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Preface

For many years, Western society has tended toward the secular. According to Pew Research Center, in 2014, 77 percent of Americans described themselves as “religiously affiliated,” down from 83 percent in 2007, while the number who said they were “absolutely certain” God existed fell from 71 percent to 63 percent in the same time period.¹ With the large wave of immigration from the Two-Thirds World to Western societies and the rapid growth of a monistic spiritual worldview, secularization has slowed. The trend has morphed into a predominance of postmodern pluralism or has become, as British American scholar Peter Jones describes it, a “postsecular” era. It is an age of maintaining secular critical thought while having an openness to issues of the spirit. Jones writes, “It signals the end of materialistic secular humanism and a final synthesis of mind and spirit in a cultural affirmation of Oneist [monistic] untruth.”² Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, wrote as follows:

If you read Eric Kaufmann’s *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?* (2010) and follow the latest demographic

research, you will know that the world is not inevitably becoming more secular. The percentage of the world's population that are non-religious, and that put emphasis on individuals determining their own moral values, is shrinking. The more conservative religious faiths are growing very fast. No one studying these trends believes that history is moving in the direction of more secular societies.³

Led by the culture makers in positions of influence, the past trend toward secularism in the West usually meant getting rid of Christian vestiges displayed in public spaces. Thus crosses, the Ten Commandments, and Christmas crèches were removed. With the newer trend toward pluralism, however, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and First Nations symbols are displayed, such as those we see on the popular “coexist” bumper sticker. Now US postage stamps are published honoring Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Eid, and Chinese New Year. If an area is designated for religious use on public property or at a school, it is usually meant to be used by those of all faiths. The way in which secularists deal with religion has moved toward a pluralist's approach. This includes welcoming Muslim, Wiccan, Universalist, Roman Catholic, and Protestant prison and military chaplains.

This often introduces new challenges to our pluralistic society, however. Already, we here in the United States see trends such as secular university chapels meant for people of all faiths being taken over by Muslim students, with all trappings of Christianity removed, including the pews. At public forums such as school graduations, the mention of Jesus in opening prayer is

disallowed. A moment of silence is preferred over a prayer in public venues. Christmas is no longer celebrated as the birth of Christ, simply as a holiday of the season along with Hanukkah, but the mayor of Philadelphia has made the two major Muslim Eid holidays official city holidays. Muslim public school students there are given permission to leave school on Fridays at noon to attend prayer at their local mosques, yet in many schools it is difficult or impossible to form a Christian club or sing Christmas carols with Christ-centered words. On some college campuses, Christian ministries are not permitted or, if they are, they are required to allow nonbelievers to be officers in their leadership.⁴ Additionally, these Christian groups are given more restrictive guidelines than other campus clubs, such as those pertaining to advertising and “giving out free materials, such as Christian books.”⁵ In other words, true pluralism has died.

New expressions of religion are appearing on our landscape. Now numerous neighborhoods in North America and Europe hear the call to prayer before dawn as new mosques are being built with large infusions of Middle Eastern oil money. The student body at a public high school in Upper Darby, a community outside of Philadelphia, comprises immigrants from all over the world, representing at least ninety languages. The same area is home to the largest concentration of Sikhs in the United States. Additionally, Hindu and Buddhist temples and meditation centers are popping up in communities nationwide.

Christians no longer live in isolated clusters in which most people believe as we do. In the previous generation, Christianity was the accepted religion of Western culture. Bible reading and prayer to the Christian God was part of the daily schedule in schools. Now believers in Christ interact with people from many

different faith traditions. Most in North America believe it is important to maintain active, healthy relationships with people of other religious faiths. They are predisposed toward not judging those from other faiths as to whether these individuals know God, how spiritual they are, or if their faith leads to salvation. However, this is usually because they are not well-informed on the principles of their own faith or knowledgeable about the other religions, as opposed to being purposely accepting of other faiths.⁶ On the other hand, 60 percent of people of non-Christian faith in the United States, most of whom are immigrants and refugees, say that they do not know a Christian. These newcomers are isolated from the Christian community, which has yet to reach out to them; they remain mostly in their own subcultures, as do many Christians.

While secular humanism has pockets of predominance in academia, Hollywood, and some cultural communities, the trend today is the vast majority of people claiming to have spirituality. Thus our society has become one in which “the cultured elites are trying to preside over a people who are very spiritual,” leading to continual conflicts.⁷ The difference today over a few decades ago is that while in the past spirituality through Christ was very much out of step with the trend toward secularism, now it is seen as one option among many forms of spirituality. The rub, however, comes when Christians proclaim Christ as the exclusive means for redemptive spirituality. Inherent in this pluralism is a rapidly rising new agnosticism that requires conformity from all in society to what has recently become our new civil religion.⁸

This rising spirituality does not mean that there is a corresponding rise in belief in God, since formerly held categories for spirituality no longer hold. Surveys indicate that more people

pray than believe in God. Anthony Giddens, professor of sociology at the University of Cambridge, explains.

