

ANATOMY OF A REASON-BASED BELIEF

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It has been only about 35 years since the establishment of one non-mystical religion, that is, in 1974, as the Seekers of Eternal Truths, making it fairly new as religions go, even non-mystical ones. Name changes took the Seekers of Eternal Truths¹ to the First Church of Rational Conscience² and then to the Church of Reason³, as it is presently known.

The Church's Cleveland, Ohio, Mission has met in a number of physical locations over the years, and now usually meets in the small brick building at West 58th and Storer Avenue which bears the name "Reason Link Place."

For clarity, it should be understood that, in this context, reason is the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by our senses⁴, and it is man's ultimate means to truth and thus his proper guide to action. For additional clarity, it should be understood that, again in this context, faith is belief without evidence, whereas reason requires evidence for belief.

While followers of the religion of Reason, some of whom may call ourselves Reasoners, or even those who may prefer to identify the principles they attempt to live by as "just" or "simply" a philosophy rather than a religion and do not necessarily need a "church" or organized religion to achieve their goals, the Church's founders identified that a successful organized religious establishment – regardless of the content of its beliefs – fulfills certain basic human psychological needs and desires by manifesting the following characteristics: (1) identity -- a reflection of one's own beliefs in the institution, (2) stability -- resistance to change and the strength to stand or endure, (3) security -- a haven from danger, fear and anxiety and a stable source of hope, (4) continuity -- uninterrupted persistence over time without essential change, and (5) fraternity -- an opportunity for division of labor and fellowship with others of like mind.

All members of the Church of Reason who actively pursue truth and knowledge through reason are, in fact, ministers -- small "m" -- of reason. All members are also eligible for ordination as Ministers—capital "M"—of the Church through the International Council of

¹ Name chosen to reflect the vital importance of the role of knowledge in human affairs, especially the spiritual.

² Name changed in 1977 – "First" indicating that, so far as we knew, no religion had been previously established to serve our specific views, "Church" used to make it clear that it is a religious activity and not to be confused with philosophic or other types of organizations, "Rational" designating our belief that reason is man's ultimate means to truth and his proper guide to action (fallible as reason might be in use, man does not have any other real place to turn); and "Conscience" serving to identify the fact that we are concerned with the most basic views that our members hold and that they will be fully honest in their efforts to act routinely in accord with those views, judging their own actions by the highest standards known to themselves.

³ Change of name in early 1988 was made principally in the interest of clarity and simplicity.

⁴ Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," The Virtue of Selfishness, p.13; The Ayn Rand Lexicon, p. 407.

Unitary Mission Churches, following a course of individual study and successful examination.

Church of Reason doctrine is limited to four basic vows or promises to which each member pledges to himself or herself, those being (1) I will seek to know, as evasion is man's worst enemy; (2) I affirm that reason is the only means to knowledge, as faith, revelation, and emotion are not tools of cognition; (3) I will attempt to act on the basis of knowledge, as action from ignorance forfeits control of life; and (4) I will not initiate force or fraud, as my right to life depends on my recognition of the same right in others.

Beyond that basic doctrine, there are some additional principles upon which most Church of Reason members agree, and which may be helpful to nonmembers or potential members in gaining a deeper understanding of the general nature of the fundamental premises which tend to unite us. Some of these principles are:

- Truth is that which corresponds to, and is validated by, the facts of reality.
- Nature is uniform, which is the Law of Causality, that is, the same cause in the same circumstance will produce the same effect;
- Thoughts, propositions, statements, and descriptions may be contradictory, but there are no contradictions in reality;
- Humans are capable of contextually-certain knowledge but are not infallible;
- Humans have the capacity to know the facts of reality but are not omniscient;
- Life-long happiness is the moral purpose of life, proceeding from happiness being the successful state of life;
- Egoism (never to be confused with egotism), otherwise known as rational self-interest or selfishness is the proper human moral doctrine;
- Morality is objective, in other words, all that which adds to, promotes and enhances meaningful human life is the good, the moral; and all that which subtracts from, diminishes or destroys meaningful human life is the bad, the immoral; and that human survival depends upon adherence to objective morality; and
- The human consciousness, the human soul, is sacred.

