

Foreword

It's not difficult to feel the undercurrent of faith and costly witness to Jesus Christ that rushes along the chapters of Victor Shepherd's book. More problematic is where these waters lead: to a profound sense of spiritual inadequacy in the face of giants like those men and women so expertly profiled here by one of Canada's most incisive theologians.

Far from a cozy fireside book, this collection of columns from *Fellowship Magazine* will cause you to squirm. Against the narcissism of our age with its preoccupation with ease, these witnesses did God's bidding regardless of cost. No breezy "before-and-after" testimonies here; their lives demonstrate a devilish reluctance, a holding out against God for years only to culminate in a "violent" conversion as they were "seized by God" for great purposes.

As you read how each witness in his or her own way recalled the Church to its foundation—*Jesus Christ*—you will take heart in your own personal situation by the repeated comfort of Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and of good courage." Their examples will revolutionize your life as you read of unmitigated suffering in willful, almost cheerful identification with their Lord. As the author says of Karl Barth, "The Church's best theology emerges from its worst suffering."

Victor Shepherd himself models both academic rigour and pastoral excellence. He writes out of a ministry of deep passion for the Church, for his congregation of sixteen years and for the multi-dimensional suffering of humankind. His words speak us out of spiritual ease into that realm of profound identification with Christ in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). For only there can we truly enjoy the company of those witnesses the writer of Hebrews describes.

Reading these chapters one imagines, as did Bonhoeffer, that Christ is looking down at us and asking, "Who is still confessing me?" The spiritual exploits of a John Wesley or Mother Teresa may cause us to feel strangely dissatisfied with our own spiritual state and even to pray for some measure of that suffering which shapes a Christian as nothing else can. As Spurgeon said, "Affliction is the best book in a minister's library." May *So Great a Cloud of Witnesses* keen our senses closer to that marvelous finish line where the saints rejoice and Christ awaits.

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