

## Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible\*

by [editors] Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Eugene Peterson\*\*

Richard Foster is the founder of the Renovaré Movement and General Editor of the Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible (Harper San Francisco, 2005). The Renovaré movement's major purpose is to subtly lead the church back into the occultism of the mystics of the early Roman Catholic Church through "spiritual disciplines" and "spiritual formation." The Renovaré Bible is a major effort in that direction. A host of "scholars" contributed commentaries, among them Bruce Demarest, Professor of Theology at Denver Seminary; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; Tremper Longman III, Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College; Earl F. Palmer, pastor of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, WA, and on the Board of Trustees of the long-apostate Princeton Theological Seminary (as was Sir John Marks Templeton).

The Renovaré Bible includes the Apocrypha and declares that "Most of the Church throughout much of history has accepted the Deuterocanonicals as Scripture...."1 Not as Scripture. Nor were these 13 books, written during the time between Malachi and the birth of Christ, ever accepted by Israel as inspired. Indeed, 1 Maccabees states that God was not speaking through prophets and apologizes for its errors (9:27 and 14:41). Obviously, anything written during that silence from God could not be Scripture.

From the Apocrypha, the Roman Catholic Church justifies purgatory, prayers for the dead and their eventual redemption through a propitiatory sacrifice (thereby justifying the Mass), purchase of forgiveness of sins, worship of angels, prayers to the "saints" and their ability to intervene. Yet Renovaré asserts, "The Deuterocanonicals do not affect any central doctrine of the Christian faith."2

The Apocrypha were never quoted by Christ or His apostles, though the Old Testament is quoted in the New more than 250 times. Even Renovaré does not put the Apocrypha on the same level as the Bible, but as helpful for "spiritual formation." Then why include it in the same volume as Scripture—and without any warning concerning its heretical teachings?!

The Renovaré Bible introduces what it calls “Spiritual Disciplines” to help one’s “spiritual formation.” Neither term is found in the Bible. Renovaré declares that the purpose of this study Bible is the “discovery, instruction, and practice of the Spiritual Disciplines.” In fact, many of these are occult “disciplines” not found in Scripture but advocated by the mystics as a means of getting in touch with God. Foster has been a major influence in seducing today’s church with the same practices—and now has edited a Bible for the express purpose of justifying this seduction.

A number of commendable “Spiritual Disciplines” are mentioned, but some that are not commendable: “solitude, confession...meditation and silence...secrecy, sacrifice, celebration.” These innocent words have a special meaning for Foster. Explaining his view of “celebration,” he writes: “We of the New Age can risk going against the tide. Let us with abandon...see visions and dream dreams. ... The imagination can release a flood of creative ideas [and] be lots of fun.” (Celebration of Discipline, Harper & Row, 1978, p. 170)

In the West, meditation means to think deeply about something, but in the East it means to empty the mind in order to open it to the spirit world, leading to mystical experiences of “God.” Purporting to reject Eastern mysticism, Foster says, “Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it.” He seductively suggests: “John was ‘in the Spirit on the Lord’s day’ when he received his apocalyptic vision (Rv 1:10). Could it be that John was trained in a way of listening and seeing that we have forgotten? ... Let us have courage to...once again learn the ancient...art of meditation” (Celebration, pp. 14,15). The idea that John had a special technique for hearing from God is heresy of the worst sort, but foundational to Renovaré’s promotion of “spiritual disciplines” and “spiritual formation”!

The arousal of the imagination through fantasy and visualization is a major theme in Foster’s Celebration. He acknowledges that “prayer through the imagination” was taught to him by Agnes Sanford, who popularized “inner healing,” a major source of much of the occultism in the Charismatic movement.

Foster writes in *Celebration*, “In your imagination allow your spiritual body, shining with light, to rise out of your physical body. ... Reassure your body that you will return....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 [to] any instruction given” (p. 27). This is astral projection and occult contact through the imagination and is the major technique used by shamans to contact their spirit guides.

Yet Foster claims that it leads to Christ and God: “Take a single event [from Scripture]. Seek to live the experience, remembering the encouragement of Ignatius of Loyola (Jesuit founder) to apply all our senses to our task...represent to your imagination the whole of the mystery...as an active participant. ... You can actually encounter the living Christ in the event, be addressed by His voice...touched by His healing power. ... Jesus Christ will actually come to you.” Not so! You cannot call Jesus Christ from the right hand of the Father to appear to you—but any demon will be happy to pretend to be “Jesus” (p. 26).