Beyond the individual personal promises to oneself, our shared premises which are the foundation of our association, we recognize that each of us is an individual mind, and it is for each of us to interpret and apply them. We recognize, too, that sharing a reasoned outlook, it is natural that most of us will agree on many things. But, we recognize that reasonable persons may, and often do, disagree on many issues. We ask only that reason be the standard for resolving such disagreements or allowing them to stand. The Church of Reason is neither a political action committee, a reform school, nor a debating society; we are, rather, seekers of truth, and our individual enlightenment is the fundamental aim of our religion.

The Church of Reason sanctuary has been established and set apart for worship of the noble human spirit through the action of its members and congregants based upon the exercise of their reason (and common sense), dedicated to its proper and sacred uses. Specifically, the Church of Reason sanctuary is dedicated:

For worship of the noble human spirit through the pursuit of knowledge;
For the teaching of Reason, Purpose and Self-Esteem;
For the celebration of life-cycle events.

For the comfort of all who may be struggling or who mourn;
For strength to those who endeavor to achieve;
For light to those who seek knowledge and achievement;

For the enhancement of family life;
For teaching and guiding the young;
For the perfecting of our moral strength;

For the harboring of devotees of reason;
For the promotion of the sacredness of reason;
For the extension of the Noble Human Spirit;

And the Church of Reason sanctuary is dedicated:

To individual self-sustaining productivity;
To an honorable honesty in all things;
To devotion to our individual integrity.

To the realization of irreplaceable independence;
To ever rendering justice to all;
To the achievement of lives deservingly lived with pride.

And the Church of Reason sanctuary is dedicated:

In the unity of rationality;
In the bond of mutual respect and affection;
In respect and good will to all who reason.

In gratitude for the labors of all who live and serve the Church;
In loving remembrance of those who have finished their course;
In recognition of and appreciation for our capacity to achieve happiness, on earth,
through reason.

The Church of Reason has also established a library and set it apart for the education and enjoyment of its members and congregants, dedicated to its several proper and sacred uses.

The Hebrew and Christian Bibles (Old Testament) states, at Proverbs 4:7, that “wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom and with all thy getting get understanding,” and at

Proverbs 22:6, states that “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The Church of reason library is dedicated:

To the service of little children, that beautiful seed-thoughts of truth may be planted in their receptive, impressionable minds, leading them to greater knowledge and thus happier lives.

To the parents who may use the materials in the library as tools in helping their children shape their lives.

To the youth, that their zeal may be seasoned with wisdom, that their choices, in all human relationships, may be made in harmony with nature, and that they may increasingly develop in discernment of the true and the false so that they may be better able to reject the false and accept the true as they advance from youth to maturity; and

To the edification of all residents who live within the confines of the community, as well as Church members, that it may be as a spring of freely-flowing living water, satisfying minds thirsting for knowledge, as a beacon, set high upon a moral and intellectual pinnacle, directing the hearts of all who see it glow in paths of peace, understanding and good will.

The Church of Reason holds weekly Sunday morning gatherings, – sometimes informal and sometimes with a formal Search Service -- on the premise that persistence is perhaps the most effective character trait available to each of us in achieving our objectives; and, accordingly, it is fitting that each of us set aside regular times to reflect upon our values and goals, and to plan and rededicate ourselves to their achievement. We come together for such gatherings in the bonds of mutual respect and affection, which we seek to earn and maintain through our actions based upon the exercise of our reason. And we join together to take advantage of having others to think with, and to use our combined capacities and efforts in the discovery and dissemination of knowledge on matters of common interest, particularly concerning ultimate, true and good issues, and the application of that knowledge to the concrete particulars of our lives. Our joining together has the further advantage of providing a forum to enjoy the company of congenial minds.

