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The Forgotten Tozer

Gone But Not Forgotten

Christianity today is man-centered, not God centered. God is made to wait patiently, even respectfully, on the whims of men.

Like many Christian readers who have heard of A. W. Tozer (who preferred to be addressed simply as "Tozer"), I first became acquainted with his writing through his classic book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*. While there have been and are many books on the attributes of God, none blends Theology and spirituality together better than Tozer's.

Other than that classic work, however, I read almost nothing else of Tozer in my nearly two and one half decades of full-time ministry, that is, until recently. It was during my research and writing of another book, one on the authority of Scripture, that one of the lambs under my care handed me a copy of *God Tells the Man Who Cares* and said, "After reading this I thought it might be an encouragement and maybe even a challenge to you." Well, it was both of those. What I read positively astounded me! I had no idea that Tozer, decades ago, faced and addressed most of the same issues that are diluting Christianity and undermining the Church today. Along with other men of history, I mentioned Tozer in the aforementioned book as one of those who has upheld the authority of Scripture and purity of the Church.

As I continued to reflect on Tozer and mention him to other preachers and Church members, it became clear that, like me, few knew of this aspect of Tozer's burden and ministry. Truly, it seemed to me, while he remained one of the great "Christian mystics" and one of the greatest of the "devotional writers," this timely aspect of Tozer had been tragically (perhaps even conveniently) forgotten.

With that observation in mind, I envisioned this book on *The Forgotten Tozer*, which I pray will serve to remind us not only of what Tozer said but that what he said was true. While this book contains some biographical material, it is not a biography. It is a review and analysis of Tozer's thought on contemporary Christianity. The following from Tozer's preface will set the stage:

Within the circles of evangelical Christianity itself there has arisen in the last few years dangerous and dismaying trends away from true Bible Christianity. A spirit has been introduced which is surely not the Spirit of Christ, methods employed which are wholly carnal, objectives adopted which have not one line of Scripture to support them, a level of conduct accepted which is practically identical with that of the world—and yet scarcely one voice has been raised in opposition. And this in spite of the fact that the Bible-honoring followers of Christ lament among themselves the dangerous, worldly course things are taking.

So radically is the essential spirit and content of orthodox Christianity changing these days under the vigorous leadership of undiscerning religionists that, if the trend is not stopped, what is called Christianity will soon be something altogether other than the faith of our fathers. We'll have only Bible words left. Bible religion will have perished from wounds received in the house of her friends.

My method of presenting Tozer's thought is simple: state the problem, present the Scripture, and permit Tozer to comment, making applications to our day as needed. While some writers might just summarize what he said, I believe that we should allow Tozer to speak for himself. Is it not better to read the man himself than to read the man's interpreter? Is this not what we wish the news media would do today, just let someone speak for himself instead of telling us what he said?

One thing I want to avoid, and I know he would agree, is to set Tozer up as the authority. We certainly have enough of that today with various Christian leaders. While this book is based largely on quotations from Tozer, I do not present them with the attitude of: "This is what Tozer said." Rather I present them from the perspective: "This is what Scripture says and what Tozer preached." There is a vast difference. Various Christian leaders today, who have been dubbed with titles such as, "Christian Leader," "Successful Church Builder," "Christian Psychologist," and others, are often followed no matter what they say, without a moment's consideration of whether their words match the Scripture. My purpose here, then, is not to lift up A. W. Tozer as the authority, rather to call our attention to the fact that Tozer proclaimed The Authority.

While writing this Introduction, I was reminded of a statement about the Americans who were killed in Vietnam. As many Americans (although not enough) remember, the Vietnam War was one we "lost," and it is for that very reason that most Americans want to forget about it and those who fought there. But the statement I've read in various sources over the years by people who do care about those who gave their all in Vietnam is, "Gone but not forgotten."

This is how I feel about many of the things A. W. Tozer wrote and spoke. They seem forgotten by the masses. Often, many Christians like to read his "devotional thoughts," but they pass by his observations and criticisms about contemporary Christianity. Many, for the sake of unity and tolerance, choose not to discern what is good from what is not.

So, it is with great burden that I offer, for whatever it might be worth, this analysis of Tozer's "contemporary thoughts." By the end of the book, I pray that you will say with me about Tozer: "Gone but not forgotten."

In true Tozer fashion, may we open with a word of prayer:

Father, may I come humbly before You in worship. May I praise You and glorify You alone, for only Thou art worthy. May I examine my heart and prove that it is pure in attitude and action. Give me the courage to set aside my preconceived ideas and notions and turn to the Word of God alone for my guide in life and ministry. Give me the strength to not be conformed to contemporary thought but transformed by the renewing of my mind. Father, change me in whatever ways are needed to make me what I should be. I ask it all in the Saviour's precious name, Amen.