In like manner, the *Renovaré Bible* honors Catholic heretics and occultists as “saints” and their writings as a framework within which to understand Scripture. The *Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola* are endorsed even though they involve occult techniques that have caused many to be demonized.

Sadly, the *Renovaré* explanatory notes deny the Divine authorship of much of Scripture—even that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Yet it hypocritically declares, “We read the Bible literally, from cover to cover...[and] in context.”<sup>3</sup> *Renovaré* claims that Genesis 1-11 is neither historic nor scientific,<sup>4</sup> and that the entire book of Genesis is merely a collection of myths:

Genesis began as an oral tradition of narrative stories passed down from generation to generation....These stories [gradually] took on theological meaning....Over time [they] were written down and collected together (Gen 12-50), and a prologue (Gen 1-11) was added....Borrowing from other creation accounts...stories with parallels to ancient Near Eastern religious narrative and mythology were reshaped with monotheistic intent....These strands of varied materials were gathered and edited into the written text....<sup>5</sup>

What wickedness for Christian “scholars” to unite with skeptics to declare that Genesis, which is foundational to the Bible, is just an edited compilation of mythology and folk tales! If Genesis is not literally inspired of God, then how can we have confidence in any other part of the Bible? What about Paul’s statement that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tm 3:16) or Peter’s “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pt 1:21) or Christ’s many quotations from Genesis and references to “the things that Moses commanded” (Mt 8:4; 19:7; Mk 1:44; 7:10; 10:3, 4; 12:19, 26; Lk 16:29-31, etc.)?

Contrary to Renovaré, the Bible itself declares in numerous places, that under the inspiration of God, Moses wrote the Pentateuch: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book...and Moses wrote all the words of the LORD...and Moses wrote this law, and delivered it...unto all the elders of Israel....And...Moses...commanded the Levites...put it in...the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God....” (Ex 17:14; 24:4; Dt 31:9, 25, 26, etc.).

“The law of Moses” is referred to repeatedly (Jos 8:31-32; 23:6; 1 Ki 2:3; 2 Ki 14:6; 23:25; 2 Chr 30:16; Ezr 3:2; Ne 8:1; etc.). Jesus called the Pentateuch “the law of Moses” (Lk 24:44). The Gospel of John is filled with affirmations that Moses was a prophet who wrote much Scripture (Jn 1:17, 45; 5:45, 46; 7:19-23, etc.).

Of Daniel, the Renovaré Bible declares, “We do not know who wrote it or exactly when it was written ... it was most likely partially written during Antiochus Epiphanes’ persecution of the Jews in Babylon, which began with the desecration of the Temple in 167 B.C.”<sup>6</sup> So it is the work of an imposter pretending to be Daniel 400 years after the fact! To escape admitting that Daniel prophesied centuries in advance the breakup of Alexander’s empire under four generals, the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes, and the pollution of the temple, skeptics had to invent a later date for these prophecies. Renovaré echoes this lie, robbing Christians of an essential proof of the validity of the Bible and depriving the unsaved of life-giving truth!

Daniel is written in the first person telling events that happened to the writer four centuries before 167 b.c.: “When I...Daniel, had seen the vision (8:15)...I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days (8:27)...In the first year of Darius...I Daniel understood (9:1,2)...I Daniel was mourning three full weeks (10:2),” etc.

The Renovaré “scholars” continually downplay the powerful Old Testament prophecies of Christ (pp. 22, 32, 1375, 1377-8, 1384, etc.). The key prophecy in Isaiah 9:6-7 of the coming Messiah, who is “the mighty God, the everlasting Father,” is said to speak of “human agents” (p. 997). The notes reduce Isaiah’s prophecies to “tradition” (pp. 982, 983), would have us believe that much of that book was not written by Isaiah (there are “three authors” – pp. 982, 1068), and even deny that chapter 53 prophesies Christ’s sacrifice for our sins (p. 984)! Renovaré describes the book of Isaiah as “poetic imagination ... Isaiah imagines,” etc. The Renovaré “scholars” declare, “The prophets of Israel are not to be thought of primarily as...predictors of the future ... they were poets” (p. 1079). Through poetry, Jeremiah attempts “to make sense of the events of his day ...” (p. 1080). Blasphemy!

