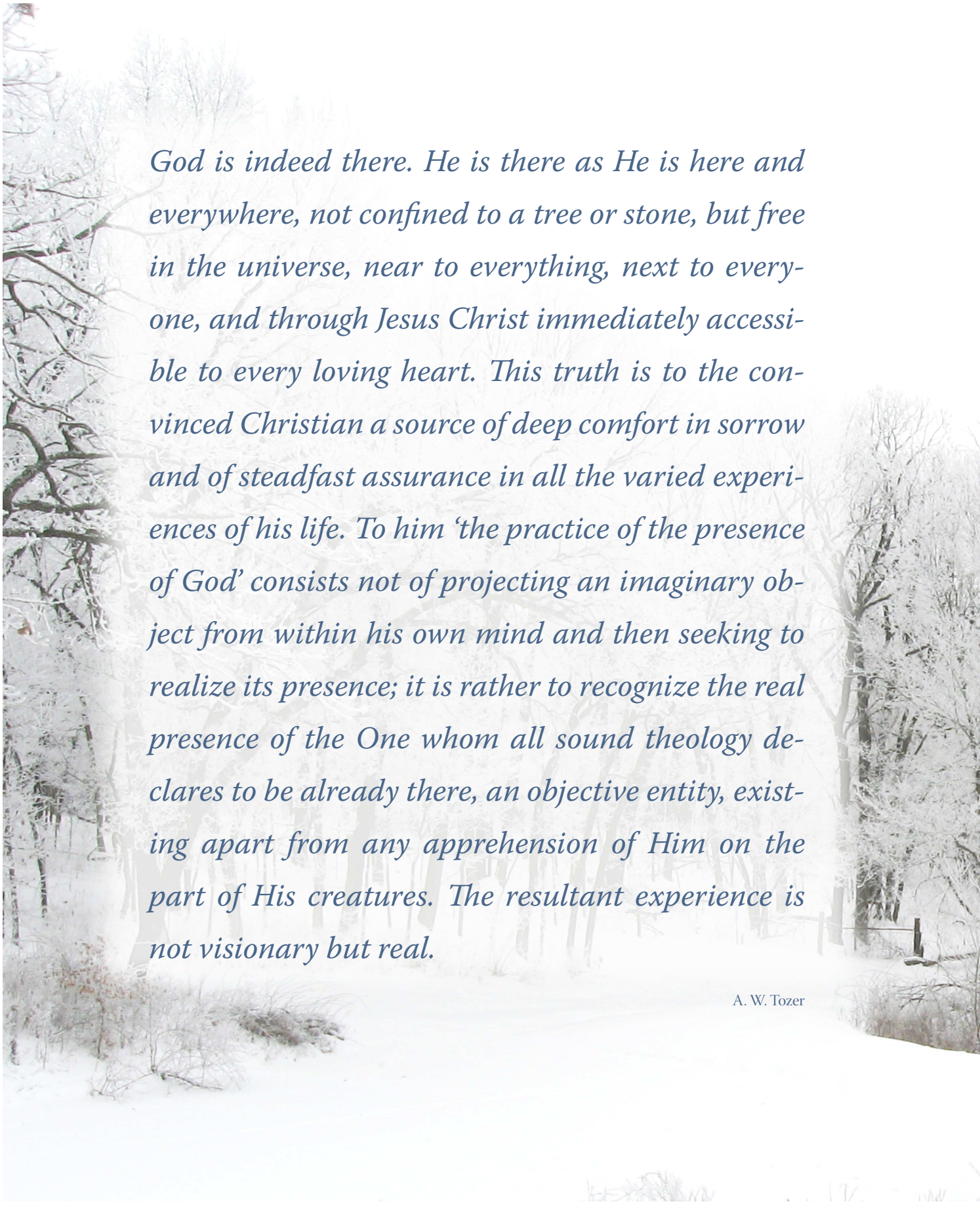


Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

REMADE

The Hope



God is indeed there. He is there as He is here and everywhere, not confined to a tree or stone, but free in the universe, near to everything, next to everyone, and through Jesus Christ immediately accessible to every loving heart. This truth is to the convinced Christian a source of deep comfort in sorrow and of steadfast assurance in all the varied experiences of his life. To him 'the practice of the presence of God' consists not of projecting an imaginary object from within his own mind and then seeking to realize its presence; it is rather to recognize the real presence of the One whom all sound theology declares to be already there, an objective entity, existing apart from any apprehension of Him on the part of His creatures. The resultant experience is not visionary but real.

