

Book Review

D. A. Carson, *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections of Tom Carson* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2008): 160pp..

D. A. Carson, research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is among the most influential neo-evangelical Biblical scholars of our times. This book is a biographical tribute to his father, who served as a church planter and pastor in French Canada. In the preface, Carson states,

Most of us—let us be frank—are ordinary pastors.
Dad was one of them. This little book is a modest attempt to let the voice and ministry of one ordinary pastor be heard, for such servants have much to teach us (p. 9).

Among other things, this book also reveals how a father's faithfulness can bear fruit in the life of his son.

Tom Carson came from an English-speaking family, but after his studies at Toronto Baptist Seminary in the early 1940s, he was called to be a church planter in French speaking Montreal. These were difficult days for Protestants to get a toe-hold in the Roman Catholic culture of Quebec. Carson notes, for example, that between 1950 and 1952, "Baptist ministers spent a total of eight years in jail for preaching the gospel" usually on charges like "inciting to riot" or "disturbing the peace" (pp. 11-12). The work was slow and plodding.

Carson shares with frankness of his father's frustration and depression when visible results were not forthcoming. He also confesses his father's overly self-critical attitude and "glass-half" empty pessimism. Many of these insights are drawn from his father's personal journal entries, reflecting his inner struggles with the hardships and difficulties of the ministry.

One of the low points came when Tom Carson gave up his ministry. When there had been no converts in his tiny congregation for over a year, Tom and his wife, Marge, made a private vow in the fall of 1962 that "if by the autumn of 1963 there had not been any conversions and other signs of grace, Tom would resign from the work..." (p. 90). The year passed without the desired fruit, and Carson's father resigned his pastoral charge at age fifty-two.

Carson then describes how his father entered a new season of life, working a secular job in the civil service and ministering as a layman and supply preacher. Thankfully, Tom Carson lived to see some spiritual and numerical growth among French-speaking Canadians, which began in the 1970s, the fruit of the pioneers. Carson relays one of the highlights of the latter years of his father's life, an evening in the late 1980s when one of the congregations held a special gathering to honor his parents for their service. He also notes his father's pride in reading his son's published works and his concern that they not

reflect liberal theology. Carson also describes with admiration his father's faithful care of his mother when she developed the Alzheimer's disease that eventually took her life.

Finally, Carson describes his father's own death in 1992. He notes:

When he died, there were no crowds outside the hospital, no editorial comments in the papers, no announcements on television, no mention in the Parliament, no attention paid by the nation....

But on the other side all the trumpets sounded. Dad won entrance to the only throne room that matters, not because he was a good or great man—he was, after all, a most ordinary pastor—but because he was a forgiven man. And he heard the voice of him whom he longed to hear saying, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord’” (p. 148).

This book is a tribute not only to D. A. Carson's father, but, as the author intended, to all the low-profile “ordinary” pastors who serve without fanfare or recognition. It is also a reminder to pastors and ministers that perhaps our most fruitful and long-lasting service may not come within the congregation at large but from within the little church in our own homes.

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