Renovaré rejects the powerful prophecies of Daniel, including the proof of 9:24-26 that Jesus is the Christ. There is not a word about the image foretelling the four world kingdoms and revival of the fourth (Roman Empire) under ten heads (2:36-45) to be destroyed by the Messiah when He sets up His everlasting kingdom. Nor is there a word about the future apocalyptic significance of the four beasts of Daniel 7 coinciding with Revelation 13. The wrath of God poured out upon earth during the Great Tribulation (Renovaré avoids that term) are described as “natural disasters straight out of Exodus” (p. 2268). Yet even the magicians in Egypt told Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” (Ex 8:19).

All of the major prophecies so crucial in proving the Bible to be the Word of God and Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah are either not commented upon, or are spiritualized away as pertaining to the “faith community” and its “spiritual formation.” There is no recognition of the great prophecies in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc., of Israel being brought back into her own land in the last days, and that she must endure forever (Ezk 35-37, etc.). For example, the powerful prophetic promise from God to bring back the Jews scattered around the world (Jer 31:8-14) is

interpreted as a promise to all homeless people (nothing about Israel), and God's promise that Israel can never be destroyed (31:35-37) is ignored!

Israel is treated as having been replaced by the church. Incredibly, the valley of dry bones brought back to life in Ezekiel 37, which is clearly declared to be "the whole house of Israel" (37:11), is interpreted as the birth of the church at Pentecost! Ezekiel 38-39 is not about Armageddon, with real armies attacking the nation of Israel back in her land in the last days to be rescued by the Messiah, but is about "dark forces" always at work in the world.

There is no commentary at Revelation 1:7 about the Second Coming of Christ (p. 2269), no evidence of belief in the Rapture; only that Christ will one day "return and overcome the wicked powers" (p. 2266). Revelation is reduced to a "pastoral letter meant to sustain the suffering and hearten the weary faithful" (p. 2267). The Antichrist and False Prophet (Rv 13) are depersonalized as "dark forces of evil" (p. 2281). The woman on the beast (Rv 17) has no prophetic significance but "embodies those institutions that across the ages have sold themselves to the dark forces..." (p. 2284). There is nothing about the city that it is clearly said she represents. So the fall of Babylon (Rv 18) "pictures the ultimate collapse of all human institutions given over to the lust for power..." (p. 2285).

The marriage of the Lamb to His bride (Rv 19) is not a real event in heaven but "symbolic of the many different celebrations that bring joy and jubilation" into our lives (p. 2287) The thousand-year reign of Christ (Rv 20) is not a real event, and the armies of the world coming against Christ and the saints at Jerusalem after Satan's release merely symbolize "the armies of darkness [which] surround us" (p. 2288).

This "Study Bible" is one more step on the slippery downward path into deepening apostasy.

Endnotes

Richard J. Foster, ed., *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* (Harper San Francisco, 2005), xxx.

*Ibid.*, Foreword, xvii.

Ibid., General Introduction, xxxi.

Ibid., 14-15.

Ibid., 13-15.

Ibid., From the introduction to Daniel, p 1245, by James M. Rand.

\* The majority of the information in this report has been adapted and/or excerpted from a review in the August 2005 The Berean Call.

\*\* Richard Foster [Excerpt from Ray Yungen's letter, "Richard Foster: Promoting Eastern Mysticism by Proxy"]: "Richard Foster advocates a prayer movement that indeed can be proven to have strong links to Eastern mysticism. ... To proclaim to be evangelical in every aspect but to say, 'Thomas Merton tried to awaken God's people' ... is a contradiction of major proportions. It is an oxymoron to try to lump Biblical evangelicalism and Thomas Merton together. ... The fact that Foster quotes Merton 13 times in the latest edition of Celebration of Discipline is just further proof that he does indeed adhere to Merton's teachings. ... Since Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen mystically perceived the 'divine' in everyone, this in effect made them New Agers. ... Foster [is] promoting Eastern mysticism by way of proxy." [See Yungen's book, A Time of Departing.]

