church
- **Robert Munger**, Longtime Presbyterian pastor and leader.
- **Chuck Mylander**, General Superintendent, Friends Church Southwest, Yearly Meeting
- **Lloyd John Ogilvie**, Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood
- **John Ortberg, Jr.**, Senior Pastor, Horizons Community Church
- **John Perkins**, Director, John M. Perkins Foundation for Reconciliation and Development
- **C.W. Perry**, Senior Pastor, Rose Drive Friends Church
- **Pat Rexroat**, Director, Extended Education in Southern California, Fuller Theological Seminary
- **Lydia Sarandan**, Minister of Adult Education, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church
- **Bob Seiple**, President, World Vision, Inc.
- **Jim Smith**, Renovaré Team Member

- **Slang-Yang Tan**, Director, Doctor of Psychology Program, Fuller Theological Seminary
- **Janine Tartaglia**, Pastor with Senior Adults, First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena
- **Donn Thomas**, Renovaré Team Member
- **William Vaswig**, Renovaré Team Member
- **Dallas Willard**, Renovaré Team Member
- **Jane Willard**, Professional therapist (offered for prayer and counseling during seminar)

## CONCLUSION

**W**hy do organizations like Renovaré flourish? Because the churches have, for the most part, created the atmosphere for them to flourish. The churches are apostate representations of the assemblies whose role was given them by God in His Word. They do not offer the nurture and instruction in the Word that is required of God’s *ekklesia*. They have relegated the role of elder to that of an elected deacon who comes and goes on the whim of the pastor, the church board or even the congregation. The elders are generally silent; they do not teach. The pastor teaches; the pastor runs the affairs of the church; the pastor is supreme.

The hierarchical structures of the denominations have denigrated into political “good-ol’-boys” associations. They have no more concern for the welfare of the individual congregant than politicians in Washington have for the individual citizen.

Richard Foster is correct when he says the Church has failed; except that he should say *the churches* have failed.

The Body of Christ is still the Body of Christ. And the day is coming when the true believers in America will become fed up with the “Sunday-go-to-meeting” variety of Christianity. They will either leave on their own to form biblically-oriented assemblies, or they will be forced out by the leadership of the churches that are ever increasing toward ungodliness and religion.

Renovaré, however, is not the answer to the problem; it is a problem unto itself. It does not reflect the biblical model; it is a human attempt to achieve godliness by incorporating the world’s philosophies into a quasi-biblically-oriented group setting.

As we approach the end of this age we will see the churches moving inexorably closer to the great delusion that will dominate the thinking of mankind. Jesus said that delusion would be so great that, if it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived (Matthew 24:24).

Most Christians fail to realize the implication of such a statement. What the Lord was saying is that the great delusion to come would appear so close to the truth that only the very elect of God would be able to discern the truth from the error.

The only source for truth that He has left us is His written Word—the Bible. When men try to infuse into Scripture what their own human reasoning assumes it means by allegorizing, spiritualizing or generally corrupting the *clear* meanings of God's Word, they are playing into the hands of the deceiver. This isn't to say that even among true brethren there won't be disagreements on minor issues (though nothing the Word clearly states is minor). But it is incumbent upon God's people not to receive any ministry that places emphasis upon subjective spiritual exercises at all, let alone more so than it does upon the study of God's Word.

Organizations such as Renovaré are usurping the place of the local assembly. While certain parachurch organizations have their place—provided they do not stray from the truth of Scripture—the local assembly is the essential place for fellowship and learning doctrine. Parachurch organizations that interfere with the learning of sound doctrine by instilling confusion are hindering the unity of the Faith.

Ultimately, it is doctrine (the Word of God) which emerges as the reason for disunity. And this is as it should be. Unity around the Word of God is the only unity desirable to a true believer. Unity around the Word of God plus something else is disunity with God Himself. We must choose only the Word of God as the source for all instruction in righteousness. And if this means that we become outcasts from the religionists of today, then so be it.

*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*

*For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly [their own desires]; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Romans 16:17-18)*

How often we who stand firm on God's Word are accused of causing division by those who quote only verse 17 and omit "contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned" in the process. We cannot compromise the truth of God's Word in the name of unity and remain faithful to Christ. Nor can we meld God's Word with extra-biblical or unbiblical teachings and practices and remain faithful to Christ.

*Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.*

*Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:5-6)*

Renovaré fails to recognize this essential truth. It incorporates unbiblical methodologies and philosophies in its spiritual exercises. While God's Word is said to be

the ultimate truth upon which to rest, Jungian psychology and even Buddhist meditation techniques are blended with Roman Catholic spiritual traditions in an attempt to bring about what Richard Foster calls, "wholeness" in the lives of believers.

This implies that the Spirit of God and the Word of God are insufficient in themselves to provide wholeness in Christ for those who are obedient to them.

Wherein does the answer lie then? It lies in the future. It lies in the work that the Lord is doing in the hearts of His true believers, opening their eyes to the deceptions in their midst. As more and more eyes become opened, more and more of us will find one another as we are forced into fellowship for the sake of spiritual survival and, perhaps, even physical survival.

In the meantime, we must work within the churches where God has given us opportunity to do so. As the light is shed through our insistence upon purity of doctrine and practice, many pastors will see the need to surrender their churches and submit themselves to the plurality of eldership within biblically-oriented assemblies. Those elders who are biblically qualified will become the elders by recognition of their spirituality and strength in Christ.

Some pastors will be salvageable; most will not be. Most will fall into the trap set by those who bring in the world's philosophies as better ways to know truth. Through their continued blending of error with Scripture, the truth of God's Word will be made of no effect among the people they are supposed to lead. As Jesus chastised the religious leaders of His day, so He will chastise the religious leaders of today:

*Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. (Matthew 15:6)*

While the Lord was speaking of a specific commandment to honor one's father and mother, the admonition is applicable to every command of Jesus Christ—to the Word of God as a whole. Those who blend error with truth have made the Word of God of no effect. Let us pray that their eyes may be opened before it's too late. ❖

## NOTES

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