

Defining the Truth by Richard Rose

The following essay is available in Richard Rose's book, *Carillon: Poems, Essays, and Philosophy of Richard Rose*. This delightful and enlightening book will carry you from the poetic to the profound. The idealism and romanticism of youth, the realism of maturity, and the wisdom of spiritual attainment are eloquently and poignantly expressed in Richard Rose's poetry and prose. If you like the dynamism and spontaneity of Richard Rose as writer and teacher, please visit www.tatfoundation.org or www.rosepublications.net.

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Most serious-minded people talk about the "Truth." But they take it for granted. They never get down to setting up measurements by which to gauge the Truth so that they will realize it when they hear it. They presume to be able to recognize it, and some go as far as to presume to be the fortunate possessors of it.

The Truth is a path more than a realization of measurability. The scientist feels that he is a pursuer of Truth, but the products of the scientific laboratory are more likely to be cannons and culture rather than inklings of the first cause or man's picture of ultimate destiny. And the same scientist, who may be trying to crack the atom or split a chromosome, may privately have massive rationalizations about religion, personal definition, or personal destiny. So that he is a mechanical seeker, but not an entire and dynamic seeker,--even though he functions mechanically in his scientific quest much more valuably than most of humanity.

Truth is a path because it is never fully realized, and because many aspects of the search for Truth remain relative. Man is a being whose consciousness depends upon fickle senses and a mind largely capable of witnessing in a relative manner, and largely incapable of direct knowledge.

Truth may well be absolute in nature, but to bicameral man with the necessary bipolar survey of all things,--a definition of absolute or abstract things or states may be readily seized and accepted in relative form, that is, with relative and possibly equivocal words.

Every last one of us thinks we are right. Which means that we think we have the Truth or that if we do not have it, no one else will do any better. But everyone has a different definition of it. And with this different definition upon the minds of men, we have a subtle, unseen Tower of Babel which stands between the minds of men so that they cannot strive together. There is much talk of the brotherhood of seekers for Truth, but this brotherhood is split up into myriad groups with no common language or understanding. And all of this is because they presupposed, a priori, that which they

expected Truth to be, and so defined it, rather than sought it for whatever it might be when found.

The Bible indicates that we should seek if we wish to find. Yet with equal authority Christ exhorts us to believe in Him if we wish to be saved. Now finding the Truth and being saved may be two entirely different projects, but believing is not compatible with seeking. The believer does not seek; he accepts that which another extends.

And with this bit of ambiguity the Christian world, for one, is hampered in honestly seeking for Truth. Lazily each sect rests upon a belief rather than upon a conviction. They comfort one another with the mutual back-scratching, and make decrees to the effect that other religions are worthy seekers also, but perhaps less fortunate. They comfort their congregation and financial supporter by telling them that man was never supposed to learn the True nature of things, and dumbfound the mind with the cliché that the finite mind will never perceive the infinite.

It cannot be that terrible. Absolute Truth is not absolutely inaccessible to us, and relative truth is definitely accessible. We must desire the Truth, and have a capacity for it else we could not receive it even if it came to us by accident.

We cannot shut our mind to any phase of reality, and still have a capacity for Truth in another field. For if we rationalize about one thing, then rationalization may well be a mental habit cooperating with our laziness or desire-thinking, and we are liable to rationalize about vital things. We cannot lie to ourselves in little things, or what we consider little things, and still be competent to receive knowledge of that which we admit to be more vital or more important.

The divergences of beliefs among men, whether these beliefs be religious, philosophic, or political, are not an indication of the infallibility of the masses nor of justification for the idea that everyone is correct to a degree. We like to think that the divergent observer is just looking at Truth from another or oblique angle. And rather than solve the problem, the divergent parties democratically vote everyone to be correct.

These procedures make for compatibility and social harmony, but they put the mind to sleep. We are either right or wrong. And if we are honest with ourselves and true to ourselves we do not wish to wait for twenty years to outgrow a religion. It is our sacred right as profaned animals to understand our state. It is our sacred right to doubt and to question. It must remain our valued trust,—that we trust no authority. We must listen and sit down with an occasional book, but any acceptance should be tentative until we have a complete picture.

When I say that we are either right or wrong, I am speaking of relative truth-seeking. In the absolute state, things may well be neither right or wrong, or both. And

while we aspire to an absolute state, and to absolute Truth, it remains doubtful if we will ever attain the absolute Truth if we compromise relative truth, or shut our eyes to reality.

Let us not pretend to be seekers while we remain addicted to vanity or enslaved to conventions. Likewise we are living a lie when we dedicate years or decades to the pursuit of pleasure or ambition, when in the honest analysis, we can find no valid gain for our search. And when we are guided by fear or emotion to accept a creed, we have neither a chance for truth nor an honest self-identification.