The Church of Reason marriage ceremony formalizes the couple’s long-term commitment to each other. In the ceremony, the bride and groom commit themselves to the long-term sharing of their lives in order to continue and enhance the happiness which they have found in one another. It asserts that the bride and groom believe that their development, both as individuals and as husband and wife, will be strengthened. In addition to the minister asking the bride and groom to affirm that each will have the other to be his or her wedded spouse, to share life and tenderly care for each other in all the varying circumstances of their lives, the minister also asks the couple to affirm that they will treat with respect any children they have or plan to have, to share in their loving care and moral upbringing, and to work together toward the children becoming reasoning, productive and happy adults.

The Church of Reason funeral or memorial service is held to commemorate the life of the deceased, to express love and affection for him or her, and to bring some consolation and

comfort to the deceased's family and friends. It recognizes that death is final, the end of a life, and that that reality cannot be altered; but that the gathering and commemoration may be helpful in overcoming any sense of unreality about the death and bring out the finality of the parting, the fact that past relationships have been severed and that a new relationship of memory alone must be established.

The final part of the Church of Reason anatomy, known in most religions as "holy days" and/or "holidays" have not yet been formalized, but certain, appropriate holy days have been suggested over the years, and individual members and/or congregants may, if they have chosen to do so, celebrate any and/or all in the privacy of their personal lives. Those such holy days identified to date are:

- Atlas Day, which corresponds in date with the American (or Canadian) Memorial Day, honoring those who are or have been willingly exposed to physical jeopardy in defense of individual rights;
- Freedom Day, corresponding in date to America's July 4 Independence celebration, reaffirming the value of freedom and honoring those who have contributed to the advance of individual liberty;
- Feast of the Bountiful Harvest, corresponding in date to American Labor Day, a symbolic experience of the variety and joy of being productive creatures in a universe where happiness is possible;
- Seekers of Eternal Truths Founder's Day, November 1, reaffirming dedication to intellectual honesty and remembering the Church founders;
- Thanksgiving, corresponding to the American (or Canadian) Thanksgiving, honoring our fellows and forebearers for enhancing our lives through their participation in a division of labor society, showing appreciation to those who specialize in any of the numerous productive activities which make it possible for us to experience and enjoy a virtually limitless range of the products, both physical and spiritual, of human insight and energy; and
- Festival of Renewal, December 31 and January 1, a celebration rejoicing in the renewed opportunity to achieve a more successful and happier life.

In addition, one more holy day, written by the author of this paper, is the celebration of one's own birthday, since, just as it is fitting that each of us set aside regular times, such as weekly or monthly Church meetings, to reflect upon our values and goals, and to plan and rededicate ourselves to their achievement, it is also fitting for certain reflection on at least an annual basis. Such reflection should include, I believe, the following:

Today, as I begin another year of my life, I am thankful, once again, for my life:

To those who gave me life,

To those who nurtured and tenderly cared for me in infancy, childhood and adolescence,

To those who contributed to and provided me with the clothing, shelter and food required to sustain me to adulthood, and

To those who have educated, coached and mentored me both in childhood and as an adult.

And, today, as I begin another year of my life, I am reminded:

That I have the marvelous opportunity to reason,

That my mind is competent to judge and I am worth living,

That I may continue to make mistakes along the way, but the more I reason and judge, the more likely I am to make better judgments, and

That my continued responsibility to and for myself for intellectual and spiritual growth keeps me on the path of life-long happiness, the proper moral purpose of life.

In conclusion, I quote our late Philosophical Club member, Cal Wight, who suggested the term “working religion” to describe not only the present state of the Church of Reason, but our future state as well. Although Cal didn’t explain it quite this way, what I think he meant by that, and intended to convey, is that since each Church of Reason member is on a life-long journey of the pursuit of truth and thus happiness, we must continue to be flexible to the realities of the universe as they unfold to us through science and adapt our lives and thus our individual religious beliefs in accord with what actually is. Perhaps Cal meant, too, what our late Director, Bob Dunn, said many times – you don’t found a religion overnight.

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