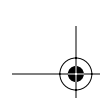


Preface

Western secularism's radical inclusiveness is sweeping over us, causing Western Christianity to drift farther away from biblical faith than it has ever been. This drift, which presents one of the greatest challenges facing the Christian church, is occurring not only outside us, but within our own spirits. So it is no surprise that Christians today are terribly confused, both as individuals and institutions. Some people see this clearly. Others are in denial, making the situation worse by heading precipitously in the wrong direction, even though their intentions may be good. In the confusion, those that would speak prophetically are judged presumptuous, while pragmatic voices are considered realistic. The purpose of the following essays is not only to shout out in alarm but also, on a more modest level, to bear witness to what I have tried to live out in the past eight decades as I've sought to follow Christ. If this personal narrative articulates and confirms any heartfelt issues that you also sense, it will serve its purpose.

I have written these essays in the genre of dialogue so that you can readily engage with the ideas presented. In the appendix you will find ways to further explore the role of dialectics in personal communication about faith. All the royalties from all my books, including this one, are donated to the Institute of Religion and Culture, which has been established to provide educational grants for young Christians in key situations who illustrate the principles I am describing in this book. If you





desire to communicate with me, please visit the website we have established for this purpose at <www.religionandculture.org>.

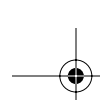
We live not only personally but publicly. The public aspect of Christian life should foster our growth in Christ, but instead it seems to create confusion. “I go to church, but . . .” “I serve this organization, but . . .” “I train at this theological college, but . . .” “I believe in Christian ministry, but . . .” Why do we qualify our expressions of faith? Why indeed do we question the institutional structures throughout our society? This book is for the “exiles,” those who need the moral courage to move away from the familiar and the conventional and into the dangerously exposed places, to prophetically critique our cultural norms and institutional attitudes.

Faithfulness to biblical convictions always calls us to live “dangerously on the edge” of our culture. This is not a call to individualism and independence of spirit. It is an invitation to experience more deeply what it means to become a faithful witness to Christ. This process requires that we have the moral courage and selflessness to confront cultural challenges, resisting the insidious pressure to depend on techniques instead of the love and Spirit of God. It requires that we foster spiritual friendship and allow community to grow spiritually rather than be organized artificially. It demands that we be more personally available to others in sharing the joy of God’s salvation.

Some twenty years ago I asked Malcolm Muggeridge, then near the end of his life, if he regretted anything about his life as an author. He replied that he wished he had written “against consensus”—as if he had not been the great lampoonist of society as editor of *Punch*.

“I mean,” he continued, “against conventional religious consensus.” He had been a late convert to Christ and left this task undone. “But you should do it,” he added. I laughed incredulously at this inconceivable assignment.





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Perhaps Malcolm sowed a mustard seed that is now grown into a small plant. This book is the confessions of a life spent recklessly, and it is intended to support and encourage other joyous exiles who may feel as I did in response to Muggeridge: as if they were being exhorted to engage in mission impossible. It is my hope that these joyous exiles, though they may be hidden in small groups in diverse settings, continue to grow into a global network of friendships.

It is to such that I myself am indebted in writing this book. Invidious as it is to select names, I am particularly grateful for the editorial support of Bob Fryling, publisher of InterVarsity Press, of Gary Deddo, who has been my skillful editor, and of his team. Helpful reviews of my manuscript have been provided by Pat Calvo, Darrell Johnson, Dean Overman, Bill Reimer, Skip Ryan, Paul Helm and, lastly, Sally Voorhies.

I am thankful for my own family and for loyal friends who continue to give encouragement. Kelly Barbey, Craig Gay, Chris Houston, Keith Martin and Ken Stevenson serve on the board of the Institute of Religion and Culture, established to promote the explorations here presented. But whatever errors of interpretation and fact remain in this book are solely the responsibility of the author.

