

Copyright © 2018 James Joshua Tancordo

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

A.W. TOZER: A MYSTICAL AND
CONFESSIONAL EVANGELICAL

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
James Joshua Tancordo

May 2018

APPROVAL SHEET

A.W. TOZER: A MYSTICAL AND
CONFESSIONAL EVANGELICAL

James Joshua Tancordo

Read and Approved by:

Nathan A. Finn (Chair)

Michael A. G. Haykin

Donald S. Whitney

Date_____

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Becky. This milestone would not have been possible without her sacrificial love, encouragement, and understanding.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
The Life of Tozer	2
Thesis	7
Review of Literature about Tozer	7
The Need for the Present Study	13
Methodology	17
2. EVANGELICALISM DEFINED AND DESCRIBED	19
Evangelicalism in Its Historical Setting	19
Defining Evangelicalism	38
The Approach of the Present Work	52
3. TOZER AND CONVERSION	58
The Center: Conversionism	58
The Boundary: Justification by Faith Alone	79
Significance of Tozer's Conversionism for Spirituality	85
4. TOZER AND OUTREACH	89
The Center: Activism	89
The Boundary: The Exclusivity of the Gospel	109
Significance of Tozer's Activism for Spirituality	114
5. TOZER AND THE BIBLE	119
The Center: Biblicism	119

The Boundary: Biblical Inerrancy.....	141
Significance of Tozer's Biblicism for Spirituality.....	147
6. TOZER AND THE CROSS	150
The Center: Crucicentrism	150
The Boundary: Penal Substitutionary Atonement.....	166
Significance of Tozer's Crucicentrism for Spirituality	175
7. TOZER’S RELATIONSHIP TO MYSTICISM	178
Elements of Mysticism Tozer Appreciated.....	178
Elements of Mysticism Tozer Rejected	183
8. CONCLUSION	188
Why Turn to the Mystics?.....	188
Is Tozer a Good Model?.....	196
Concluding Thought	199
APPENDIX.....	200
BIBLIOGRAPHY	202

PREFACE

Like any sizeable project, this dissertation was written with the valuable assistance of others. Nathan Finn, my doctoral supervisor, deserves most of the credit for helping me arrive at this topic in the first place and then tirelessly proofreading my drafts and offering valuable insights and suggestions. Without question, his guidance has made me a more skilled writer, a more careful researcher, and a more nuanced interpreter. His efforts have made this dissertation what it is.

My other committee members, Michael Haykin and Donald Whitney, have also been incredibly helpful in completing this project. From the earliest stages of the project, they gave useful ideas and suggestions. Their guidance and wisdom have certainly been a valuable asset.

Last but not least, my wife, Becky, has also assisted me in writing this dissertation. This assistance has come mostly in the form of the personal sacrifices she has made to allow me time to complete this project. She has also been a useful conversation partner as I thought about which direction to take and various other “big picture” decisions.

James J. Tancordo

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

May 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”¹ These are the well-known words with which Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897–1963) begins *The Knowledge of the Holy*. They represent one of the central thrusts of Tozer’s ministry: seeking and being captivated by God himself. In an age when so many Christians hurriedly moved from one church activity to the next, rarely thinking deeply about spiritual matters, Tozer emphasized the importance of communing with God in a significant and meaningful way. Arguably, he was one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century evangelicalism, inspiring countless Christians, both inside and outside his denomination, to devote themselves to a more passionate pursuit of God.² As one who knew him well has written:

So impressed were people with this man that they applied to him such descriptive terms as oracle, seer, Christian mystic. Certainly there was something that distinguished him from the common run of preachers, authors, and editors. His was an originality of thought, a spiritual depth of message, a craftsmanship of style. When he spoke, people listened; what he wrote, they read.... That explains the subtitle of this book [*A Twentieth-Century Prophet*].³

¹A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 1.

²See David Neff, “The Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals,” *Christianity Today*, October 2006, 52. Tozer’s *The Knowledge of the Holy* was ranked number 49 on the list. In addition, Lauren Barlow has gathered numerous testimonies from Christian leaders around the country to demonstrate how much of an impact Tozer has had. The volume includes contributions from Ravi Zacharias, Randy Alcorn, Dan Kimball, Johnny Hunt, Joni Eareckson Tada, Charles Swindoll, Bill Johnson, Alex McFarland, and Elmer Towns, among others. See Lauren Barlow, ed., *Inspired by Tozer: 50 Artists, Writers and Leaders Share the Insights and Passion They’ve Gained from A. W. Tozer* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011).

³David J. Fant, *A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth-Century Prophet* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 1964).

The Life of Tozer

Tozer was born on April 21, 1897, to Jacob and Prudence Tozer as the third of six children. The Tozers were a relatively poor farming family who lived in La Jose, Pennsylvania. Besides helping on the family farm, Tozer first worked in railroad cars selling items such as peanuts, candy, and books. In 1912, the family moved to Akron, Ohio, as a result of the father's failing health. They now had to adjust to city life. Tozer's oldest brother, Zene, had moved to Akron a few years before this and was working in a Goodrich rubber plant. Tozer began working there as well to help put food on the family's table.

Living in Akron allowed the Tozer family to attend church more frequently, and Tozer and his siblings participated in Sunday school. Three years after moving, in 1915, Tozer came to faith while listening to an open-air preacher. The elderly man was speaking on a busy street corner and said to the crowd, "If you don't know how to be saved, just call on God, saying, 'Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.'"⁴ Upon hearing this, Tozer went to his attic to be by himself and wrestled with God over the state of his soul. After emerging from the attic, he had been saved. Although Tozer was baptized by immersion in the Church of the Brethren, he began attending Grace Methodist Church.

At Grace Methodist Church, Tozer met Ada Celia Pfautz and married her on April 26, 1918. They had seven children together: Lowell, Forrest, Aiden, Wendell, Raleigh, Stanley, and Rebecca. Interestingly, Ada's mother Kate played a significant role in Tozer's early spiritual growth. She allowed him to borrow books from her collection, which he hungrily devoured even though he only had an eighth-grade education. Tozer took full advantage of Kate's library and read virtually anything he could get his hands on. One colleague said of Tozer, "During his early Christian years he read widely in everything and some of his early mentors feared for him. But he pressed on and surpassed

⁴Fant, A. W. *Tozer*, 14.

them all. He often likened himself to a hungry bee gathering nectar from any flower.”⁵

Before long, Tozer began engaging in ministry in any way he could. He preached the gospel on the streets and facilitated prayer meetings in his neighborhood. However, the Methodist Church did not look favorably on his ministry since Tozer had never received formal training. This lack of support led Tozer to move his membership to Locust Street Church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), where the pastor, Samuel M. Gerow, encouraged him to exercise his gifting. Tozer credited much of his growth during his formative years as a Christian to this pastor.

After serving in the United States Army during World War I, Tozer returned home, and H. M. Shermon, the CMA superintendent of the area, recognized his gifting for ministry. Shermon appointed him as pastor of the Alliance church in Nutter Fort, West Virginia, in 1919, although Tozer would not be formally ordained until August 18, 1920. After serving in Nutter Fort, Tozer moved on to pastor churches in Morgantown, West Virginia (1919–1922), Toledo, Ohio (1922–1923), and Indianapolis, Indiana (1923–1928). However, his longest ministry and that for which he was most well known was at Southside Alliance Church in Chicago, Illinois (1928–1959).

Being in Chicago enabled Tozer to preach frequently at Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, and Fort Wayne Bible College, in addition to extensive preaching tours all around the country. From 1951 to 1959, he also hosted the radio program *Talks from a Pastor's Study* on Moody Bible Institute's radio station, WMBI. Right from his church office, Tozer would stand and share a message from the Bible as if an audience were sitting before him. This program was one of the most highly rated on the station. In order to allow Tozer time to engage in such an expansive preaching ministry, the Southside Alliance Church appointed assistant pastors responsible for visitation.

⁵Raymond McAfee, “He Fell Down to Worship: Reflections on a Worshiping Man’s Life,” *The Alliance Witness* (July 24, 1963), 8. For fifteen years, McAfee served under Tozer as assistant pastor and music minister at Southside Alliance Church.

In 1950, Tozer was elected editor of *The Alliance Weekly* (renamed *The Alliance Witness* in 1958) and served in this capacity until his death in 1963. Although various organizations invited him to serve on their boards, he turned them all down so that he could devote himself to fulfilling his God-given calling to minister the Word of God. However, he did make one exception by accepting a place on the Board of Managers of the CMA in 1941, serving in this capacity until his death. In 1946, this board elected him vice president, but he resigned from this post in 1950 because so many people suggested that they saw him in line to be the next CMA president.

Tozer also wrote a number of books, beginning with two biographies. In 1943, he published *Wingspread* on A. B. Simpson, the founder of the CMA, and in 1947, he published *Let My People Go* on Robert Jaffray, a CMA missionary.⁶ He then wrote *The Pursuit of God* (1948), *God's Pursuit of Man* (1950), *The Root of the Righteous* (1955) *Keys to the Deeper Life* (1957), *Born after Midnight* (1959), *Of God and Men* (1960), and *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1963).⁷ Although Tozer made an impact on many people through his preaching ministry, it was his writing ministry—especially *The Pursuit of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy*—that made him known throughout the nation and that has had an especially pronounced impact since his lifetime.

Perhaps one of the most significant reasons Tozer's books gained such popularity was because Tozer was an excellent writer. This was likely due—at least in

⁶A. W. Tozer, *Wingspread: A. B. Simpson, A Study in Spiritual Altitude* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007); A. W. Tozer, *Let My People Go: The Life of Robert A. Jaffray* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007).

⁷A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007); A. W. Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), CD-ROM; A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), CD-ROM; A. W. Tozer, *Keys to the Deeper Life: Revised and Expanded* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); A. W. Tozer, *Born after Midnight: Spiritual Renewal Comes to Those Who Want It Badly Enough* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), CD-ROM; A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Men: Cultivating the Divine/Human Relationship* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), CD-ROM; Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Note that *God's Pursuit of Man* was originally entitled *The Divine Conquest*.

part—to his love of reading the very best literature. The love of learning that Tozer possessed in his younger years remained with him and perhaps even accelerated through the years. He enjoyed digging through various secondhand bookstores in Chicago, New York, and other places he visited. He read not only theological works but also works of history, philosophy, poetry, and general literature. He would memorize not only passages from the Bible but also from exceptional poets. Tozer had a particular interest in ancient writers, especially the early church fathers and Christian mystics. One observer has written that “addiction to words and ideas led naturally to his honing of writing skills until his pen became a ready servant of God—ready to slash like Toledo steel or caress like a downy feather.”⁸ Wheaton College formally recognized Tozer’s literary and intellectual achievements by granting him an honorary Doctor of Letters degree in 1950, and Houghton College granted him a Doctor of Law degree in 1952.

