

Elton Trueblood *speaks*

As a writer, speaker, minister, teacher, and leader in the Yokefellow movement, Elton Trueblood has exerted a tremendous influence upon thousands of persons throughout the United States and in other countries and has exercised a powerful impact upon the religious and philosophical thinking of recent times.

Born in Iowa in 1900, he obtained his education in a one-room school, in a nearby high school, and in Penn College. His graduate work was done at Brown University, at Harvard, and at Johns Hopkins, from which he won his doctorate.

His teaching has included years of effective instruction at Guilford College, Haverford College, Stanford University, and Earlham College, plus shorter stints in other institutions. During President Eisenhower's administration, he served as a staff member of the United States Information Agency.

Probably his greatest influence has come through more than 30 books, many of them short, incisive, superbly-written accounts on a wide range of topics, plus innumerable pamphlets and articles. Among his many popular volumes are *The Company of the Committed*, *The Life We Prize*, *General Philosophy*, *The Idea of a College*, *The People Called Quakers*, *The Humor of Christ*, *Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish*, and *The Prayers of Samuel Johnson*.

For many years he has criss-crossed the U.S.A. speaking in college chapels and in the churches of many denominations, leading retreats, and meeting with groups of ministers and theological students, delivering stirring, cogent messages combining an evangelical, Christ-centered approach with intellectually up-to-date scholarship. The importance of the laity and the need for an ecumenical Christianity have been among his foremost concerns.

In the following excerpts, he speaks:

ON OUR CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATION . . .

"The terrible danger of our time consists in the fact that ours is a cut-flower civilization. Beautiful as cut flowers may be, and much as we use our ingenuity to keep them looking fresh for a while, they eventually die, and they die because they are severed from their sustaining roots. We are trying to maintain the dignity of the individual apart from the deep faith that every man is made in God's image and is therefore precious in God's eye."

"The means of our culture, i.e., our technics, are developed wonderfully by rational experimental and precise thought, but the ends have not kept pace."

"Actually most of us like war better than we like peace. We like it because it saves us from boredom, from mediocrity, from dullness. . . . The consequence is that millions will prefer war so long as they lack in their inner lives a living faith which gives significance to their existence."

"Modern man is overimpressed with his own achievements."

"Evil structures are indeed precarious, but evil structures are not automatically followed by something better."

"Whatever contemporary analysts may say, this is not the post-Christian age. It may be the pre-Christian age, but that is another matter altogether."

"If we could put the same keen intelligence and careful judgment into the revival of faith and the proper objects of faith that we now put into the production of magnificent machines, man's life on this earth might come into a new and glorious day."

ON CHRIST, CHRISTIANS, AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH . . .

"The Christian Movement was initiated as the most radical of all revolutions."

"Idealization of humanity is a very poor substitute for faith in the Living God."

"A Christian is a person who confesses that, amidst the manifold and confusing voices heard in the world, there is one Voice which supremely wins his full assent, uniting all his powers, intellectual and emotional, into a single pattern of self-giving. That voice is Jesus Christ. A Christian not only believes that He was; he believes in Him with all his heart and strength and mind. Christ appears to the Christian as the one stable point or fulcrum in all the relativities of history. Once the Christian has made this primary commitment, he still has perplexities, but he begins to know the joy of being used for a mighty purpose by which his little life is dignified."

"Somewhere in the world there should be a society consciously and deliberately devoted to the task of seeing how love can be made real and demonstrating love in practice; . . . there is really only one candidate for this task. If God, as we believe, is truly revealed in the life of Christ, the most important thing to Him is the creation of centers of loving fellowship, which in turn infect the world. Whether the world can be redeemed in this way, we do not know, but it is at least clear that there is no other way."

"Because we cannot reasonably expect to erect a constantly-expanding structure of social activism upon a constantly-diminishing foundation of faith, attention to the cultivation of the inner life is our first order of business, even in a period of radical social change."

ON CHURCH UNITY . . .

"There is a conceivable kind of unity which is based on the meager uniformity of the least common denominator. This would be dull, indeed, and, moreover, it would be lacking in power. It would be hard to become enthusiastic or excited about such a prospect. There is, however, another ideal and that is the pooling of rich resources. The result is not the dull monotone, but the brilliance of the patchwork quilt or the beauty of the mosaic."

ON MINISTRY AND THE VOCATION OF WITNESS . . .

"There is no possibility of an effective Church unless it includes a pastoral system, but this must never be construed as a system with a single pastor. The magic lies neither in the emphasis upon the laymen alone, nor upon professionals alone, but in the creative combination. Actually each member is called to be a pastor to somebody, because each stands where someone asks questions which demand answers. The trouble with the ordinary pastoral system is not that it goes too far, but that it does not go far enough. There can be no vital Church without a multi-pastoral system."