Many people have found reality for the first time in the depths of alcoholism, or drug addiction, or rather, have found reality after passing through the depths. They managed to become alcoholics because alcohol alone, or drugs alone, made it possible for them to live with massive rationalizations in the form of religion or social mores, from which their inner intuition rebelled.

We live in a cloud of illusions. We cling to them, legislate them in our councils, create and deify them in our religious dogma, breed them into our children, and rarely realize that we are spinning this web of fiction for all the hours and days of our lives unless we are fortunate or unfortunate enough to die slowly. I was shocked the first time I heard a priest at a funeral pray that all of those present might be granted a slow death. For a moment I thought him a barbarian carrying to the extreme his cult of masochism. But perhaps that slow death may be the only moments of reality for the total life of many earthlings. Because a dying man is forced to face the fact that he is about to become zero, and the pseudo-comforts that promised glorious lights, trumpets and escorting angels, now have no meaning. All that the dying man knows is that he is about to begin to rot. Nothingness has more meaning to him, and embodies his world of reality more than all of the religions and clichés of a human-animal philosophy eternally cursed and confounded by language and its deceptions.

This dying man knows too late the value of the doubt, and the foolishness of faith unless that faith be in his own power to solve the problem or cut the Gordian knot. Blind faith is only rationalization. It is the little pig that does not wish to grow up, and procrastinates weaning. It is the weakling-child that replaces sturdy effort with boasting and lies of pretended achievement. The most fanatical and dangerous (that is recriminatory) type of religious zealot is the one that would make a political cause out of his favorite religion, rather than go through the effort to make his life a true religion of Search.

There is but one Truth. To equivocate for the sake of social compatibility is to sell our spiritual nature for cowardly bargaining with the herd, when the bargaining is not necessary. For ages the wise men have served notice that we must remain inconspicuous, and this silence will help avert the teeth of the herd. But unless someone occasionally speaks up, the sincere will have no encouragement.

We might ask here, "How shall we know the Truth? What is Reality?" We can only know the Truth by teaching ourselves to face the truth in all things. If we encourage

our computer to come up with erroneous answers, because they are more desirable, then we are developing a computer that we may never be able to trust.

Let us take examples in social experience. Many of us, and many people we know employ incomplete formulae to govern their lives. After decades of misery they realize that they were lying to themselves. The decades would usually be prolonged but the person's friends become alienated, or they continue until some disastrous climax brings the truth into focus. This distress is usually caused by inadequate or incomplete assessment of the general picture of life.

We have the young bully who thinks that he is invincible. Repeated conquests have led him to believe that kindness is a sign of weakness. He may even believe that he is a gigantic avatar sent by the gods to boot the peasants of the earth into line. He does not bother to find out what line the gods want him to follow, for in reality it is his line.

The bully will eventually be rebuffed. Someone will change his philosophy with the same convincing force he meted out to others. His sadism will become inverted and he will see that he did not even have half of the picture of his destiny. But he may have rationalized half or three-fourths of his life away trying to be a bully before he relents and admits that he has little sure destiny except the all-conquering grave. And by the time he relents and realizes, it is too late for his brutalized brain to ponder anything beyond the grave.

Everyday we meet people who admit that they have been fooling themselves for years. They are generally up in years, and will be found more frequently in ale-houses than in churches. Instead of group-therapy, the churches specialize in mass-make-believe.

It is difficult to prescribe a conduct of Seekers of Truth. But Truth is that which is. A person who dyes his hair or wears a wig is not truthful. A person who wears clothes other than to cover himself is not truthful. A person who uses cosmetics except for comedy, is not truthful. The naked body with its tell-tale wrinkles, its sagging folds of fat, bowed legs, and collapsing organs, may be much more conducive to Truth than years of church-attendance, if we just observe in it our unglamorous destiny.

I am not advocating nudity since nudity may well be a rationalization or excuse to emphasize the urges of the body. Yet it is hard to tell which would do the worse for our salvation (enlightenment),--a parade of undyed nudes or a parade of vain clothes-horses on Easter Sunday.

Much of our religion is vanity. We clothe ourselves in it and strut about as if to mock the feathers of our neighbors. Too many of us think that we have chosen the true religion by virtue of our better intellect. We even manage to glorify ourselves by manifesting compassion for those who are less concerned with such toys as missionary work and conversion. We will carry a badge to show our superior position. The badge

will be a quotation from the Bible, a talisman, a secret word, water on the head, or a missing foreskin.

What do we know for sure? We know very little. We find ourselves to be a rotting body, with thoughts and hope for something more permanent. Yet like children, we deck the body with importance, even as we vainly embalm the corpse to delay the truth. I am reminded of the case of the Narcissist, a woman who always wished to be a nun. She maintained that she was living for God, and that she was remaining pure for Him. In reality she was remaining pure because she abhorred change and aging. But her grand rationalization carried right through until her death. She refused a doctor out of modesty, and the result was a slow death. This woman never seemed to contemplate that God might have intended for her to reproduce. We evince the most blatant egotism when we announce that we are doing something for God. We who are not able to identify ourselves are about to oil the eternal mechanisms.