Beneath all of these engagements and achievements was Tozer’s habit of avidly seeking personal communion with God. From an early age, Tozer spent significant time in personal prayer, often withdrawing to the basement in search of a quiet place because space was so scarce in the rest of the house. This pattern of withdrawing from the world to seek communion with God would characterize Tozer throughout his life. One close associate observed how Tozer’s “praying deeply affected his preaching for his preaching was but a declaration of what he had learned in prayer.”⁹ Tozer would often lie facedown on the floor with a piece of paper between his face and the floor. As he humbled himself before the Lord in this way, “he beheld the beauty and glory of the Trinity, witnessing one divine attribute after another pass in kaleidoscopic splendor

⁸Robert L Niklaus, John S Sawin, and Samuel J Stoesz, *All for Jesus: God at Work in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Over One Hundred Years* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1996).

⁹Fant, A. W. *Tozer*, 16.

before his raptured sight.”¹⁰

As valuable as these times in God’s presence undoubtedly were, they sometimes made life difficult for his family. As one observer stated, “Tozer was in effect a married monk.”¹¹ In addition to frequently withdrawing from the world to pursue communion with God, Tozer did not wish to own a car or a house, nor did he desire a bank account. There were several instances in which he even declined an increase in his salary. Aspects of Tozer’s approach to life such as these were frequently challenging for the entire Tozer family.¹²

In 1959, Tozer made the decision to leave Chicago because he felt ministry there could be better performed by another pastor, probably someone younger. The neighborhood had changed significantly, and the church needed to build a new building. Therefore, from 1959 until 1963, Tozer preached weekly at Avenue Road Church in Toronto, Canada, in addition to his characteristic heavy lineup of other preaching engagements. Tozer’s death was a sudden one. On May 12, 1963, Tozer apparently had a heart attack in the morning and was taken to the hospital, where he passed into eternity soon after midnight.¹³

¹⁰Fant, *A. W. Tozer*, 16.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 24.

¹²Tozer’s wife, Ada, made considerable sacrifices to enable Tozer to be as engaged as he was in spiritual and ministerial pursuits. This was the case to such a degree that, after Tozer’s death, Ada married a man named Leonard Odam and reportedly responded in a consistent way to those who inquired about her well-being: “I have never been happier in my life. Aiden loved Jesus Christ, but Leonard Odam loves me.” Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 160. For his sources on Ada’s feelings regarding this particular issue, Dorsett cites oral interviews with four of Tozer’s closest associates, including two of his children.

¹³Much of the biographical information was taken from Fant, *A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth-Century Prophet*, and Laurie Mellinger, “A. W. Tozer: Prophet to a Generation,” *Evangelical Journal* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1–16. Other sources consulted repeatedly include Dorsett, *A Passion for God*; James L. Snyder, *The Life of A. W. Tozer: In Pursuit of God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009). As Mellinger observes, some discrepancies exist between the biographical accounts of where Tozer worked while in Akron, Ohio, as well as minor details surrounding his death.

Thesis

One of the most intriguing aspects of Tozer's ministry is the extent to which he drew from the writings of medieval Roman Catholic mystics. In fact, twenty-eight of the thirty-five books on his recommended reading list were written by Roman Catholics who lived either during or soon after medieval times.¹⁴ This interest in Roman Catholic mystics is not something people would normally expect from a pastor in the CMA. Nevertheless, Tozer appears to have been profoundly influenced by these writers and developed a deep appreciation for them.

This dissertation argues that while A. W. Tozer possessed a number of notable mystical tendencies, his spiritual insights remained demonstrably within confessional evangelical boundaries.¹⁵ In other words, though he drew deeply from the well of medieval Catholic mysticism, in the end he succeeded in synthesizing those insights with his confessional evangelical identity and emphases. He was nourished by what he considered true and carefully discarded the rest. In demonstrating Tozer's confessional evangelical identity, this dissertation will also describe the distinct contours of his thoughts about various matters central to evangelicalism.¹⁶ The dissertation will conclude by considering how Tozer is a model for how evangelicals can be uncompromising in their doctrinal convictions and yet benefit from a wide variety of spiritual writers, even those of other Christian traditions.

Review of Literature about Tozer

Considering Tozer's influence, surprisingly few academic works are available about his thought and ministry, and only some of that material is relevant for this

¹⁴Fant, A. W. *Tozer*, 181. This recommended reading list is included as an appendix to this dissertation.

¹⁵“Confessional Evangelicalism” will be defined and described below.

¹⁶These will be identified and described in detail below.

dissertation in any significant way.

The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer

Perhaps the most relevant work for this dissertation is E. Lynn Harris's monograph *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer, a Twentieth-Century American Protestant*.¹⁷ Harris sets out "to analyze Tozer's mystic spirituality, his concept of man's relationship to God."¹⁸ She defines Christian mysticism as "an experience of interior meeting and union of a person with the divine infinity which sustains him and all other being (essence/existence), namely, with the personal God through Jesus Christ."¹⁹ With this understanding of Christian mysticism, Harris takes Tozer's recommended reading list of thirty-five books, the great majority of which are from the tradition of Western Christian mysticism, and uses this "as a frame of reference for examining Tozer's type of mystical approach."²⁰ Harris then compares these writings to Tozer's own writings, noting similarities and differences. She writes, "The basic hypothesis which this study has substantiated is that Tozer is in the mystical tradition of Western Christianity though possessing characteristics distinctive of Evangelicalism."²¹

Although this thesis sounds quite similar to that of the present dissertation, this project will differ from Harris' work in the following ways. First, this work will give more attention to what it means to be an evangelical, using both the Bebbington Quadrilateral and more specific theological proposals from other authors. It will also take

¹⁷Eleanor Lynn Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth Century American Protestant* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992). This work was originally published as Eleanor Lynn Harris, "The Thought of Aiden Wilson Tozer: An Analysis and Appraisal with Special Emphasis on His Mysticism and Conceptual Approach to the World" (PhD diss., New York University, 1980).

¹⁸Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 4.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

²¹*Ibid.*, 6.

into account contemporary discussions of evangelical identity and argue that Tozer was a confessional evangelical. In contrast, Harris uses the marks of being oriented around the Bible, emphasizing the person and work of Christ (in contrast to the typical mystical emphasis on God the Father), being concerned with practical holiness, maintaining balance in being “in the world but not of the world” (in contrast to monkish withdrawal), and having a cooler and more sober tone (in contrast to the emotionalism of many Italian and Spanish mystics).²² It is not entirely clear exactly how Harris came up with these marks of evangelicalism or upon what research they were based. In addition, they appear to be more appropriate for comparing Tozer to the Western Christian mystics than for conclusively demonstrating his evangelical identity.

Second, this dissertation will be much more extensive and thorough in its concentration on Tozer’s evangelical identity. Further reading of Harris’ work beyond the introductory chapter reveals that she concentrates much more on Tozer’s mystical tendencies than she does on his evangelical identity. In their totality, her comments on Tozer’s evangelical characteristics span only nine pages.²³

Third, this dissertation will perform more extensive research on what Tozer actually wrote. It seems as though Harris gave most of her attention to researching the thirty-five books on Tozer’s recommended reading list and doing interviews with people who knew Tozer. She quotes from surprisingly few of Tozer’s writings—only nine of his books and eight of his articles in her entire work.²⁴

²²Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 58–66.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴In her nine-page section on Tozer’s evangelical tendencies, Harris includes references to only four of Tozer’s writings.

“The Life and Thought of A. W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification”

Another relevant work on A. W. Tozer is Robert Patterson’s thesis “The Life and Thought of A. W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification.”²⁵ Patterson does not argue a specific thesis about Tozer but simply provides a sketch of the main contours of Tozer’s work as it relates to sanctification. Patterson acknowledges that Tozer had a wide variety of thoughts related to sanctification but would always have a sharp focus: exhorting his readers toward greater holiness. In doing so, he drew extensively from mystical writers of previous centuries. Even as a minister in the CMA, which Patterson identifies as “a Presbyterian offshoot,” Tozer created an incredibly rich and eclectic synthesis of the insights of Christian mystics.²⁶ Patterson goes through different classifications of mystics including the Rhineland mystics, the English mystics, the Spanish mystics, Brother Lawrence and the French Quietists, and various later mystics. He describes significant contributions of specific individuals from each of these classifications and then explores ways in which Tozer interacted with them.²⁷

After briefly surveying the doctrine of sanctification as it has commonly been described in modern times, Patterson turns his attention to describing Tozer’s thoughts on sanctification, particularly on “The Great Need for Sanctification,” “The Godward Aspects of Sanctification,” “The Role of the Church in Sanctification,” and “The Role of the Christian in Sanctification.”²⁸ Throughout his dissertation, Patterson gives specific attention to analyzing what Tozer took from the mystics as well as what he chose not to

²⁵Robert J. Patterson, “The Life and Thought of A.W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification: An Investigation into the Thoughts of Aiden Wilson Tozer on the Doctrine of Sanctification and the Insights He Received from Some of the Past Mystics of the Church” (ThM thesis, Regent College, 1989).

²⁶*Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 49–207.

²⁸All of these headings are sections of ch. 4, entitled “Tozer’s Thoughts on Sanctification,” and comprise the bulk of Patterson’s dissertation, specifically pp. 224–410.

take. He also explores how mystical ideas have made an impact (presumably through Tozer) on modern concepts of sanctification held by the CMA.²⁹

Other Relevant Works

Daniel Ewearitt delivered a paper on Tozer titled “A. W. Tozer: The Spiritual Formation of a Prophet-Mystic.”³⁰ Ewearitt begins with Tozer’s conversion in 1915 and explores some of the key points of his spirituality. He demonstrates how “Tozer joined knowledge of God through His written Word and mystical knowledge of God.”³¹ Tozer wrote extensively about the centrality of encountering God in the life of a healthy Christian. Christianity is about more than grasping biblical truth with the intellect. It is about knowing God experientially—that is, entering into an experience of the real God of the Bible rather than “some synthetic god compounded of theology and logic.”³² By describing insights from Tozer such as these, Ewearitt gives his audience a basic introduction to Tozer’s spirituality.

In addition, Sin Soo Jeon wrote a Doctor of Ministry thesis on Tozer with the intriguing title “An Examination of A. W. Tozer’s Life as Practical Applications for Korean Pastors to Combat the Prosperity Gospel.”³³ In response to the widespread influence of the prosperity gospel in Korea, Jeon surveys Tozer’s life, writings, and sermons, using them to provide pastors with “practical applications for combating the prosperity gospel by building intimate companionship with God in their ministry and

²⁹Patterson, “The Life and Thought of A. W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification,” 3–4.

³⁰Daniel Ewearitt, “A. W. Tozer: The Spiritual Formation of the Prophet-Mystic” (paper presented at Southeastern Regional Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Toccoa, GA, March 16–17, 2001). I possess a copy of this paper.

³¹*Ibid.*, 5.

³²*Ibid.*, 9–10, quoting Tozer.

