

Ask In Prayer: A Faith-Promoting Journey

Tom Bowers

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Ask in Prayer is an earnest memoir about a spiritual life led at the fringes of American religions.

Tom Bowers's contemplative memoir *Ask in Prayer* is about a search for, and a discovery of, a seeker's faith.

Bowers's is a story of exploration. It expresses deep willingness to explore and inhabit a variety of religious and spiritual expressions, from traditional to fringe. The text covers early time spent in the Methodist church and Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, considerations of Eastern teachings, and then finding a home in the Mormon church. Spiritual growth and development are covered at each step, as are Bowers's meditative efforts, his quest to find real community, and the difficulties he found when it came to living out his faith.

Much energy concentrates on Bowers's time in the Unification Church, living in the Oakland Family group and rising through the leadership ranks beginning in the 1970s. The difficulties of being a part of that organization are conveyed, including dealing with public ridicule. Glimpses of ceremonies including Moon's marriage "matching" and insights into the church's key ideas and Moon's *Divine Principle* capture the spiritual effects of those experiences. Bowers's is an interesting firsthand look at a little-understood group most remembered for headlines.

The writing is earnest and clear, coming across in quiet and calm tones. It moves with ease from recalling specific life events to probing their underlying spiritual meanings. The book's everyday language pairs well with its descriptions of the involvement of the Holy Spirit and God in Bowers's life, and with its presentations of signs from God that are approachable and understandable.

While Bowers's personal willingness to consider some criticism of the Unification Church is apparent, such concerns are dismissed with speed and without much nuance. Personal doubt still plays a role in Bowers's narrative, particularly as he leaves one faith behind to follow another, but this pattern becomes repetitive. Struggles to name spiritual concerns and to uncover the reasons behind them are a text constant.

Though it is organized in a chronological fashion for clarity, there's little suspense evident to propel the book forward. It is specific when it comes to others—presenting names, dates, and locations—but in a way that doesn't inform its central narrative. Bowers recalls meeting many people, but most are not fleshed out. Some related spiritual discoveries don't invite outsiders in enough as a result.

The text ends with a spirited defense of Mormonism, undermining the journeying aspect of the narrative in order to do something that looks like evangelism. The sincerity of Bowers's searching narrative is compromised by this turn.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (June 19, 2019)

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