Dallas Willard: During an instructional role-play, this question was posed to Willard. [Hypothetical Seeker:] "I still struggle with how I should view those who have other beliefs. I'm not sure I am ready to condemn them as wrong. I know some very good Buddhists. What is their destiny?" [Willard:] "I would take [you] to Romans 2:6-10: 'God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.' What Paul is clearly saying is that if anyone is worthy of being saved, they will be saved. ... I am not going to stand in the way of anyone whom God wants to save. ... It is possible for someone who does not know Jesus to be saved." ["A Conversation with Dallas Willard," Cutting Edge, Winter 2001, Vol. 5 No. 1]

Eugene Peterson: Peterson is "Consulting Editor, New Testament" of the Renovaré Bible. In his own Bible "translation," The Message,

Peterson reduces much of Paul's vital treatment of the gospel in Romans to metaphor, which he says is the "opposite [of] precise use of language" (p. 2045). In commenting on the necessity of Bible study for Christians, Peterson says, "The importance of poetry and novels is that the Christian life involves the use of the imagination, after all, we are dealing with the invisible. And, imagination is our training in dealing with the invisible, making connections. ... I don't want to do away with or denigrate theology or exegesis, but our primary allies in this business are the artists. ... Why do people spend so much time studying the Bible? How much do you need to know? We invest all this time in understanding the text which has a separate life of it's own and we think we're being more pious and spiritual when we're doing it. ... [Christians] should be studying it less, not more. You just need enough to pay attention to God. ... I'm just not at all pleased with all the emphasis on Bible study as if it's some kind of special thing that Christians do, and the more they do the better." ["A Conversation with Eugene Peterson," Mars Hill Review, Fall 1995, Issue No. 3: pgs. 73-90.] It is shocking, but not surprising, that Peterson esteems Bible study so little. While claiming to be a Greek and Hebrew scholar on one hand, Peterson regularly abandons definitions from Strong's (and other trusted sources) for his own poetic "translation" into today's "lingo." Peterson says, "imagination is our training in dealing with the invisible." What an astounding contradiction of God's Word! (which says): "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15); "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" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

"Critical Praise" for Renovaré Bible not too critical

Considering that The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Study Bible mirrors "higher criticism" (a movement in which intellectuals question the authorship and authenticity of Scripture portions—particularly prophetic passages—akin to the ungodly "Jesus Seminar"), and incorporates New Age terminology and methodology (under the guise of "spiritual formation"), and then packages it with a problematic translation, one wonders just how closely other Christian endorsers have examined its contents—or the teachings of Renovaré. Below is the



two-thirds-page ad, prominently featured next to the publisher's box on page 6 of the July 2005 issue of Christianity Today. It is interesting to note that although the Renovaré logo appears at the bottom of the ad, the publisher (nowhere mentioned) is actually Harper Collins (which incidentally also publishes The Satanic Bible by Anton La Vey). Harper Collins owns Zondervan, the largest “Christian” publishing company, which recently formed a partnership with Youth Specialties to create materials for the Emerging Church movement—which is in turn a primary importer/exporter of Catholic mystic tradition, being marketed to evangelicals as “vintage” faith or “authentic” Christianity.

Endorsements of Renovaré Bible include Popular Christian Authors:

“The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible ... is unrivaled as a classic work of biblical theology suffused with a pastoral heart.” - Brennan Manning, author of The Ragamuffin Gospel [endorsed by Eugene Peterson and Max Lucado; Manning is a former Franciscan priest]

“This Bible is greatly needed.” - Tony Campolo, author of Speaking My Mind ... [embracing homosexual marriage, espousing a similar “soft” view of Romans as Eugene Peterson's The Message]

“With great enthusiasm, I open The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible. One could not assemble a finer team to compile it.” - Max Lucado, [prolific author; pastor, Oak Hills Church, signer of Evangelicals & Catholics Together II]

“This Bible helps us desire intimacy with God, not just know the typical facts and knowledge.” - Dan Kimball, author of The Emerging Church [with contributions by Rick Warren and Brian McLaren], and Pastor of Vintage Faith Church

“... [T]he most spiritually-impactful Bible of our time.” - John Ortberg, Teaching Pastor, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, author of If You Want to Walk on Water ... [endorsed by Dallas Willard; a former teaching pastor at Willow Creek (Bill Hybels), Ortberg holds a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Fuller]

“[An] outstanding resource ... Christians of many different traditions will appreciate this ecumenical resource devoted to spiritual renewal.” - Publishers Weekly [this secular trade journal is politically-and religiously-correct]