³³Sin Soo Jeon, “An Examination of A. W. Tozer’s Life as Practical Applications for Korean Pastors to Combat the Prosperity Gospel” (DMin thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

spiritual lives.”³⁴ He includes a discussion of Tozer’s views on such topics as prayer, worship, and being filled with the Spirit.³⁵

In a thesis titled “A Study of the Doctrine of Holiness in the Thought of A. W. Tozer,” Kenneth Friesen sets out to “determine the nature of A. W. Tozer’s doctrine of holiness and its place in relation to his theology as a whole. He states that his work is merely “descriptive” rather than “argumentative” in nature and does not attempt to evaluate Tozer’s beliefs by comparing them with the Bible.³⁶ Friesen emphasizes how, according to Tozer, holiness begins with a personal encounter with God.³⁷ In addition, it rises out of a regenerate heart given at conversion as the Holy Spirit indwells that heart.³⁸ After this initial event of regeneration, the Christian progressively grows in holiness as he or she surrenders to God, continually dies to self, and embraces God’s commands.³⁹

In addition, Robert Wick wrote a thesis entitled “A. W. Tozer on Sanctification: A Study Emphasizing Doctrine and Practical Application.”⁴⁰ Writing only four years after Tozer’s death, Wick states a simple purpose: “to study the doctrine of sanctification held by Tozer,” specifically noting what Tozer taught about the need for sanctification, the desire for sanctification, and the practical outworking of sanctification in life.⁴¹ As with the works by Patterson and Friesen described above, Wick’s purpose is

³⁴Jeon, “An Examination of A. W. Tozer’s Life, iv.

³⁵Ibid., 136–61.

³⁶Kenneth L. Friesen, “A Study of the Doctrine of Holiness in the Thought of A. W. Tozer” (MDiv thesis, Western Seminary, 1971), 2.

³⁷Ibid., 25.

³⁸Ibid., 49.

³⁹Ibid., 172.

⁴⁰Robert Stanley Wick, “A. W. Tozer on Sanctification: A Study Emphasizing Doctrine and Practical Application” (MA thesis, Seattle Pacific University, 1967).

⁴¹Ibid., 2.

not to argue a particular viewpoint but simply to summarize Tozer's thoughts about a particular subject—interestingly the same subject that Patterson would later summarize twenty-two years later.

The Need for the Present Study

This dissertation contributes to the literature about Tozer by highlighting his unique synthesis of confessional evangelicalism and elements of mysticism. Tozer unquestionably saw himself as an evangelical. He states,

Let it be understood by everyone that I am now and have always been an evangelical. I accept the Bible as the very Word of God and believe with complete and restful confidence that it contains all things necessary to life and godliness. I embrace the tenets of the historic Christian faith without reservation and am conscious of no spiritual sympathy with Liberalism or Modernism in any of their manifestations.⁴²

However, his writings and sermons are replete with mystical tendencies that have the potential to cause discomfort for many in the evangelical camp. His unique approach offers a model for contemporary evangelicals who wish to engage with mystical traditions, but from the perspective of a robustly evangelical identity.

Openly Praises Mysticism

Tozer frequently expresses open appreciation for mysticism. In *Faith Beyond Reason*, he observes that a lot of people disapprove of the word “mystic.” Whenever a preacher mentions it, they chase him out of the church and replace him with a preacher who is afraid of the word as much as they are. However, Tozer says, “I am not afraid of the word *mystic* because the whole Bible is a mystical book, a book of mystery, a book of wonder. I have discovered that you cannot trace any simple phenomenon back very far without coming up against mystery and darkness.”⁴³ Not only does Tozer speak here of

⁴²A. W. Tozer, *The Set of the Sail: Direction for Your Spiritual Journey*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 62, CD-ROM.

⁴³A. W. Tozer, *Faith Beyond Reason: With God Nothing Is Impossible* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 4, CD-ROM.

“mystery” and “darkness,” two classic hallmarks of apophatic theology, he also openly embraces the mystic label. In another place, he argues that “we ought to get spiritual mysticism back into the Church again” rather than continuing to tolerate the slick programs that are so prevalent, featuring people full of talent and personality but void of true worship of God.⁴⁴ Such appeals were characteristic of Tozer’s ministry.

Encourages Mystical Experiences

In addition to openly praising mysticism, Tozer also encourages believers to seek mystical experiences. In one instance, he advises people to retreat to a private spot away from all distractions and stay there until all the noises fade out of their heart and they are filled with a sense of God’s presence. Whenever an unpleasant sound comes to their ears, they should tune it out, determined not to hear it. Instead, Tozer instructs, “Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it.”⁴⁵

In another instance, Tozer commends silence above studying the Bible in a merely intellectual way. He observes that “more spiritual progress can be made in one short moment of speechless silence in the awesome Presence of God than in years of mere study.”⁴⁶ The reason he gives for this is straightforward: whenever our mental faculties are in control, there is always “a veil of nature between us and the face of God,” and it is only “when our vaunted wisdom has been met and defeated in a breathless encounter with Omniscience that we are permitted to really know.”⁴⁷ This happens when we are silent.

⁴⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God: Deeper into the Father’s Heart*, vol. 2 (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 40, CD-ROM.

⁴⁵Tozer, *Of God and Men*, chap. 31.

⁴⁶A. W. Tozer, *This World: Playground or Battleground*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 48, CD-ROM.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

Describes the Christian's Relationship with God in a Mystical Way

Examining Tozer's high regard for silence naturally leads to another mystical tendency of Tozer: the way he understands the Christian's relationship with God. Tozer speaks of "knowledge by direct spiritual experience" that consists not of "intellectual data" but of "immediate contact with higher spiritual reality" and "a conscious encounter with God invisible."⁴⁸ He writes that believers do not know God himself merely through their intellect but chiefly, if not exclusively, through their spirit. Knowledge of God comes by intuition, not by the intellect. "It is not a knowledge mediated by the intellect, but an unmediated awareness experienced by the soul on a plane too high for the mind to reach."⁴⁹ The reason for this is that "God is Spirit," so it makes sense that "only the spirit of a man can know Him really."⁵⁰ Tozer compares this to the way people hear a symphony. They do not hear it with their eyes but with their ears; the ear is the organ God has supplied to receive musical sounds. In the same way, Tozer argues, people do not apprehend God with their intellect, but rather with their spirit.⁵¹ Christians need to seek a relationship with God that is characterized by personal knowledge of God with "spirit touching spirit and heart touching heart."⁵² This is not the way many evangelicals with a high view of biblical authority and sufficiency are used to describing a relationship with God. Evangelicals certainly value religious experience, but many of them may become a bit uncomfortable with Tozer's tendency to downplay the intellect in favor of

⁴⁸A. W. Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 53, CD-ROM.

⁴⁹A. W. Tozer, *The Set of the Sail: Direction for Your Spiritual Journey*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 48, CD-ROM.

⁵⁰Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 37–38.

⁵¹A. W. Tozer, *The Counselor: Straight Talk About the Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 20, CD-ROM.

⁵²A. W. Tozer, *I Talk Back to the Devil: Straightforward Appeals for Christlike Living*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 2, CD-ROM.

“unmediated” knowledge of God.

Quotes Mystics with Approval

A final way Tozer demonstrates mystical tendencies is by referencing mystical authors with approval. As mentioned above, many of the books on Tozer’s recommended reading list were written by mystical authors.⁵³ Furthermore, when he quotes them, he often goes out of his way to describe his admiration for the way they related to God. For example, Tozer describes Nicholas Herman (1614–1691)—better known as Brother Lawrence, author of *The Practice of the Presence of God*—as “one of the purest souls ever to live on this fallen planet” and who wrote a book “so rare and so beautiful as to deserve a place near the top among the world’s great books of devotion.”⁵⁴ Tozer also loves to reference the Catholic mystic and hymn writer Frederick Faber (1814–1863). He describes Faber as “one whose soul panted after God as the roe deer pants after the water brook” and whose love for Christ “was so intense that it threatened to consume him” as it “burned within him as a sweet and holy madness and flowed from his lips like molten gold.”⁵⁵ Such is Tozer’s admiration for many mystical authors.

With these mystical tendencies in mind, this project seeks to answer the question, “Does Tozer truly fit with confessional evangelicalism?” He certainly has several convictions that may lead some to question whether this is the case. This project will argue that Tozer’s teachings do indeed fall within confessional evangelical boundaries, despite his appreciation for aspects of mysticism.

⁵³Fant, A. W. *Tozer*, 181.

⁵⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 18, CD-ROM.

⁵⁵Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 38.

Methodology

This dissertation makes extensive use of primary-source materials from A. W. Tozer. During his lifetime, Tozer published nine books, and approximately seventy others have been compiled from his sermons and shorter writings since his death. As editor of *The Alliance Weekly* (renamed *The Alliance Witness*) from 1950 to 1963, Tozer wrote numerous editorials, which are used as well. Many of Tozer's sermons are also available for download on the Internet and are utilized, though to a lesser extent.⁵⁶ In addition, this dissertation also takes into account the information biographers have gained through verbal interviews with those who knew Tozer personally. Although relatively little has been published on Tozer from an academic perspective, this dissertation interacts with those academic writings that are available.

This project inductively analyzes these sources with a focus on anything Tozer wrote related to the criteria for evangelical identity that will be discussed below. It devotes attention not only to discerning whether Tozer actually did value and believe these things but also to understanding in detail how he approached them in his own unique way. It uses secondary sources primarily to inform and confirm the conclusions drawn from inductively studying the primary-source material.

This dissertation has several limitations. First, with regard to primary sources, the work leans slightly more on Tozer's written works rather than his sermons with the assumption that Tozer's extensive array of written works is a sufficient body of material from which to form conclusions about his beliefs and emphases. In addition, with regard to secondary sources, the dissertation looks mainly to academic works rather than popular thoughts and opinions that have been published about him. Another limitation is that each chapter contains a comparison of Tozer's teachings to the Bible's teachings, but space only allows for brief, preliminary comparisons. In reality, each of these comparisons

⁵⁶A. W. Tozer, "A. W. Tozer Audio Sermons," *Sermon Index*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/mydownloads/viewcat.php?cid=6>.

deserves treatment in its own essay.

Lastly, the reader will find it helpful to keep two things in mind throughout this paper. First, this dissertation records many of Tozer's thoughts without necessarily agreeing with those thoughts. The fact that something has been recorded here does not necessarily mean that the present author agrees with it. This includes Tozer's remarks about the Christianity of his day that, due to Tozer's sermon form, may not be as nuanced as would be preferable. Second, whenever this dissertation talks about "the mystics," this is a reference to the mystical writers from whom Tozer drew inspiration. This is best exemplified in Tozer's recommended reading list, provided in the Appendix. "Mysticism" in this paper does not include Eastern mysticism or any other form of mysticism other than that from which Tozer drew.

