

Tozer, A. W. *The Pursuit of God*. Vancouver: Eremitical Press, 1948. 109 pp. \$11.48.

Introduction

"His education consisted of his prayer life and his personal study of the Bible and other literature, and this allowed him to preach in a direct and passionate style free of academic terminology." So reads the back cover of *The Pursuit of God*. Tozer was a pastor as well as an author. Tozer's denomination, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, writes of him,

While on his way home from the Akron, Ohio tire company where he worked as a teen, young Aiden Wilson Tozer overheard a street preacher say, "If you don't know how to be saved...just call on God." Upon returning home, Tozer climbed into the attic and heeded the preacher's advice. . . . His writings impress on the reader the necessity to abandon worldly comforts in favor the deeper life that comes with following Christ. Living out this simple and non-materialistic lifestyle, Tozer and his wife, Ada Cecelia Pfautz, never owned a car, preferring bus and train travel. Even after becoming a well-known Christian author, he signed away much of his royalties to those who were in need. Tozer had seven children, six boys and one girl. He was buried in Ellet cemetery, Akron, Ohio, with a simple epitaph marking his grave: "A. W. Tozer — A Man of God."¹

Summary

The Pursuit of God "is a modest attempt to aid God's hungry children so to find him," that is, that through the Scriptures God's people would have "intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into him, that they may delight in his presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God himself in the core and center of their hearts" (11).

¹<http://www.cmalliance.org/about/history/tozer>. Accessed online on April 23, 2013.

Critical Evaluation

One of Tozer's strengths is his ability to put words together in powerful, memorable, Christ-honoring ways that lead the reader to an extra degree of abhorrence of sin and evil, or to an extra degree of delight in God and good. The following quotes illustrate this point. "The pronouns 'my' and 'mine' look innocent enough in print, but . . . they express the real nature of the old Adamic man *better than a thousand volumes of theology* could do. . . . God's gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by *the monstrous substitution*" (22). "If he (the Christian) will become *drastic enough* (in ousting sin), he can shorten the time of his travail from years to minutes and enter the good land long before his slower brethren who *coddle their feelings*" (27). "The ancient curse will not go out painlessly; *the tough old miser* within us will not lie down and die. . . . He must be torn out of our heart like a plant from the soil; he must be expelled in agony and blood like a tooth from the jaw; he must be expelled from our soul by violence as Christ expelled the money changers from the temple" (28).

In his ability with powerful word combinations Tozer also reminds us that "we have been guilty of that *'foul revolt'* of which Milton speaks when describing the rebellion of Satan and his hosts. We have broken with God. We have ceased to obey him or love him and in guilt and fear have fled as far as possible from his presence" (32). But God is so merciful and patient: "now he waits to show himself in *ravishing fullness* to the humble of soul and the pure in heart" (35). And "while we are looking at God, we do not see ourselves—*blessed riddance*" (78). Further, the Lord God deserves and demands full lordship for himself and full submission from us. "We owe him every honor . . . *our everlasting grief* lies in giving him anything less" (87).

The author's strength is seen not only in those doxology-inducing word combinations (review them again; they are in italics above), but also in theology woven together with godly

living. Some of his more important observations are that "the man who has God for his treasure has all things in One" (20). Tozer distinguishes between God's omnipresence (from which we cannot flee) and God's manifest presence. From that latter presence "we have fled, like Adam, to hide among the trees of the garden" (32). He reminds us that "self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us" (41). Further, Tozer reminds us of our proper place: "God is real. He is real in the absolute and final sense that nothing else is. All other reality is contingent upon his. The great Reality is God who is the Author of that lower and dependent reality which makes up the sum of created things, including ourselves (49).

Time and space fail to relate fully Tozer's thoughts on the theology of God's immanence and transcendence (55-57), or the "one vital quality" of spiritual receptivity (60). Nor can we go into detail, but need to be reminded of our impoverishing tendency to "read our chapter, have our short devotions, and rush away, hoping to make up for our deep inward bankruptcy by attending another gospel meeting or listening to another thrilling story (latest song?) told by a religious adventurer lately returned from afar" (61, 62). Yet the Lord God honors our "thousand thought-prayers as we go about the job of living" (106). Tozer's words on "the progression" (71) are likewise vital.

Perhaps nothing captures the essence of the book, and of the heart of the man of God himself, as his words on "The Gaze of the Soul" (Chapter 7): "'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith' (Heb 12:2). . . . Faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God. . . . Believing, then, is directing the heart's attention to Jesus. It is lifting the mind to 'behold the Lamb of God' and never ceasing that beholding for the rest of our lives. At first this may be difficult, but it becomes easier as we look steadily at his wondrous Person . . . (and God) establishes the heart's intention to gaze forever upon Jesus" (73-83).

Weaknesses in the book were not a few. Objections to Tozer's content are here framed as questions. Was Isaac really Abraham's idol (23-25)? Should we really dare to "insist" on matters as we approach God (27, 42)? Should we sing "great hymns to the Holy Spirit" (38)? Is it correct to say that the spiritual realm is "not future, but present"—is it not both (51)? Do we really believe in "a new God-consciousness (that) will seize upon us (52)? Is it true that God "seeks to discover himself" (58)? Does the author make an unnecessary distinction between the speaking versus the writing of God—"present Voice" versus "written Word" (66)? Is it true (Tozer said he would not "feel bad" if no one agreed with him on this point) "that every good and beautiful thing which man has produced in the world has been the result of his faulty and sin-blocked response to the creative Voice sounding over the earth" (69)? Does it not smack of existentialism and reader-response theory to say, "The Bible will never be a living book to us until we are convinced that God is articulate in his universe" (71)? Is it true that we need just one volitional committal to establish "the heart's intention to gaze forever upon Jesus" and that after this committal there is required "no more conscious effort on our part" (77)? Is it true that "When the habit of inwardly gazing Godward becomes fixed within us, we shall be ushered onto a new level of spiritual life. . . ." (82)? Dare we presume to "put God where he belongs" (91)?! Is not exalting God over all deserving and needful of more than a "once-for-all decision" (91)?

Conclusion

The Pursuit of God brings many excellent and challenging thoughts as well as many concerns—as indicated in the paragraphs above. I mined some real gold from this book. But I may have found some fool's gold also—more concerns and weaknesses than I expected. Sometimes when reading "big name" authors, Christians become star-struck and uncritically

accept everything they write. We may think, "If Dr. So-and-so wrote it, I know it's good. Who am I to second guess such a man of God?" But we must!