A. W. Tozer

the Rainbow after the Flood

Twenty-four hours ago grass, brown and even some green, was exposed around our property. The gravel of the drive was intermingled with patches of mud. Twenty-four hours ago the ice in the pond was beginning to soften and melt, and old snow was disappearing into stray islands of white melting into the topsoil. Twenty-four hours ago the world looked like it couldn't make up its mind whether to be clothed in winter, autumn, or spring.

Then it began to snow.

Twenty-four hours later that same world is blanketed by twelve inches of new, pristine snow.

All the gritty ugliness of *brown* winter is now gone, covered over by the clean frosting of white winter.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Rome declares that God has filled this earth with not just evidence of Himself, for His sovereign majesty over it, but He has also filled this earth with clues to His ways, His nature, and thus His overarching plan for mankind.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and

unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Romans 1:18-20

These signs of Him are, of course, interpreted differently by the peoples of this fallen world—even denied their existence. Dirt is just dirt, rain is just rain, and snow is just snow, they say. The child of God maturing in His grace, however, becomes aware of God's fingerprints all around him: evidence for His creative genius and common grace, yes, but also parables for kingdom life, present and future.

Who can deny that we live in a fallen, depraved world? It is true that there is "nothing new under the sun," that what is has been before, that what is occurring has occurred before. But that doesn't mean things are not intolerably bad—just that they have indeed been this intolerably bad before.

Visually there is little to commend a winter's day without snow. The naked, twisted, black arms of the deciduous trees are stark against the too-often clouded, gray sky. The bushes have been rendered down to a dry collection of sticks, the grass is brown and lifeless. The only thing growing is our impatient yearning for spring.

This fallen earth yearns as well. It yearns to be rid of the curse inflicted on it by the treachery of man in the Garden.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly,

but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

Romans 8:19-22

Like the rainbow after the flood, a blanket of clean white snow can be for us a foretaste of the cleansing that will one day take place when our and the earth's groaning will at last be answered by the righteous judgment of God. ☸

From the smoke and pain and heat [of the preceding scenes] it is a relief to pass into the clear, clean atmosphere of the eternal morning where the breath of heaven is sweet and the vast city of God sparkles like a diamond in the radiance of His presence.

J. B. Moffatt

the Pull of the Familiar Present

Not everyone—not even every follower of Christ—looks forward with impatient yearning for the day when this weary world will be renewed. Inaugurated by Christ's return for His church, the Last Things will proceed through the Tribulation and Millennium. Then, after being released for a short while, Satan will once and for all be consumed in the lake of fire, along with his angels and disciples. The great white throne of judgment follows, after which death and Hades themselves will be added to the lake of fire. All sources of evil will then have been expunged from the earth.

But that will not be enough. It will not be enough to consign every last unbeliever, every evil nation, and even the source of evil himself, Satan, to the lake of fire. For if the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are to dwell with their people, it will not be enough to simply *cleanse* the old earth. Just as the body of Jesus could not be laid in a tomb vacated by another body, but could only be laid in a new, never-occupied tomb, so the Lord God and the resurrected

Son cannot possibly live where evil had once trod. No, they and their church will require a dwelling never before inhabited, one of pristine holiness—a *new* earth to replace the old, and a *new* Jerusalem to be the place where the children of God dwell forever with their Lord and Master.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea

was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Revelation 21:1-3

As compelling and glorious that scene, and as wonderful the contemplation of meeting our Lord in the air to begin the whole process, some of us are not quite ready to leave what we have now. This world is indeed a sorry place, and the flesh we inhabit weak and aging. Yet it is also familiar.