CHAPTER 2

EVANGELICALISM DEFINED AND DESCRIBED

In order to prove the thesis that Tozer’s spiritual insights are in full accordance with evangelicalism, it is first necessary to have a clear idea of what evangelicalism is. The term *evangelical* comes from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον, which means “gospel” or “good news.”¹ Yet, while the etymology of *evangelical* may be relatively simple, the task of defining evangelicalism is not simple at all since the movement is known for its diversity.

Evangelicalism in Its Historical Setting

Evangelicalism has a rich history that spans several centuries and that has been marked by distinct concerns, prominent figures, and memorable events.

The Great Awakening

Historians commonly trace the evangelical movement back to a revival movement known as the Great Awakening, a Transatlantic series of revivals in the eighteenth century that changed the religious landscape of Britain and the American colonies.² Douglas Sweeney refers to evangelicals as “heirs of the Great Awakening” and

¹Walter Bauer, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 402.

²This is not to say that evangelicalism had no historical antecedent before the Great Awakening, as contributors to *The Advent of Evangelicalism* point out. On the contrary, as Michael Haykin observes, there is “a great deal of continuity between Puritanism and evangelicalism.” Michael A. G. Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment: A Reassessment,” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin, Kenneth J. Stewart, and Timothy George (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 60.

notes how British Christians usually refer to these revivals collectively as “the evangelical revival.”³ Therefore, the Great Awakening is as good a place as any to begin a brief overview of the history of evangelicalism.

One of the most distinctive features of evangelical spirituality during the Great Awakening was the relative lack of concern for traditional denominational boundaries. Rather, proponents of the Awakening were much more interested in personal religious experience. The essence of the emerging evangelicalism was “a movement away from formal, outward, and established religion to personal, inward, and heartfelt religion.”⁴ As a result, there was a new spirit of unity among many of the denominations. Previously, there was significant conflict among Protestants. They developed competing doctrinal statements and rarely cooperated with one another in missions endeavors. Instead, denominational leaders encouraged their followers to think of themselves primarily according to their denominational identity rather than their Christian identity.⁵

However, with the advent of the Great Awakening, attitudes changed significantly. While many differences continued to exist, Christians of various denominations came together to advance the gospel in an almost unprecedented way. For many Christians swept up by the revival, being a Christian was much more important than being a Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian. Congregations from different denominations frequently shared their buildings and engaged in common witness in a way that had scarcely been known before that era. Sometimes, different denominations even merged with each other as in the case of the Regular and Separate Baptists.⁶

³Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 25. Ibid., 186.

⁴Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 51.

⁵Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 28–29.

⁶Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism ; 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 87–88.

The Great Awakening featured three figures quite prominently: John Wesley (1703–1791), George Whitefield (1714–1770), and Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758).⁷

John Wesley. Wesley grew up as the son of Rev. Samuel Wesley and attended Oxford, where he soon found himself involved in the so-called “Holy Club” (as it was known to detractors) that had been started by his brother, Charles, and met regularly to pursue God and a pious lifestyle. However, it was not until several years after graduating from Oxford (and even after being involved in missions endeavors) that Wesley had the conversion experience now recognized as so central to evangelicalism. He writes, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”⁸ As can be seen by this testimony, one of the hallmarks of Wesley’s ministry was his conviction that the gospel must not only persuade the mind but also captivate the heart and move the will. He had no patience for mere doctrinal orthodoxy. Rather, people must believe the gospel in such a way that the great truths of God’s grace “become vitally and transformingly real” and “experienced as personal present reality.”⁹ After his conversion, Wesley went on to become one of the key leaders of the Great Awakening, preaching from place to place and in the open air for five decades. He preached an estimated forty-two thousand sermons and travelled an estimated eight thousand miles per year on horseback. He also became the founder of the

⁷For more complete biographical information on Wesley, see Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2014). For Whitefield, see Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). For Edwards, see George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁸John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley: A Selection*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 34–35.

⁹James Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality: From the Wesleys to John Stott* (London: SPCK, 1991), 12.

Methodist movement and was shepherding 294 Methodist preachers at the time of his death.¹⁰

George Whitefield. Another well-known leader of the Great Awakening was George Whitefield. In many ways, Whitefield was very similar to Wesley since both were key figures of the revival and belonged to the Anglican denomination. They also attended Oxford together, where Whitefield joined Wesley's Holy Club in 1733. He subsequently experienced conversion in 1735. After founding an orphanage in the American colony of Georgia, Whitefield returned to England and began to preach wherever people were able to gather, frequently in the open air. Meetings also occurred at non-traditional times—usually on days other than Sunday and at various hours of the day or night.¹¹ Whitefield was remarkably skillful at extemporaneous preaching, and thousands (even tens of thousands at times) assembled to hear him preach about the new birth. His sermons were “designed to bring hearers to a point of crisis, at which they despaired over their sinfulness and experienced the love of God in an immediate way.”¹² He preached extensively both in England and throughout the American colonies, which he visited seven times in the course of his preaching ministry. Whitefield also proved to be the greatest media figure of the era and sold more publications in America than anyone else at the time. Because of this, Whitefield became the best representative of the revival's international orientation.¹³ Mark Noll has even dubbed him as “the most visible symbol of the new evangelicalism.”¹⁴

¹⁰Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 39–40.

¹¹Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 51.

¹²D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*, The American Way Series (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 7.

¹³Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 40–43.

¹⁴Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 51.

Jonathan Edwards. While Wesley and Whitefield did the most travelling to spread the Great Awakening throughout England and her colonies, Jonathan Edwards provided a theological foundation for the Awakening through his sermons and writings. Edwards experienced conversion while a graduate student at Yale and went on to serve as an assistant pastor at a Congregational church in Northampton under his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729). When Stoddard passed away, Edwards became the church’s sole pastor and preached a sermon series on justification by faith alone that brought about a period of revival in 1734 in which hundreds of people experienced conversion. This revival then spread to other churches along the Connecticut River Valley and was documented in Edwards’ *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737). Edwards also defended the revivals against the charges of their opponents and gave practical guidance concerning the revivals in such works as *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (1742), and *Religious Affections* (1746). Because of the insight Edwards provided, one historian described him as “the theological genius of the Awakening.”¹⁵

The Advance of Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism continued to advance during the latter part of the eighteenth century and throughout much of the nineteenth.

Social and evangelistic activism. During this time period, evangelicals took it upon themselves to address both the social and eternal needs of people in their society. With regard to social needs, this occurred most notably in Britain through William Wilberforce (1759–1833), a member of Parliament who worked tirelessly to abolish the British slave trade. Evangelicals formed numerous voluntary societies independently of churches to address specific issues. These societies enabled people from different

¹⁵Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 44.

denominations to pool their energies and resources in order to respond more effectively to the social challenges they faced. In America, these included the Colonization Society for Liberated Slaves (1817), the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance (1826), and the American Antislavery Society (1833).¹⁶

While evangelicals were very active in addressing social issues, they were also quite active in spreading the gospel. They inaugurated the global missions movement by building its leading institutions, producing most of its gospel literature, and sending most of its workers into the international mission fields. Drawing inspiration from Jonathan Edwards and his *Life of David Brainerd* (1749), ministers like Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and William Carey (1761–1834) promoted the cause of international ministry. In 1792, Carey published his classic work *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. This led to the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society and Carey himself departing Britain for India in 1793. The first American foreign missionary was Adoniram Judson (1788–1850), who worked in Burma as a missionary of the American Baptists.¹⁷

The Second Great Awakening. All of this is not to say that all the action was taking place internationally. Beginning in the final years of the eighteenth century, evangelicalism began to advance at an especially rapid pace in America. This advance is known as the Second Great Awakening. This Awakening lasted for most of the first half of the nineteenth century and was quite diverse. However, one general characteristic of the Second Great Awakening is that it was less Calvinistic in its general theological orientation than the First Great Awakening.

One example of this is the ministry of Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875),

¹⁶Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 67–68.

¹⁷Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 79–90.

a lawyer-turned-evangelist who served as theology professor and eventually president at Oberlin College, preached regularly at the First Congregational Church of Oberlin, and toured the country as an itinerant evangelist.¹⁸ Finney is most famous for his “new measures,” such as mass advertising, lay leadership, protracted revival meetings, and the “anxious bench.”¹⁹ These grew out of his early conviction that revival is something people bring about through the proper use of means rather than something God brings about at his own initiative. As Finney states quite directly in his *Lectures on Revival*, “Revival is not dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a result we can logically expect from the right use of God-given means, as much as any other effect produced by applying tools and resources.”²⁰

Unsurprisingly, because of viewpoints like this and the practices that grew out of them, a number of Calvinist interpreters have criticized the Second Great Awakening for focusing too much on human techniques and abilities. In *Revival and Revivalism*, Iain Murray contrasts what he considers the prevailing man-centered perspective of the Second Great Awakening with the God-centered perspective of the First Great Awakening. In contrast to views like that of Finney cited above, major figures of the First Great Awakening firmly believed that both faith and regeneration are gifts from God. Because of this, “wherever conversions are multiplied, the cause is to be found not in men, nor in favourable conditions, but in the abundant influences of the Spirit of God.”²¹ This was not the general spirit of the Second Great Awakening, at least among the more famous figures of the era.²²

¹⁸For more information on Finney’s life, thought, and legacy, see Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

¹⁹Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 68–69.

²⁰Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revival* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988), 13.

²¹Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 21.

²²The Second Great Awakening was not entirely bereft of Calvinistic influence, as can be seen

The Holiness movement. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Methodists began to show a renewed interest in Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification. In New York City, Phoebe Palmer (1807–1874) experienced what she called “entire sanctification” on July 26, 1837, and began hosting “Tuesday meetings for the promotion of holiness” in 1839. These meetings were enormously popular and drew thousands of people, including many clergy. In Boston that same year, Timothy Merritt (1775–1845) published the *Guide to Christian Perfection* (later the *Guide to Holiness*), a resource that would eventually become a central means of promoting the holiness revival. In addition, Palmer soon developed “altar terminology” which led believers into receiving a “second blessing.” Just as an Old Testament sacrifice was sanctified the moment it was offered, Palmer claimed that believers simply needed to offer themselves as a “living sacrifice” on God's altar in order to immediately receive sanctification by faith. This emphasis on receiving sanctification as a “second blessing” instantaneously and in a climactic crisis experience eventually provoked enough controversy in the Methodist churches that they ejected adherents of this view, who then formed separate Holiness denominations. Holiness teachers also organized events such as the Keswick Conventions, which began in 1875 and were led by Robert Pearsall Smith (1827–1898). Furthermore, the “second blessing” mentality prepared the way for Pentecostalism to enter the arena in the first years of the twentieth century.²³

D. L. Moody. A final name worthy of mention from the nineteenth century is D. L. Moody (1837–1899).²⁴ Moody was an enormously popular itinerant evangelist who

by the influential ministry of figures like Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844).

²³Vinson Syan, “Theological Boundaries: The Arminian Tradition,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 43–46.

