

2014

## Foreword to A Place to Stand

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### Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul N., "Foreword to A Place to Stand" (2014). *Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies*. 331.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/331>

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# FOREWORD

By Paul N. Anderson

Known as “the Dean of American Religious Writing,” D. Elton Trueblood did for American audiences something similar to what C.S. Lewis achieved in Britain. He helped believers embrace their faith and to give an account for the hope that is within them (I Peter 3:15). Author of thirty-one books, followed by a half-dozen collections of his essays, Trueblood also encouraged generations of other emerging writers so that his influence was multiplied many times over. Addressing such issues as the vitalization of the church and the equipping of the laity for ministry, he did more to inspire “thinking evangelicalism” than any other author in his day. And, Trueblood’s most important book within that contribution is *A Place to Stand*.

In the central entryway at Dayton International Airport there used to be a large globe, placed there by the National Cash Register Company (NCR) as an advertisement for its headquarters in Dayton, Ohio. This rotating model of Planet Earth provided the perfect spot to meet incoming travelers. “Meet you at the globe,” worked perfectly for an airport rendezvous of any kind. For several years no one thought anything was wrong, that is, until Elton noticed that “the world” was rotating from right to left—making the sun rise in the west and set in the east—instead of left to right. The next day, Elton wrote the President of NCR and informed him that “the world” was “turning in the wrong direction.” Immediately, the company’s engineers restored the right direction of the planet’s movement, and the sculpture not only continued to serve its purpose, but it did so truthfully.

In *A Place to Stand*, Trueblood also signals modern readers that the world is turning in the wrong direction in its understandings of God, humanity, and the meaning of life. In the light of truth, things need to change. As did C.S. Lewis a quarter century earlier,<sup>1</sup> Trueblood confronts modern tendencies to sidestep the question of God and even more pointedly challenges trends seeking to diminish the place of God in people’s lives. Shifting the question from whether Jesus was like

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<sup>1</sup> In his autobiography, *While it is Day* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), Trueblood expresses his desire to do in America what C.S. Lewis had done in the UK (p. 68) with *The Predicament of Modern Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944). Continuing that endeavor, he notes later that *A Place to Stand* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) was the first of four books addressing the problem of unbelief in America (p. 80) and even expresses appreciation to C.S. Lewis for his own recovery of the place of Christ and his unique relation to the Father in Christian theology (*While it is Day*, pp. 99-103). What Lewis attempted as an expert in literature, Trueblood performed as an expert in philosophy and a Quaker historian.

God to whether God is “like Jesus” becomes not only a valid argument for God’s existence, but even more pointedly it elucidates the character of God. Because Jesus was loving, kind, wise we know that God is. Where some might imagine God to be vindictive, cruel, uncaring, Jesus reveals the opposite. As Archimedes said in days of old, “Give me a place to stand, and I can move the entire earth.” For the modern believer, Jesus Christ becomes a solid point of certitude, turning the world back to God’s love and presence; this book explains how that is so.

With so many others whom Elton Trueblood encouraged in their development,<sup>2</sup> I owe him a great deal! He encouraged me to come and study with him at Earlham, and one of the gifts he gave me (as I also was also pastoring a small church in the area—West River Friends Meeting) was to reflect together on how the previous sermon had gone...and how the next one might go. He provided me a key to Teague Library, his study, for my two years at the Earlham School of Religion, of which I made great use in my studies. More importantly, we had many conversations together about faith, ministry, and our callings to impact the world through the spoken and written word. For Elton’s inspiring counsel and encouragement I am forever grateful.

I am also grateful to Jim Newby<sup>3</sup> and Samuel Trueblood for their encouragement to get some of Elton’s most important books back into print, and I am delighted that Mickey Maudlin and the publishers at Harper’s have chosen to make some of their best works of the past available for new audiences. In providing a modest editing of the text, I’ve sought to make the language more inclusive, but the references to contemporary literature remain as they were. With the publication of this book in 1969, it is no coincidence that the “Death of God” movement of the 1960s began to wane in the 1970s. Given the rise of the “Science and Religion” discussions and “New Atheism” debates in recent years, Elton Trueblood’s most theological of his thirty-seven books is sure to make a difference in a continuing way; he even expressed his belief in his autobiography (p. 81) that *A Place to Stand* would be the most enduring of all his books.

In turbulent times, where latest trends and newest waves often rehash older positions, thoughtful persons need—now as much as ever—*a place to stand*.

And, that’s what it takes to move the world.

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<sup>2</sup> While the number of Elton’s protégés is too large to list here, I have mentioned some whose works have been influenced most directly by his mentorship in editor’s notes below, including most notably Jim Newby, Richard Foster, and Howard Macy.

<sup>3</sup> See especially James R. Newby, *Elton Trueblood: Believer, Teacher and Friend* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990); and *The Best of Elton Trueblood, An Anthology* (Nashville: Impact Books, 1978).