First, religion should not be identified with monotheism. . . . Most religions involve several deities. . . . In certain religions there are no gods at all. Second, religion should not be identified with moral prescriptions controlling the behavior of believers. . . . Third, religion is not necessarily concerned with explaining how the world came to be as it is. . . . Fourth, religion cannot be identified with the supernatural, as intrinsically involving belief in a universe “beyond the realm of the senses.”⁹

What we now increasingly encounter is people seeking mystical communion with the spirit world, and this does not fit our categories for religion. It includes an amoral value system with selective tolerance for those who do not conform to its sense of destiny.

Academics and policymakers work at eliminating Western civilization from university study curricula and keeping Christian morals from producing value judgments in student and faculty behavior. A current political movement in the United States seeks to eliminate most vestiges of Christianity from Christian colleges, including mandatory chapel attendance and Bible classes, prayer, curriculums based on a Christian worldview, and adherence to a doctrinal statement.¹⁰ Colleges that impose traditional Christian rules of morality and conduct on issues regarding gender identity and sexual orientation could be stripped of public funding¹¹ and open themselves up to lawsuits.¹² Some

are even advocating that Christian colleges be stripped of their accreditation.¹³ At the same time, all sorts of ideologies, world-views, and religions are introduced as truths at “secular” universities and are considered appropriate because they are seen as acceptable pluralism and multiculturalism in our postmodern milieu. Christianity is not considered to be part of that mix. At an Ivy League university, a Christian administrative faculty member was dismissed by the dean of her department for having Christian verses on display in her office and meeting with students for prayer and Bible study. In today’s pluralist environment, talking about and expressing one’s faith in public is strongly discouraged, as faith is believed to be a private matter.

Peter Jones, Christian apologist and cultural analyst, describes our current climate. “Political correctness denies any distinctions between cultures, religions, and value systems. Thus, politically correct multiculturalism dominates the public square and the university campus and affects domestic and foreign policy.”¹⁴ It has become official United States policy to fund lobbyists and train activists to demand gay rights, gay marriage, and abortion rights, and to deny foreign aid to majority countries that refuse to comply with our monistic religious-based cultural imperialism.

Secular university campuses have shifted toward emphasizing pluralism and multiculturalism, and not just at a practical level where all religious views get a voice at the table; rather, welcoming diversity is now an ideology and movement. Two types of pluralism have emerged. The first is a militant form that says one can have a voice at the table only as long as one espouses views that are pluralistic. The second form, which is true pluralism, allows for all with differing religious and philosophical

viewpoints to express them, no matter how committed people are to their ideals.¹⁵ Obviously, the first form is more oppressive and restrictive, while the second allows for true diversity and freedom. The challenge is when one group's freedom takes over another group's right to freely exercise or express their faith.

Now even many church-related colleges are teaching religion as if all options are equally valid in our multicultural context.¹⁶ Christianity, for these institutions, is just one option with no eternal truth valid for all. But as Alister McGrath explains, "The whole issue of religious pluralism has been fatally flawed by a mentality that demands that all shall be reduced to the same mold. . . . Dialogue implies respect, but it does not presuppose agreement."¹⁷

This context of our current daily lives challenges our faith. It has become closer to the pluralistic religious mixture prevalent in the Roman Empire, in which early Christians learned to live out their faith. Consequently, it makes it harder for Christians to remain neutral and passive about our faith in Christ. The former trend toward cultural Christianity has now been replaced with many who claim to be spiritual but do not associate with organized religion or identify themselves as Christian.

As true Christians, how should we think about those who do not subscribe to faith in Christ? How should we perceive their eternal destiny in light of Christianity's definitive belief in the true and only God, biblical authority, and exclusivity to salvation through Christ alone? Are we the only ones who are right? How can we know? In a time when so many are looking for tolerance, freedom, peace, and unity, how should we respond from a Christ-centered perspective? With all the daily bad news in this world, what can we expect from the future? Is there hope?

This book wades through these questions and offers thoughts to help those of us who are believers relate to people who observe other faiths or no apparent faith at all.

I thank the Lord for my wife Anne, for her encouragement and support in writing this book, and for the congregation of Tenth International Fellowship at Tenth Presbyterian Church, where I first presented these themes.