²⁴For more information on Moody's life and ministry, see Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997).

rose to fame through his work in the Chicago YMCA. Although he had good working relationships with most Christian denominations, he did not maintain any formal denominational ties. Assisted by song leader Ira Sankey (1840–1908), Moody travelled throughout Britain and America conducting revival meetings and soon became an internationally known figure. While he was a regular speaker at the Keswick Conventions, Moody avoided some of the more extreme tendencies of the Holiness movement. Rather, pragmatism guided his ministry. His style was that of a businessman looking for the most efficient and effective way to close a deal.²⁵ Like Finney, he focused less on God’s sovereignty in salvation and more on the human responsibility to make “a decision for Christ.” He believed that conversion that was instantaneous in nature and urged his audiences to seize the moment and accept Christ as Lord and Savior without delay.²⁶

The Rise of Liberalism

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a challenge surfaced against evangelicalism that changed the landscape of American Protestantism: theological liberalism. H. Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962) criticized the main thrusts of liberalism when he presented it as the teaching that “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”²⁷ Historians commonly trace liberal thought back to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who has been dubbed the “Father of Modern Liberal Theology” and who taught the feeling of “absolute dependence” on God as the basis for religion and theology. Thus,

²⁵George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32–35.

²⁶Ian A. Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 37.

²⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 193.

liberalism was “the idea that Christian theology can be genuinely Christian without being based upon external authority” and serves as a kind of “third way” between traditional orthodoxy and dry rationalism.²⁸ While many of the most influential liberal schools were in Germany, American seminaries such as Harvard, Yale, the University of Chicago, and Union Theological Seminary (New York) also did much to advance liberal teaching.

In many ways, the popularity and influence of liberal thought was a response to the changing ideas of the day that challenged traditional Christian theology. Liberal theologians desired to rescue Christianity from becoming hopelessly irrelevant to modern man. Two challenges to orthodox Christianity are particularly worthy of mention.

Darwinism. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Darwinism to the religious thought of the nineteenth century and beyond. Sydney Ahlstrom writes that “Darwin [1809–1882] unquestionably became the nineteenth century’s Newton, and his theory of evolution through natural selection became the century’s cardinal idea.”²⁹ Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) disrupted the Christian teaching that God created the world and instead outlined a way in which the world as we know it could have evolved into its current state without a divine being. His later work *The Descent of Man* (1871) then explained in greater detail the way the human species came about. Darwin’s theories, especially the theory of natural selection, were quite problematic for Christians because they directly contradicted the traditional interpretation of the biblical book of Genesis in a number of ways, most notable the very idea that God created the world.

In response to Darwinism, many theologians flatly rejected the historicity of Genesis 1–3. Prominent Protestant figures such as James McCosh (1811–1894), president

²⁸Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805–1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xiii.

²⁹Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1975), 764.

of Princeton University, embraced the ideas of evolution and natural selection.³⁰

Congregationalist pastor Lyman Abbot (1835–1922) wrote books arguing for *The Evolution of Christianity* (1892) and promoting *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (1897).

Higher criticism. Another challenge to orthodox Christianity is known as “higher criticism” or “historical criticism” and is an approach to historical literature rooted in the rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In response, many biblical scholars set aside their doctrinal commitments to the Bible in favor of a more “objective” approach to biblical scholarship. They no longer viewed the Bible as coming from God and instead approached it as a merely human product. For example, scholars such as Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) questioned both the literary unity and the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.³¹

Higher criticism included several sub-disciplines. One of these was the task of *source criticism*, in which scholars searched for the true sources behind the ancient text. It also included *form criticism*, which gave careful attention to the original form of various textual units in the Bible and attempted to determine their original “situation in life” (*sitz im leben*). Finally, higher criticism involved *redaction criticism*, in which scholars explored how the Bible’s original source materials were modified by the biblical authors according to that author’s purposes.³² In effect, the Bible was still “worth revering because of its moral and spiritual truths, [but] it could no longer be considered the literal Word of God.”³³

³⁰David F. Wells, introduction to *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 11.

³¹Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 772.

³²For more on various sub-disciplines of higher criticism, see Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

³³Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America*, 30.

Outworking. As might be expected, such changes in ideas had a significant effect on the way liberal congregations lived and the goals they pursued. Liberal churches moved away from traditional evangelism and toward a focus more on social needs, a trend that eventually became known as the “social gospel.” In a report entitled *Re-Thinking Missions*, the Commission of Appraisal led by Harvard philosopher William Ernest Hocking (1873–1966) advocated for ceasing evangelistic activity in foreign missions and instead concentrating on humanitarian work. The Commission endorsed full cooperation with non-Christian agencies as they sought to bring about social improvement. Furthermore, most famously, Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918) promoted the social gospel through books such as *The Social Principles of Jesus* (1916) and *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917). In liberal circles, social work was now clearly replacing evangelism.³⁴

The Fundamentalist Response

These shifts eventually caused a forceful reaction from theological conservatives. This reaction to the liberal advance is commonly known as “fundamentalism,” a term which comes from an article by Curtis Lee Laws (1868–1946) printed in 1920 in the *Watchman-Examiner*. In the article, Laws states, “We suggest that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the Fundamentals shall be called ‘Fundamentalists.’”³⁵ Perhaps with this in mind, historian George Marsden memorably defines a fundamentalist as “an evangelical who is angry about something,” while his more careful definition is “an evangelical Protestant who is militantly opposed to modern liberal theologies and to some aspects of secularism in modern culture.”³⁶ Marsden also argues that fundamentalism is a uniquely American

³⁴Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 100, 162.

³⁵Curtis Lee Laws, “Convention Side Lights,” *The Watchman-Examiner*, July 1, 1920, 834.

³⁶George M. Marsden, “Defining American Fundamentalism,” in *The Fundamentalist*

phenomenon in the sense that in almost nowhere else did Protestants respond to modernity with such militancy and have such a conspicuous role in the national culture.³⁷

The Fundamentals. A twelve-volume collection of pamphlets titled *The Fundamentals* helped to popularize fundamentalism. Lyman Stewart (1840–1923) financed and promoted the project, and A. C. Dixon (1854–1925), Louis Meyer (1862–1913), and Reuben Torrey (1856–1928) served as editors. Stewart then distributed each volume to every pastor, missionary, theological professor, theological student, YMCA and YWCA secretary, college professor, Sunday school superintendent, and religious editor in the English-speaking world free of charge—a total of three million individual volumes.³⁸ Arguably, the foundational fundamental doctrine was the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. As a result, the affirmation of biblical inerrancy soon became “a test for the purity of denominations.”³⁹ Other common themes included Christ’s deity, virgin birth, historical miracles, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, and second coming.

Dispensational premillennialism. In addition, many fundamentalists (though certainly not all) subscribed to dispensational premillennialism.⁴⁰ Dispensationalism

Phenomenon: A View from Within, A Response from Without, ed. Norman J. Cohen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 22.

³⁷George M. Marsden, “Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon: A Comparison with British Evangelicalism,” *Church History* 46, no. 2 (June 1977): 216. Other scholars suggest fundamentalism was present in other contexts, even if it proved less influential than in America. See David W. Bebbington and David Ceri Jones, eds., *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁸Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 118–19.

³⁹Marsden, “Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon,” 215.

⁴⁰This issue raises some debate since some scholars argue that premillennialism was the key belief of fundamentalism. See Ernest Robert Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). See also Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

teaches that there are seven dispensations in the Bible and that God relates to humans in a different way in each era. Moreover, dispensationalism teaches significant discontinuity between Israel and the church. Premillennialism fits very well with these theories and teaches that things will get progressively worse in the world until Jesus finally returns to begin his millennial reign. This expectation of things getting substantially worse in the future dovetailed nicely with the rise of liberalism in the late nineteenth century and the subsequent decline of conservative Christian scholarship in the twentieth. Dispensational premillennialism began in Britain but soon spread to America through the Niagara Conferences of 1883–1897 and *The Scofield Reference Bible* (1909).⁴¹

The battle. In an effort to restore fundamentalist doctrines to prominence, William Bell Riley (1861–1947), a Baptist pastor in Minneapolis, organized the World Christian Fundamentals Association. However, liberal theologians also went on the offensive. Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969) preached a controversial sermon in New York’s First Presbyterian Church entitled “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” in which he openly criticized fundamentalist belief in the virgin birth, biblical inerrancy, and Christ’s second coming. He challenged Christians to remain “open-minded” to modern learning and “tolerant” of dissent within their churches.⁴² As liberals gained more and more ground within Presbyterian churches and also in historically conservative Princeton, J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937), a professor at Princeton, sounded the alarm. He published his classic *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), in which he argued that “despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology modern liberalism not only is a different religion

⁴¹Bill Leonard, “The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism,” *Review and Expositor* 79, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 7.

⁴²Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” (sermon, First Presbyterian Church of New York, May 21, 1922), accessed December 19, 2017, <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/shall-the-fundamentalists-win.pdf>.

from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions” and has “relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity.”⁴³

Finally, in 1925, a showdown took place at the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee. Authorities charged public high school teacher John Scopes (1900–1970) with unlawfully teaching evolution. Well-known agnostic Clarence Darrow (1857–1938) served as defense attorney, and fundamentalist spokesman William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) served as prosecutor. Due to extensive media coverage, the whole world was watching. In the end, Bryan actually won the legal case but suffered a humiliating ideological defeat in the public eye. From this time onward, fundamentalists endured ridicule in the public sphere.⁴⁴

This led them to withdrawal from much of public life from 1926 to around 1940. Whereas, in the early 1920s, fundamentalism had been a movement within mainstream American Protestantism that attempted to control not only the churches but also the national culture, it now moved in a more sectarian direction. Most fundamentalists now worked through an independent network of denominations, congregations, Bible institutes, and other organizations. For example, J. Gresham Machen started the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (1933) as well as a new denomination, eventually named the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1936). Similar responses occurred in the other denominations.⁴⁵

⁴³J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 7.

⁴⁴For more information on the Scopes trial, see Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

⁴⁵George M. Marsden, “From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism: A Historical Analysis,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 147. See also Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999).

The Formation of Neo-Evangelicalism

After a period of separatism and regrouping, some fundamentalists had a desire to dust themselves off and reengage the culture. This movement is sometimes known as neo-evangelicalism and is distinct from fundamentalism. William Martin describes the differences as “not so much cognitive and doctrinal as they are matters of outlook, temperament, and style.”⁴⁶ While some continued to call themselves fundamentalists and maintained militant separatist viewpoints, neo-evangelicals believed a new approach was necessary. They tolerated doctrinal differences on secondary issues, including the miraculous gifts of Pentecostalism. They also placed an emphasis on scholarship that had been sorely lacking in fundamentalist circles.⁴⁷

Key people. Two individuals in particular were pivotal in establishing the new evangelicalism. The first was Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003), who wrote the evangelical movement’s cultural manifesto *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947).⁴⁸ In this work, Henry calls the separation of evangelical Christian doctrine from social reform “the most embarrassing evangelical divorce” and bemoans the fact that “whereas once the redemptive gospel was a world-changing message, [with fundamentalism] it was narrowed to a world-resisting message.”⁴⁹ He goes on to argue that “if historic Christianity is again to compete as a vital world ideology, evangelicalism

⁴⁶William Martin, “The Transformation of Fundamentalism Between the World Wars,” in *Critical Moments in Religious History*, ed. Kenneth Keulman (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994), 142.

