

## NOTE TO THE READER

**A**s will quickly become obvious, this book contains a good deal of pointed critique. Much of it I have shared in lectures and presentations around the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK. Some of my listeners have reviled it as “church bashing,” while others celebrate it as prophetic. I have never claimed to be doing either. I have no stomach for unsophisticated church bashing. Announcing that the church is like an emperor with no clothes is easy enough. Any fool can do it. And besides, the church seems altogether unchanged by such announcements. As Neil Gaiman says, “It has always been the prerogative of children and half-wits to point out that the emperor has no clothes. But the half-wit remains a half-wit, and the emperor remains an emperor.”

Neither have I ever made claim to being a prophet. A hundred years ago, Mark Twain debunked the over-valued place of the modern-day prophet with this scathing assessment: “I have done some indiscreet things in my day, but this thing of playing myself for a prophet was the worst.” Believe me, I don’t wish to be as equally indiscreet in this matter. I claim no greater insight or higher knowledge. Rather, my goal is to make a thoughtful evaluation of many facets of contemporary church and culture, and to offer helpful suggestions for Christians who wish to improve both of them in ways that are biblically sound and pleasing to God. Clearly, I am in sympathy with the multitudes of people who feel exiled outside of or, worse perhaps, within the traditional church, many whose company I have greatly enjoyed on my travels. Nevertheless, it is neither helpful nor truthful for one part of the body of Christ to dismiss the other parts as utterly defective and withdraw into a fortress constructed of self-righteousness. Thus, as a member and lover of the body of Christ, it is my hope that in this book I will engage and edify the entire church and “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Wherever I fulfill that marvelous directive from Ephesians, I give thanks, and wherever I fail it, I ask forgiveness.

Finally, I wish to thank those who have helped in the development of this book. Morling College generously granted me leave from classroom teaching to complete its writing. The Forge Missions Training Network has

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