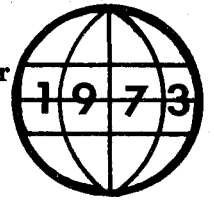


Contemporary Issues:

by Richard J. Foster



Truth, Knowledge and the Church

Dear Martin,

I thought I would take the initiative this time and write to you rather than always responding to your questions.

Martin, I want you to know that in order for you to make genuine advances in your Christian experience, you need a deep commitment to knowing the truth. The one who is Himself the Truth said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) Now, it is not merely the truth that sets a person free but the *knowledge* of the truth. If I am drowning in the ocean and a life raft shrouded in fog is ten feet away, it does me no good unless I know it is there. You must *know* the truth. Obviously I am not just talking about intellectual assent to facts (though this is included) but contact and experience with the living Christ.

CHURCHES NOT COMMITTED TO TRUTH

The reason I want to stress this with you is that you will receive very little encouragement to do this from other quarters. The truth of the matter is that on the whole the churches are simply *not* committed to knowing the truth. They are in fact organized, however unconsciously, to keep people from an earnest search for the truth. Churches are often committed to exciting programs to build attendance, evangelistic meetings, many activities to keep everyone "involved" or social action, but they are not committed to knowing the truth. Rarely do their activities come as a result of a serious apprehension of the truth. This judgment may sound harsh, but it can be verified by simply observing how Christians, especially Christian leaders, spend their time.

This will mean that if you are going to be serious about knowing the truth, you must be willing to be misunderstood and even rebuked by the fellow members of your meeting. Let's take, for example, something as elemental as prayer and Bible study. To really grow here you need to spend several hours each day and periodically give whole weekends to this task. But to do this will mean there will be committees you will not be on and meetings

Richard J. Foster is pastor of the Woodlake Avenue Friends Church in Canoga Park, California.

you will not be attending. Few people will receive this with appreciation.

RESULTS

Knowing the truth is both a matter of comprehension and application. You will discover that as you seriously apply your mind to God's ways (see Romans 12:2, Phil. 4:8) there will be things you will be instructed to do. No doubt you will become convinced of the need to spend more time in depth with your wife and children. (Eph. 5:25; 6:4) The poor and the weak will begin to claim more of your time and attention. (James 1:27) You will begin to receive some of the gifts of the Spirit — perhaps healing or prophecy or teaching or helps (see Romans 12, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4) and you will be going out under the authority of Christ to minister to needs. If you are really serious in this, God will give you a specific ministry through which lives will be changed at the deepest recesses of their being. When you know the truth, you are set free; and when you are set free, you enable to set others free. Remember the words of George Fox in Doomsdale Dungeon; "I was never in prison but that it was the means of releasing multitudes out of their prisons."

You will also discover some rather startling things that are not commonly believed and will not be readily received in churches — including Quaker ones. For example, you have probably always thought that giving money meant giving only to the church. Jesus teaches us to give indiscriminately to all who are in need. This, of course, includes the church but goes far beyond this. We give simply because it is *good* to give, and we know that God will take care of us. (See Luke 6:36, Matt. 6:3; 25-34.) Again, you will discover that you are called to be a minister of Christ and not of your church or meeting. God will lead you to minister to persons irrespective of whether they ever come to your church or not. We minister because it is *good* to minister and for no other reason. (See Acts 8:26-40.)

Martin, if you are willing to commit yourself to know the truth, you will be on an exciting adventure of freedom and power. God bless you as you search.

Sincerely,
Robert J. Catalyst

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