⁴⁷Marsden, “From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism,” 148–49. For other studies of early neo-evangelicalism, see Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, as well as Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

⁴⁸For an in-depth look at Henry, see Matthew Hall and Owen Strachan, eds., *Essential Evangelicalism: The Enduring Influence of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

⁴⁹Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 27, 19.

must project a solution for the most pressing world problems.”⁵⁰ In short, evangelicals must recapture their heritage as activists for social reform.

The second key figure was Billy Graham (b. 1918), whose popularity is difficult to overstate.⁵¹ As Mark Noll aptly observes, “Graham’s appeal has even reached heights usually reserved for rock stars and lifetime .330 hitters,” which undoubtedly had much to do with his “gift for public speaking” and the fact that he “simply exuded charisma.”⁵² Although Graham served in wide variety of ministerial roles throughout his long and distinguished career, he is best known for his activities as an evangelist. Besides his unparalleled popularity, one of the most distinctive things about him is his ecumenism. As Ian Randall put it, “Graham maintained that it was possible to be a convinced evangelical while seeing that the church was bigger than the evangelical movement.”⁵³ This ecumenical approach set him apart from sectarian fundamentalist leaders early on in his ministry. In 1957, at a major evangelistic campaign in New York City, Graham insisted on including mainline Protestants both in planning for the crusade and in following up after the crusade with those who made professions of faith. This won him “the undying wrath of separatistic fundamentalists.”⁵⁴

Key institutions. The neo-evangelical movement advanced through a number of key institutions. One of these was the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, founded in 1956 by Billy Graham and first edited by Carl Henry. The aim of the

⁵⁰Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 65.

⁵¹For more on Billy Graham, see Grant Wacker, *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁵²Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 45.

⁵³Ian M. Randall, “Outgrowing Combative Boundary-Setting: Billy Graham, Evangelism and Fundamentalism,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 2 (April 2010): 118.

⁵⁴Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 49.

magazine was to make evangelicalism respectable once again and appeal to those in mainline denominations who were open to biblical doctrine. Without question, this was neo-evangelicalism's most important publication.⁵⁵

Another important institution is the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which was formed in 1942 with the stated purpose of representing “all evangelical believers in all denominations and groups.” Evangelicals formed this association because of the perceived departure of the Federal Council of Churches from biblical doctrine. Unlike the fundamentalist American Council of Churches (1941), the NAE did not require denominations or individuals to withdraw from the Federal Council as a condition for membership but rather sought to maintain fellowship with those who were trying to reform the Federal Council from the inside.⁵⁶ The NAE appointed Harold John Ockenga (1905–1985) as its first president and saw exponential growth. It wrote a constitution and doctrinal statement (1943), founded an Office of Public Affairs (1943), opened a lobby for media ministry known as the National Religious Broadcasters (1944), and started a missions agency (1945) as well as the humanitarian ministry World Relief (1945). Today, the NAE is “by far the single largest clearinghouse for common outreach by America’s evangelicals.”⁵⁷

The leading evangelical institution in the realm of scholarship was Fuller Theological Seminary.⁵⁸ Founded in 1947 by Charles E. Fuller (1887–1969), Ockenga served as the first president. Ockenga had a lofty vision for Fuller, believing that it should

⁵⁵Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 175.

⁵⁶John H. Gerstner, “Theological Boundaries: A Reformed Perspective,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 34.

⁵⁷Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 172.

⁵⁸For an examination of Fuller Seminary as it relates to post-1940's evangelicalism, see George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

do more than simply train pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. Rather, it should serve as a place to contemplate evangelical theology and thereby save Western civilization from the degenerative effects of liberal theology that had been seen so clearly in Nazi Germany.⁵⁹ With this vision in mind, Fuller had a high-caliber faculty with Everett Harrison (1902–1999) teaching Bible, Carl Henry teaching theology, Harold Lindsell (1913–1998) teaching history and missions, and Wilbur Smith (1894–1976) teaching apologetics. For many years, these men were “the deans of neoevangelical thought.”⁶⁰

Political involvement. In subsequent decades after the beginning of the evangelical movement, evangelicals also engaged in concerted political action, opposing especially the Supreme Court Rulings of the 1960s that outlawed prayer in public schools and the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 that legalized abortion. They also opposed feminism, alcohol use, sexual promiscuity, and pornography. One evangelical who became a household name for his political activism was Jerry Falwell (1933–2007), founder of the Moral Majority. Falwell and other evangelicals like Pat Robertson (b. 1930) and James Dobson (b. 1936) were alarmed at the rapid decline they perceived in American morals as well as the country’s departure from its Christian moorings. Therefore, using mass communications very effectively, they attempted to assert their influence in various public institutions, including government and schools, and steer the country back toward a Christian moral code.⁶¹

This was not the first time evangelicals had engaged in politics. However, their level of partisan commitment during this time period was unique. Presenting a unified front, a sweeping majority of evangelicals joined the Republican Party and eventually

⁵⁹Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America*, 116.

⁶⁰Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 173–75.

⁶¹For a more in-depth analysis, see Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

exercised significant control over that party's agenda. They led the party to nominate Ronald Reagan as presidential candidate and then helped elect him in 1980 and again in 1984.⁶²

Diversification

The second half of the twentieth century and first years of the twenty-first have brought incredible diversification to the evangelical movement. Evangelicalism truly is a global movement, with the majority of its adherents in countries outside the West. In addition, there are twice as many Pentecostals and charismatics as there are other evangelicals.⁶³ Mark Noll notes that evangelicals have always been “diverse, flexible, adaptable, and multiform.”⁶⁴ This has perhaps never been the case more than it is now.

Defining Evangelicalism

With this brief overview of the history of evangelicalism in mind, it is now possible to attempt to answer the question, “What is an evangelical?” The sheer diversity of the evangelical movement has made answering such a question notoriously difficult, and it is becoming even more difficult as time goes on and the movement continues to diversify. Even in 1996, D. A. Carson acknowledged the very real possibility that “the term [evangelical] will eventually so lack definition as to be theologically useless.”⁶⁵ Indeed, that day may be quickly approaching. What follows is simply a brief survey of different approaches to defining evangelicalism and is by no means exhaustive.

⁶²Williams, *God's Own Party*, 2.

⁶³Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 9.

⁶⁴Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, 14.

⁶⁵D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 444.

The Bebbington Quadrilateral

In surveying different approaches, the most common starting place has become David Bebbington, who famously suggested four “hallmarks” of evangelicalism that have become widely known as the “Bebbington Quadrilateral.” His list includes conversionism, activism, biblicism, and “crucicentrism.” According to Bebbington, these four tendencies have characterized evangelicals since the movement began in the early eighteenth century.⁶⁶

Conversionism is “the belief that lives need to be changed.”⁶⁷ Simply being born into a Christian family or being baptized in a Christian church is not sufficient for salvation. The gospel demands that individuals “turn away from their sins in repentance and to Christ in faith.”⁶⁸ Conversion is closely related to the new birth taught by Jesus in John 3:3–8. Only those who have experienced this inward transformation will be able to see God’s Kingdom in heaven.⁶⁹

Bebbington describes activism as “the expression of the gospel in effort,” which includes both sharing the gospel with the world and engaging in social action to help those in difficult circumstances.⁷⁰ He attributes the missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the evangelical revival, noting the work of men like William Wilberforce in laboring to abolish the British slave trade. As famed evangelical Hannah More (1745–1833) wrote, “Action is the life of virtue, and the world is the theatre of action.”⁷¹

⁶⁶David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1989), 1–19.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁹Bebbington states, “The line between those who had undergone the experience and those who had not was the sharpest in the world. It marked the boundary between a Christian and a pagan.” *Ibid.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 2.

⁷¹Hannah More, *The Works of Hannah More* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), 5:201, quoted in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 12.

As may be expected, biblicism is devotion to the Bible or, in Bebbington's words, "a particular regard for the Bible."⁷² Evangelicals have believed the Bible is the source of all spiritual truth and firmly adhered to the conviction of *sola scriptura*. However, Bebbington carefully notes the differences he argues have existed among evangelicals with regard to the way they view the Bible. While all have agreed that God inspired the biblical text, there have been different views of the implications of God's inspiration. Some have been inerrantists, believing that "the Bible is altogether true" and is "truth without any mixture of error."⁷³ Others have seen things differently, such as G. S. Barrett in expressing doubt over the "crude and mechanical theory of verbal inspiration."⁷⁴ Bebbington then records, "Attitudes to the Bible drew apart until, in the wake of the First World War, the Evangelical world divided into conservatives and liberals primarily on that issue. The importance attributed by Evangelicals to the Bible eventually led to something approaching schism in their ranks."⁷⁵

Bebbington's fourth and last hallmark of evangelicalism is what he calls crucicentrism, "a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross."⁷⁶ Evangelicals distinguish themselves by emphasizing the cross more than any other theme, including Christ's incarnation.⁷⁷ Bebbington writes, "To make any theme other than the cross the fulcrum of a theological system was to take a step away from Evangelicalism."⁷⁸ Most evangelicals

⁷²Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2.

⁷³Edward Bickersteth, *The Works of Rev. E. Bickersteth*. (New York: Appleton and Hall, 1832), 11, cited in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 13.

⁷⁴George S. Barrett, *The Secularization of the Pulpit* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1894), 27, cited in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 13.

⁷⁵Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 14.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁷Bebbington observes, "The atonement eclipsed even the incarnation among Evangelicals." *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

believed in the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. However, according to Bebbington, there were a few exceptions. He writes, “Belief that Christ died in our stead was not uniform in the Evangelical tradition, but it was normal.”⁷⁹ In addition, evangelicals emphasized the implications of the cross for daily living.⁸⁰

Further Discussion of the Quadrilateral

The Bebbington Quadrilateral continues to have extensive influence and spark significant discussion in the scholarly realm. In fact, leading historians have participated in two recent panel discussions dedicated to the Quadrilateral. The papers presented at these discussions were subsequently published in the journal *Fides et Historia*.

American Society of Church History panel discussion. The first discussion took place in January 2014 at the American Society of Church History conference in Washington, D. C. and included contributions from Kelly Elliott, Thomas Kidd, and Amanda Porterfield. First, Elliott examines how well the Bebbington Quadrilateral fits with the early work of the Baptist Missionary Society in India. She quotes from several Indian converts who were led to Christ by missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society and concludes that even though evangelicalism was surrounded by new cultural influences and took on a number of different forms, Bebbington’s four central characteristics remained intact.⁸¹

Next, Kidd argues that the central feature of early evangelicalism during the Great Awakening was its emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s ministry. He claims that this was a greater departure from earlier Protestantism than any of the four elements of the

⁷⁹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 16.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹Kelly Cross Elliott, “The Bebbington Quadrilateral Travels into the Empire,” *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 46.