"Almost all astute observers agree that the growth of the lay or universal ministry is the growing edge of vital Christianity today."

"The churches which are succeeding best are those in which the involvement of the rank and file of the members is most nearly complete."

"The vocation of the Christian is threefold: he is called to pray, to serve, and to think; and he is called to do all three together."

"Service without devotion is rootless; devotion without service is fruitless."

ON THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE COMMITTED . . .

"Much of the uniqueness of Christianity in its original emergence consisted of the fact that simple people could be amazingly powerful when they were members one of another."

"We understand the idea of the Church better when we see it as a functioning fellowship."

"While we must never minimize the value of the witness of the separated individual, we should also recognize that sometimes the best witness is that of the Church as a whole."

"No man is strong enough or devout enough to operate alone."

"The Company of Jesus is not people streaming to a shrine and it is not people making up an audience for a speaker; it is laborers engaged in the harvesting task of reaching their perplexing and seeking brethren with something so vital that, if it is received, it will change their lives."

". . . disciplined fellowship never emerges if the discipline is presented as a vague and general idea; it must be made explicit."

"If we want to make a difference, here is a clear way. Make all within your society members of the crew and permit no passengers."

"One rare but powerful item of discipline is the requirement that the recruit of the company undertake a personal experience of solitude at least once a month."

"We are making a great step forward when we realize that there is no inevitable contradiction between the idea of the scattered Church and the gathered Church. We gather in order to scatter."

ON THE PEOPLE CALLED QUAKERS . . .

"The Quaker faith, in the minds of its major interpreters has always been 'Christianity writ plain.' Though Quakers were not the only ones who have declared this noble intention, there are very few others who have taken it more seriously."

"Any uniqueness in Quaker religious thought is not to be found in its novelty, but rather in its recovery of something which is easily lost, the idea that religion must be genuinely experiential. The God who is like Jesus Christ can indeed be inferred by argument, but that is never sufficient. It is experience, and especially the experience of a changed life, that is the true verification. This is another way of saying that Quakers have placed strong emphasis on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."

"It is widely known that Quakers have stressed the Inner Light in all men, but it is not equally well known that Quakers have stressed, at the same time, the identity of this Light with Christ Himself. . . . The emphasis not merely on the historical Jesus, but also upon the Universal Saving Light of Christ, is the most nearly original Quaker contribution to religious thought."

"... the Quaker movement would never have continued or even begun, apart from a powerful ministry."

"Quakerism was a missionary movement before it was an organized religious society."

"The secret of Quakerism, if there is one, lies in the close and constant marriage between religious experience and social concern."

"Far from being merely a historically interesting movement, Quakerism is a live option . . . a practical alternative for contemporary men and women."

ON THE IDEA OF A COLLEGE . . .

"The deepest reason for a college is an unrealized ideal. What inspires her men and women is the vision of a society of learning and teaching and pioneering that continues to be a community of understanding, whatever the prejudice and confusion of the surrounding world. Because men are imperfect creatures, this vision is never fully achieved, even by the good college, but it is this vision which provides the college with a reason for being."

"The entire college exists for the sake of producing significant changes in the lives of men and women who enter the community voluntarily in the hope of personal improvement and consequent effectiveness."

"The college is to be judged by the quality of its human product. . . . The purpose of a college is the production of persons who are both more civilized and more civilizing."

"The college should stir up so many desires in people that an entire lifetime will not suffice to give opportunity for their full satisfaction."

"As we understand the idea of a college better, we shall do all we can to bridge any chasm which exists between administration and teachers and to avoid, if possible, its development. The chief way to do this is by the clear recognition that what we are producing is a team."

"It is easy to envisage a good college with poor buildings, but it is not possible to envisage a good college with poor teachers."

"Part of our failure now is fundamentally a failure of expectancy. We expect too little and we get what we expect."

ON THE JOURNEY OF LIFE . . .

"What is most attractive about the entire conception of life as a journey is the widespread realization that no man walks alone."

"When we think about it deeply, we realize that what we desire and what we require is some achievement, no matter how modest, which makes a difference. We should hate to come to the end of our days only to find that we had merely gone through the motions, carrying the bricks up the hill and then carrying them down again."

"The heart of the idea which has helped to give meaning to my life for a quarter century is that, to be a Christian, I must be yoked with others because I am yoked to Christ."

"Both the price and the glory of our finitude are indicated by the fact that we do not arrive; we are always on the way."

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