It is all we have ever known.
It is comfortable.

Not everyone perceives twelve inches of newly fallen snow in the same way. They may see only its fresh obstacles to getting to the office, getting to church to teach a class, to doing the essential shopping. They may think only of the inconvenience of having to wear boots, and more layers against the cold; of slippery, hazardous roads; of employees unable to show up for work. Others see only the labor of shoveling and plowing, clearing sidewalks and driveways of the deep snow. They would vote every time for the relative ease of a *brown* winter, thank you very much.

Just so, there are those—perhaps most of us, if we were honest—who would delay Christ's return in exchange for more time with life as it is. The dad who looks forward to the day when he will give his daughter's

hand in marriage; the newlyweds looking forward to a lifetime together, raising a family, and growing old with each other; the little boy who wants to grow up to be the high school quarterback; the inventor who wants to see his years of imaginative labor pay off; the mom who yearns to hold her grandchildren upon her knee, to tell them all about Jesus.

Who can blame these and others for thinking, "Yes, come Lord Jesus, but wait just a little while longer, would You please?"

The challenge for the follower of Christ is to prefer the unnatural over the natural, the unknowable future over the familiar present, the other-worldly over the comfortable world. After all, it is in our DNA to cling to our roots; we are born with that inclination.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Ephesians 2:1-3

The ways of the flesh are so ingrained in every believer that it sometimes takes effort to long for the day when it will be no more—but it must, and will, happen. For the purity and holiness of God requires that all be made new for His future habitation.

Even His people. ☘

a Sight at once Uplifting and Melancholy

My fault and my fate is to be an incurable romantic. Where others see a squirrel burying acorns for the winter, I see nature's epochal struggle for survival. Where others see only the frigid inconvenience of accumulated snow and ice, I see the sublime subtleties of God's crystalline palette. Where others see the loss of chlorophyll in the leaves of summer and their inevitable littering of the ground, I see signs of a fading year sprinkled liberally with the exuberant shades of God's handiwork.

So if I gaze upward toward the west, on a chilly autumn eve, and my breath is taken away by the resplendent beauty of a sunset, I see not just a pretty end to another day, but God's glory splashed across His immense, heavenly canvas. Again,

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Romans 1:20

And there's the rub. An energetic and creative God has gone out of His way to reveal Himself in the components of His handiwork. He has surrounded all my senses with the beauty of His mind and hand. Yet often, instead of exhilaration the result is only an unrequited longing in my breast, and a sensation of being in the wrong place at the wrong time—a feeling of belonging not to the low or to the high, but to neither.

I cannot yet reach up into heaven. I cannot yet soar with the angels or kneel and worship alongside the Elders. I do not yet

tread the soft pathways of gold that criss-cross my God's home. But neither can I be at peace in a place of soil and clay and mortal impermanence.

At times this flesh is little more than a cumbersome cloak—cloyingly uncomfortable apparel for my God-tinged spirit.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!"

1 Kings 8:27

Alas, that which displays the handiwork and personality of the Father must remain, until The Day, only a beckoning foretaste of what lies ahead. Just as God in my mind can only be a weak and fleeting surrogate for the more substantial glory of His literal presence, the glory of His earthly creation cannot compare to the wondrous mysteries and beauty of my eventual home.

So, as a consolation, I make the visual riches of His grace into a promissory note. He has promised me life everlasting in the now-unimaginable wonder of His presence. For the moment, because I am still small and earth-bound, I take comfort in a diluted foretaste of that wonder. All around me glows the beauty of His creation: the woods, the luxurious plains, the beasts of the field. The changes in each new season offer a hint of the changes that will take place after I pass through His gates.

The beauty of this world is a sight at once uplifting and melancholy—a pleasant experience tinged with homesickness.

But it will do for now. ❧