Bebbington Quadrilateral. This emphasis was “precisely what made evangelical Christianity as novel and controversial as it was.”⁸² This argument is very similar to Kidd’s point in an essay he has written for *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*. In that essay, he observes that “New England evangelicalism [in particular] was most markedly distinguished from earlier forms of Protestantism by new expectations for seasons of revival, or outpourings of the Holy Spirit.” These seasons saw large numbers of people experiencing evangelical conversion almost simultaneously. Even in the final years of the seventeenth century, there are signs of a new emphasis on mass conversions brought about by outpourings of the Holy Spirit.⁸³

Amanda Porterfield makes the final contribution, noting the irony of the Bebbington Quadrilateral being associated with “scholarship that approached religion as an intellectual system rather than an affective enterprise.” In reality, Bebbington’s work complements the “lived religionist” approach to religion put forward by Geertz and others. The main difference lies not in viewpoint but in method, with Bebbington mostly analyzing texts and others incorporating more ethnographic methods that involve participant-observation.⁸⁴

Conference on Faith and History panel discussion. The second discussion of Bebbington’s work took place in September 2014 at the Conference on Faith and History meeting at Pepperdine University and included contributions from Darren Dochuk, Mark Noll, and Molly Worthen. First, Dochuk explores a few hallmarks of

⁸²Thomas S. Kidd, “The Bebbington Quadrilateral and the Work of the Holy Spirit,” *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 54.

⁸³Thomas S. Kidd, “‘Prayer for a Saving Issue’: Evangelical Development in New England before the Great Awakening,” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 129–30.

⁸⁴Amanda Porterfield, “Bebbington’s Approach to Evangelical Christianity as a Pioneering Effort in Lived Religion,” *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 58–61.

evangelicals that may deserve to be added to the Quadrilateral. He cites Kidd's work and agrees that scholarship should "take seriously" the early emphasis on the Holy Spirit's ministry among evangelicals.⁸⁵ Dochuk then notes the interdenominational nature of evangelicalism. Denominational differences did not keep evangelicals from working together with a mutual spirit of cooperation. Therefore, this commitment to "fellowship" is another fundamental distinctive of evangelicalism.⁸⁶ A final point of emphasis among evangelicals is their premillennial eschatology and consequent anticipation of Christ's immanent return. Not only has this been a subject of frequent discussion and debate among evangelicals—even to the point of many fundamentalist evangelicals choosing their closest associates according to their timetable of the rapture—but was "one of the cruxes of collective belief and action."⁸⁷ After suggesting the addition of these tendencies to the Bebbington Quadrilateral, Dochuk then wonders whether it may be appropriate to think of evangelicalism as a sentiment or perhaps a tone just as much as a creed. After all, he argues, evangelicals have always been just as concerned about spiritual deadness as with unbiblical thinking and eager to enjoy fellowship with each other based on their shared passion. Dochuk then wonders if evangelicalism could also be considered a method—that is, "a specific mode of interpreting, interacting with, and engaging the world" that emphasizes personal spiritual experience and has little time for abstract theories that are disconnected from reality.⁸⁸

Noll describes his essay as "the ravings of a fanatical nominalist," arguing against any such entity as evangelicalism and asserts that using the term is not conducive

⁸⁵Darren Dochuk, "Revisiting Bebbington's Classic Rendering of Modern Evangelicalism at Points of New Departure," *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 64.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 66.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 67–68. See also Sutton, *American Apocalypse*.

⁸⁸Dochuk, "Revisiting Bebbington's Classic Rendering of Modern Evangelicalism at Points of New Departure," 68–70.

to historical research or historical narratives. Instead, he prefers to speak in terms of various “evangelical traits.” This is the difference between the realist view, which holds to the existence of evangelicalism, and Noll’s nominalist view, which only recognizes traits that can be given the label of “evangelical.”⁸⁹

In the final essay, Molly Worthen expresses doubt about whether the static application of the four bullet points of the Bebbington Quadrilateral sufficiently accounts for the diversity of the movement. She prefers to think of evangelicalism as a “constellation of Protestant traditions.” Although at one point or another, evangelicals have disagreed with each other about almost everything except Jesus’ deity, they seem to have been participating in the same conversation for a few centuries now. They orbit around the same questions and share a common set of worries and concerns. Worthen then lists three basic concerns that unite evangelicals: “how to repair the fracture between spiritual and rational knowledge,” “how to assure salvation and a true relationship with God,” and “how to resolve the tension between the demands of personal belief and the constraints of a secularized public square.”⁹⁰

Bebbington’s response. Bebbington responded to both panel discussions, and editors combined his remarks in a final article in *Fides et Historia*. His responses to Kidd, Dochuk, and Noll are especially noteworthy.

In response to Kidd’s suggestion that an emphasis on the Spirit’s ministry be added to the Quadrilateral, Bebbington objects based on the grounds that “characteristics need to have existed over time if they are to be treated as valid marks of the whole

⁸⁹Mark A. Noll, “Noun or Adjective? The Ravings of a Fanatical Nominalist,” *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 77–81. For more on evangelical traits, see introduction to Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

⁹⁰Molly Worthen, “Defining Evangelicalism: Questions That Complement the Quadrilateral,” *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 83–84.

movement.” Of course, the degree to which something is emphasized will vary, but at least some emphasis must be discernible. This consistent emphasis has not been the case with the Holy Spirit’s ministry. Bebbington points out that fundamentalists in the 1920s did not give much place in their thought to the Spirit—likely a reaction to the growing Pentecostal movement. Not only that, they even accused the Pentecostals of distracting people from Jesus with their emphasis on the Spirit. Furthermore, Bebbington contends that even at the beginning of the evangelical movement, some in the movement were wary of placing too much emphasis on the Spirit’s presence. Thus, the movement was divided over pneumatology from its very inception. Therefore, it is not appropriate to add an emphasis on the Holy Spirit to the Quadrilateral since it has not been a hallmark of the entire movement.⁹¹

In response to Dochuk, Bebbington continues to defend the Quadrilateral as it stands. He responds to the suggestion of adding fellowship to the Quadrilateral by noting that many evangelicals have lacked a communal emphasis. Ironically, some scholars have even suggested adding individualism as a fifth characteristic of evangelicalism.⁹² Because of this, fellowship is not a true hallmark of evangelicals because it is far from universal in the evangelical movement. The same is true of premillennial eschatology. In the eighteenth century, postmillennial teaching was the most common view, and premillennialism was rare. Thus it does not deserve a place as a hallmark of evangelicalism.⁹³

Bebbington’s response to Noll’s contention that evangelicalism does not truly exist is a simple one: evangelicals themselves have consistently believed that

⁹¹David W. Bebbington, “The Evangelical Quadrilateral: A Response,” *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 89.

⁹²See Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19.

⁹³Bebbington, “The Evangelical Quadrilateral,” 93.

evangelicalism exists, and “agents have privileges.” That is, we should respect their opinion. Bebbington reasons, “If a historian ought to see things in the same way as agents in the past, a case that has been persuasively argued, then the presumption must be that something called evangelicalism has been there for investigation.”⁹⁴

Four Views

Another helpful resource for defining evangelicalism is *Four Views on the Evangelical Spectrum*, edited by Andrew Naselli and Collin Hansen. It includes contributions from Kevin T. Bauder, R. Albert Mohler Jr., John G. Stackhouse Jr., and Roger E. Olson.⁹⁵ After contributing their main essay, the authors exchange papers and offer responses to each other.

Fundamentalism. Bauder, writing from a self-identified fundamentalist perspective, observes that the most basic kind of unity among Christians is not outward unity but inward unity—a unity that is intangible and invisible. This does not imply that outward unity is unimportant but simply that it can only be enjoyed where inner unity already exists. This inward unity comes from believing the gospel. If one party denies the gospel, Christian unity cannot exist.⁹⁶

The question then becomes, “How do we know what the gospel is?” Bauder explains that the gospel does not merely consist of events but of the correct interpretation of those events. In other words, it consists of doctrine. Furthermore, certain doctrines are essential to the gospel and may be called “fundamental doctrines” or simply “fundamentals.” Thus, the fundamentals are the boundary of Christian fellowship.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Bebbington, “The Evangelical Quadrilateral,” 94.

⁹⁵Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, eds., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 29.

So far, many evangelicals would agree. However, Bauder then advocates for second-degree separation where believers not only separate themselves from theological liberals in organizing churches but also refuse to cooperate in any way with other believers who hold to the true gospel but do not practice separation along these boundaries. Instead, Bauder writes, “we should treat them as people who have a share in the evil of apostasy.” This is “the most basic cause of the ongoing division between fundamentalists and the rest of the evangelical movement,” and it is where many evangelicals would disagree.⁹⁸

Confessional evangelicalism. Mohler writes from a “confessional evangelical” perspective and argues that evangelicalism is properly viewed as a group that is both centered and bounded. The center is the gospel, as the very word “evangelical” suggests. However, the boundaries have proven more difficult to identify. Mohler critiques the Bebbington Quadrilateral for being “so vague as to be fairly useless in determining the limits of evangelical definition” and goes on to say that “it is hard to see how many Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants would not consider themselves included.”⁹⁹ The Quadrilateral lacks boundary lines that make clear who should *not* be considered an evangelical.

Mohler then suggests that once the center of evangelicalism—the gospel—is clearly defined, boundary lines naturally arise. The center defines the boundary. This boundary is simply doctrinal lines that, if crossed, would amount to a denial of the gospel. Boundary doctrines include “the trustworthiness of the Bible, the exclusivity of

⁹⁸Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 40. For more on secondary separation along these boundaries, see Larry Russell Oats, *The Church of the Fundamentalists: An Examination of Ecclesiastical Separation in the Twentieth Century* (Watertown, WI: Maranatha Baptist Press, 2016).

⁹⁹Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 73.

the gospel, the integrity of theism, and the nature of justification and the atonement.”¹⁰⁰ To express unbiblical views of any one of these issues is to deny the gospel. Therefore, those who advocate such views should not be considered evangelicals.

It is important for true evangelicals to maintain these boundaries because that is the only way evangelicalism will be a coherent movement. In Mohler’s words, “Attention to the boundaries is as requisite as devotion to the center.” Boundaries do not exist for their own sake but are necessary in order to keep the center intact.¹⁰¹

Generic evangelicalism. In contrast to Mohler, Stackhouse finds Bebbington’s hallmarks quite helpful. Writing from the perspective of “generic evangelicalism,” Stackhouse embraces these hallmarks and champions George Marsden’s suggestion for a fifth item, transdenominationalism, which is defined as “recognizing authentic Christianity in other denominations sufficiently strong as to warrant working together on projects of mutual concern.”¹⁰² As long as someone fits these hallmarks, they are an evangelical. Therefore, the evangelical camp is large enough to include both those who hold to open theism and those who deny penal substitutionary atonement.¹⁰³

However, Stackhouse also notes that evangelicals are a subset of Christians. Therefore, anyone who clearly deviates from Christian orthodoxy is not a Christian and therefore is not an evangelical either, even if they fit the five hallmarks. Yet, Stackhouse’s requirements for maintaining the Christian label seem to be somewhat looser than those of Mohler and Bauder. He is more cautious about deciding who does and does not qualify as a Christian. While some firmness in maintaining the boundaries

¹⁰⁰Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 89. Mohler does not claim that this is an exhaustive list.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 95.

