

# View

## Believing *that* vs. Believing *in*

David Elton Trueblood [1900-1994] was an influential Quaker author and theologian, especially during the 50's and 60s. He was an advisor to presidents, president of a college and chaplain at both Harvard and Stanford Universities. He authored 33 books, many of which I have read with profit. Of course, I do not agree with everything he said, but I feel that his view of the importance of commitment and the significance of the church are worth reading. It is in that spirit that I am publishing the following excerpt.

We all understand, when we give our minds carefully to the question, that to be an effective Christian it is not enough to be an individual believer... Men are often brave and good alone, but they are never really effective unless they share in some kind of group reality...

The crucial question today is not whether we must have a fellowship, for on that point we are reasonably clear; the crucial question concerns the character of the fellowship. The more we think about it the more

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quence that they try to convince other men that "there is a God." Although the... case for theistic realism, is an important intellectual discipline and one which a true scholar will never neglect or even minimize, the chief barrier to a renewed vitality in the Christian society is not lack of belief. Millions who feel no sense of urgency about the Christian endeavor will list themselves, when inquiry is made, as believers of some sort.

There is no better way, in contemporary thought, of approaching the meaning of commitment than by reference to Marcel's distinction between "believing that," and "believing in" (Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 1960, p. 77). To be committed is to believe *in*. Commitment, which includes belief but far transcends it, is determination of the self to act upon conviction...

### The church of Christ

Meeting at 900 E. Natoma  
PO Box 492  
Folsom, CA 95630  
916/608-4866

#### Elders

Forrest Brown: 530/295-9230  
Randy Clark: 916/939-5066  
Rich Ladd: 916/774-9048  
David Posey: 530/676-9514  
Dennis Reagan: 916/797-5539

#### Deacons

Brent Agee: 916/786-0436  
Bryan Byrd: 916/351-9320  
David Byrd: 916/985-6564  
Barrett Cain: 916/351-0774  
Michael Caisse: 530/672-2902  
Jeff Clark: 916/985-8689  
John Daniels: 916/985-3090  
Jerry Deschler: 916/285-9115  
Steve Dickey: 916/983-1071  
Eric Fields: 916/817-6495  
David Main: 650/292-5417  
Terry Raposa: 916/782-1140  
Dane Scott: 916/631-7221  
Russ Tarrant: 530/672-1748  
Steve Thompson: 916/983-4170  
Jeff Warshaw: 916/933-9399

#### Evangelist/Editor

David Posey: 530/676-9514  
dpaulposey@mac.com

#### Services

Sunday Morning Assembly  
9:30 AM  
Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM  
Wednesday Bible Study  
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.  
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[www.folsomchurch.com](http://www.folsomchurch.com)  
Webmaster: Richard Harvey

... The best light that can be thrown upon commitment is that provided by marriage. For everyone recognizes the degree to which marriage is a bold venture, undertaken without benefit of escape clauses.

The essence of all religious marriage vows is

"CHRIST APPEARS TO THE CHRISTIAN AS THE ONE STABLE POINT OR FULCRUM IN ALL THE RELATIVITIES OF HISTORY."

their unconditional quality. A man takes a woman not, as in a contract, under certain specified conditions, but "for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health." Always, the commitment is unconditional and for life. The fact that some persons fail in this regard does not change the meaning of the glorious undertaking.

... Belief *in* differs from belief *that*, in the way in which the entire self is involved. "If I believe in something," says Marcel, "it means that I place myself at the disposal of something, or that I pledge myself fundamentally, and this pledge affects not only what I have but also what I am" (Op. cit., p.77).

We shall not be saved by anything less than commitment, and the commitment will not be effective unless it finds expression in a committed fellowship. If we have any knowledge of human nature, we begin by rejecting the arrogance of self-sufficiency. Committed men need the fellowship not because they are strong, but because they are—and know that they are—fundamentally sinful and weak.

It is generally recognized that though commitment is of the first importance, men may have more than one object of their commitment. The full commitment of millions of Germans, prior to and during the Great War, was to Adolf Hitler and his cause. Other millions are today committed to Marxism. This is why it is now recognized that Marxian communism is fundamentally a religion rather than a mere economic or political system. The fact that it denies God does not keep it from being religious.

Christians have no monopoly on commitment; they simply have a different object. 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.

DP

#### JESUS: BELIEF THAT OR BELIEF IN?

This article reminds me of John 2:23-25 where John says that "many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing." They believed that he did the signs, therefore, they believed "in his name" (became followers). However, the next two verses (v. 24-25) tell us that Jesus did not entrust himself to them because he knew their hearts. We infer that he knew that their "belief" was shallow – believing *that*, not believing *in*.

We see this again in John 6 where Jesus says they were following not even because they saw the signs but because they ate their fill of loaves (v. 26, after the feeding of the 5,000). When they inquired about how they might do the work of God Jesus told them that the work of God is that you "believe in him whom he has sent" (v. 29).

That their faith was shallow is proved later on, as recorded by John in the same chapter. After Jesus gives a particularly deep lesson about his flesh and blood, the disciples respond with, "this is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (v. 60). Then, v. 66 tells us that after this many of his disciples "turned back and no longer walked with him" (v. 66).

They believed that Jesus had some power and did some "neat" things, up to a point; but they failed to grasp his true significance; they didn't believe *in* Jesus, and therefore obtain, as the outcome of their faith, the salvation of their souls" (see I Pet. 1:9).

DP