Let us look at this woman with candor. Let us just see that which she is. We will not presuppose that God created her, or that God is even around or concerned. This we do not know. But we know that she has been born with female organs, and feminine instincts to promote her female functioning. The prompting of those instincts, and the uncontrollable cycles imposed upon her by nature have become evil things or sins. She feels responsible for the hormones that might find their way into her blood, or the consequent thoughts that might find their way into her thinking. She lives a life of self-recrimination and confession in never-ending apology for having a body that she did not ask for, and which may have been created by agencies who are more responsible for it than the sufferer.

Again we do not denounce this unfortunate lady. Her tactic was her only means available to seek a better existence. She saw only a facet of the picture, and thought she had found the only door in the universe. She was a seeker in her own way, and her death-ordeal testifies to her intensity. But we cannot help but feel that her dynamic energy was wasted somewhat, and that the waste lies at the feet of the priest-union that preferred to let her make a life of sincere effort and tangential uselessness, out of what may have been a more articulate and understanding seeker. The priest-union preferred this to making an admission concerning the relative importance of moral teachings.

The purpose of this example is to show that it is possible for persons to follow a diligent tack all through life, which tack is absurd to minds of most other observers. It is possible that similar zealots find themselves on these life-long tangential paths because somewhere early in their lives they formed a fabric of rationalization rather than face reality.

That which is believed by the majority of humanity is not necessarily the truth. This is a common error, man makes. Man thinks that if everyone or the majority of people believe a thing, that popularity makes it the truth. At one time the universal concept was that the sun revolved about the earth. At one time the thinking or scientific world had a "phlogiston" theory which was later dissipated.

Faith can change material things to a limited degree only. It did not render the earth flat nor did it arrest the cycles of the sun. If the sun danced at Fatima it would have involved motions for that star which would not only have been noticeable elsewhere, but would have required that the sun travel at fantastic speeds out of its regular position. So that while millions of people may believe that the sun danced at Fatima, it is equally valid to offer or to believe that the minds of the viewers were simultaneously hallucinated, or hypnotized. I do not mean to imply that the hypnosis was caused by human agency, necessarily. Religious leaders when weary of their theological diggings, resort to edict and dogma. The scientific world, while more laborious, is prone to lean heavily upon its "concepts" and "theories," and much of the engineering in new fields treats these theories as fact by virtue of habit.

Again let us return to the observation of the two apparent types of truth. There is actually only one real Truth, but too soon we must admit that real Truth is absolute and ideal in nature. We are apt to coin another word, "relative truth," for want of a better word to express our attempts to calibrate validity with a relative and restricted mind. It is better to understand that while searching for the Truth we will believe things that we will later no longer believe to be the truth, and this previous state of appreciation I would prefer to call incomplete truth, leading perhaps eventually to absolute Truth.

The human family is constantly finding things to be more true or less true. It is finding more perfect material formulae, and is discarding inefficient or erroneous formulae. If it can apply this weeding-out process to the vast tangle of metaphysical and religious formulae, it will begin to make progress.

The human family has been in the past in the habit of accepting ideas or spiritual concepts without even a half-hearted attempt to set up a formula. We know nothing of life after death, of the nature of our own essence, or of the motivating agencies of the visible or invisible worlds. The human family for centuries has just accepted that which sounded good or quieted their fears and made the children more tractable.

Our civilization has come to a point where we know about quality and demand that our food contain certain qualities, and that those who handle it do so with clean hands. But that admittedly most valuable thing which is spiritual, too often comes from mountebanks, misfits, and often degenerates who know that their pretense may never be challenged, or their venality exposed. Modern society accepts religions that render compatibility, that keep down crime, and that work in harmony with the state.

We are allowing ourselves to be tortured by our clergy, even as the witch-doctor applied the needle of fear to keep his sinecure, in primitive cultures. The clergy maintained darkness for centuries with their "Anti-modernistic Oaths," or equivalents of such. They were not concerned with the laity, who over those centuries were reacting with more mature common-sense. While unable to deny that their function was that of a hammer, they maintained that God was the hand that swung the hammer. Generally if

the peasant questioned the identity of the swinger of the hammer, he received a blow from the hammer.

A new trend now is growing. The men of science and the beatniks who proclaim their own common sense, have united to admit that God is dead. The new trend has no more validity than the old one. Yet, we may take a note. If the existence of God in the minds of men may be maintained by faith or belief, then denial or belief of non-existence may bring an end to God,--if God has no more existence than in the minds of men. We must seek for that which is, and we will find that such facts are indestructible and not dependent on belief or human acceptance.

There is but one way to begin and promote such a search. It is the sorting of the most likely answer from the oceanic froth of data. It requires courage, diligence, perseverance and an open mind.

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