¹⁰²Ibid., 121.

¹⁰³Ibid., 131–36.

may be necessary at times, especially when deciding who will be employed by evangelical institutions, the bigger priority is “keeping vital things vital.” This does not mean we can be “reckless on the boundaries,” but we should still be willing to “tolerate peripheral challenges” and recognize that a certain degree of grayness in the boundary lines is inevitable since the outermost boundaries of Christian orthodoxy are “inherently contestable.”¹⁰⁴

Postconservative evangelicalism. In the last essay, Roger Olson writes from the viewpoint of “postconservative evangelicalism.” He takes the position that evangelicalism is a movement and not an organization. Unlike Roman Catholicism, it has no headquarters or authoritative magisterium. Because of this, “evangelicalism has no definable boundaries and cannot have them.” Instead, it just has a center—actually a number of emphases that collectively make up a center. These emphases have been aptly summarized in the Bebbington Quadrilateral.¹⁰⁵ Olson compares evangelicalism to a tent that has no walls. It has a center, and those who adhere to this center are evangelicals. However, there is no legitimate way of determining who is not an evangelical.¹⁰⁶

Other Suggestions for Defining Marks.

As can be seen, there is quite a diversity of opinion about how to define evangelicalism and how to go about discerning who is and is not an evangelical. Without question, the Bebbington Quadrilateral has been quite influential. However, other scholars have suggested lists of defining marks and descriptions of evangelicalism as well. A few of these are worthy of mention.

¹⁰⁴Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 137–41.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 168–75. Olson also adds a somewhat vague fifth element: “respect for the great tradition of Christian orthodoxy.”

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 179.

In *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, Alister McGrath suggests “six fundamental convictions” of evangelicals. These include (1) “the supreme authority of Scripture as a source of knowledge of God and a guide to Christian living,” (2) “the majesty of Jesus Christ, both as incarnate God and Lord and as the Savior of sinful humanity,” (3) “the lordship of the Holy Spirit,” (4) “the need for personal conversion,” (5) “the priority of evangelism for both individual Christians and the church as a whole,” and (6) “the importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth.”¹⁰⁷ McGrath also observes that evangelicalism is both a theological system and a “devotional ethos,” combining the Reformed emphasis on sound doctrine with the Pietist emphasis on spiritual vitality.¹⁰⁸

Timothy Larsen has also written insightfully about evangelical identity. He states that an evangelical is: (1) “an orthodox Protestant,” (2) “who stands in the tradition of global Christian networks arising from the eighteenth-century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield,” (3) “who has a preeminent place for the Bible in her or his Christian life as the divinely inspired, final authority in matters of faith and practice,” (4) “who stresses reconciliation with God through the atoning work of Christ on the cross,” and (5) “who stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual to bring about conversion and an ongoing life of fellowship with God and service to God and others, including the duty of all believers to participate in the task of proclaiming the gospel to people.” This “pentagon” is helpful because it explicitly places evangelicalism in its historical context.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 55–56.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰⁹Timothy Larsen, “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–14. The main difference between Larsen’s pentagon and Bebbington’s quadrilateral is that Larson mentions an emphasis on the Holy Spirit while Bebbington does not.

George Marsden notes that the term “evangelicalism” can be used in several ways. It can be used narrowly to denote a consciously “evangelical” community that spans a variety of denominations and includes a complex array of infrastructures. It can also be used to refer to a broad, organic movement characterized by significant diversity but moving in the same general direction. Finally, it can be used of a conceptual unity that designates Christians who fit a particular definition. Using the term in this third sense, evangelicals are Christians who usually emphasize: (1) “the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture,” (2) “the real, historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture,” (3) “eternal salvation only through personal trust in Christ,” (4) “the importance of evangelism and missions,” and (5) “the importance of a spiritually transformed life.”¹¹⁰

In addition, the late D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones also suggested some general characteristics of evangelicals. According to Lloyd-Jones, a true evangelical is “entirely subservient to the Bible,” is “a man who is always watching,” “distrusts reason and particularly reason in the form of [secular] philosophy,” is “always ready to act on his beliefs,” puts “tremendous emphasis...upon the rebirth,” has a great “interest in revival,” “always gives primacy to preaching,” and is “always concerned about evangelism.”¹¹¹ In addition to these general characteristics of evangelicals, Lloyd-Jones also identifies specific boundary beliefs that help distinguish evangelicals from non-evangelicals. These include affirmation of the sole authority and complete historicity of the Bible, creationism without any accommodation to evolutionary theory, the historicity of humanity’s fall into sin, one way of salvation, penal substitutionary atonement, and

¹¹⁰George M. Marsden, “Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ix–x.

¹¹¹Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “What Is an Evangelical?,” in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942–1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 322–35.

justification by faith alone. It is also necessary to reject various aspects of Catholicism.¹¹²

So far, all of these descriptions of evangelicalism come from authors who identify as evangelicals. This can be an advantage, but it is also very likely that insiders will miss something. Therefore, it is helpful to get an outsider's perspective on defining marks of evangelicalism as well. Sydney Ahlstrom offers a helpful list. According to Ahlstrom, evangelicals are Protestants who: (1) "repudiate Roman Catholic polity, liturgies, piety, and doctrine, and at least used to regard the Roman Catholic Church as the Anti-Christ," (2) "insist upon the inerrancy of the received biblical text, tend to interpret revelation in strict propositional terms, and question the value of historico-critical studies of biblical religion," (3) "regard the doctrine of *sola scriptura* as having very serious import for the devotional life of every Christian," (4) "emphasize the experiential dimensions of being or becoming a Christian and hence tend to diminish the significance of the sacraments, a sacerdotal clergy, authoritative hierarchical structures, and doctrinal complexities," (5) "understand the ethical teachings of the Bible in a precisionistic or legalistic manner and oppose utilitarian or situational approaches," and (6) "resist the extension of fellowship or even the name of Christian to persons and churches that do not share these convictions."¹¹³

The Approach of the Present Work

Having given a brief overview of various ways scholars conceive of evangelicalism, it is time to make a decision. Which is most appropriate?

A Doctrinal Basis

The first issue to nail down is whether to adopt a sociological or doctrinal

¹¹²Lloyd-Jones, "What Is an Evangelical?," 340–51.

¹¹³Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "From Puritanism to Evangelicalism: A Critical Response," in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 290–91.

definition. Scholars such as Richard Lints strongly prefer the former, arguing that doctrine is merely tangential to the essence of the evangelical movement and that there is no confessional or theological framework that holds the movement together.¹¹⁴ However, a stronger case can be made for the latter. There are two main points to consider.

Evangelicals have viewed themselves as doctrinal people. D. A. Carson convincingly argues that a deep concern for sound theology has historically been a central emphasis of evangelicals and one of the main reasons the modern (post-World War II) evangelical movement arose. He observes that “it cannot be said too strongly that the leaders of the movement... understood what they were setting out to do in *theological* terms” and cautions against “relegating to the periphery what the leaders themselves saw as central.” Just because many contemporary evangelical leaders have arguably lost their theological moorings, that does not change the fact that “until recently evangelicalism has tried to define itself primarily in theological categories.” Carson then concludes that “to read the entire history of the movement in terms of the most recent developments of some wings of it is to fall into historical anachronism.”¹¹⁵

In addition, David Wells argues for a strongly theological view of what it means to be an evangelical. He points out that “evangelicals have always been *doctrinal* people.”¹¹⁶ Theology served as a foundation for the coalition of modern evangelical leaders like Billy Graham and Carl Henry, specifically belief in the total authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the centrality of penal substitution. These men did not simply assert certain theological beliefs but actually saw those beliefs as the glue that

¹¹⁴Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 30–31.

¹¹⁵Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 456.

¹¹⁶David F. Wells, “‘No Offense: I Am an Evangelical’: A Search for Self-Definition,” in *A Time to Speak: The Evangelical-Jewish Encounter*, ed. A. James Rudin and Marvin R. Wilson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 22. Italics in original.

bound them together. Such beliefs were instrumental in evangelicalism becoming a cohesive movement.¹¹⁷

Concern for the Bible leads to concern about doctrine. Not only has an emphasis on doctrine been central to the evangelical movement, it is also a natural outgrowth of “biblicism” (to borrow from the Bebbington Quadrilateral). That is, concern for the Bible leads to a concern about doctrine.

Lloyd-Jones follows many others in observing that evangelicals start with the Bible, are a people of the Bible, and submit themselves to the Bible as their only authority. In his words, the Reformed slogan *sola scriptura* “has always been the slogan of the true evangelical.”¹¹⁸ Since evangelicals so value the Bible, should we not expect that they would also place a premium on rightly understanding the teachings of the Bible? Is it really possible for those who truly value God’s Word *not* to be concerned about rightly understanding God’s Word? To the present author, it appears as though a concern for doctrine and theology is a necessary corollary to valuing the Bible.

A Centered and Bounded Set

This dissertation’s approach to defining evangelicalism will be intentionally theological. This includes having clear doctrinal boundaries. However, this does not eliminate the need to take into account values and behaviors as well (although even these values and behaviors are commonly, if not universally, tied to theology). As outlined above, Albert Mohler borrows from the field of mathematics to argue that evangelicalism

¹¹⁷David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 5. Wells continues on to bemoan the doctrinal weakness that has become characteristic of evangelicalism recently. He writes, “What had started out as a strategy for building the evangelical movement in fact ended up weakening the whole surrounding fabric of belief. And it is now worse than that. This weakening process did not stop at the periphery. It has entered the central core.” Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁸Lloyd-Jones, “What Is an Evangelical?,” 318.

is both a centered and bounded set. That is, it must have a center that brings evangelicals together with enthusiasm, but it also must have appropriate boundaries derived from the center. Having boundaries without a center would produce a “sterile and lifeless faith—orthodox but spiritually powerless,” while having a center without boundaries would lead to immense confusion.¹¹⁹

Mohler’s arguments are convincing. The brief overview of evangelicalism’s history included above demonstrates that a pietistic emphasis on lived religion has been characteristic of the evangelical movement since its inception. Evangelicals are anything but theological “bean-counters” who value theology for its own sake. With the possible exception of some forms of fundamentalism, evangelicals have primarily been people who are *for* something rather than people who are *against* something. Therefore, any definition of evangelicalism must include a center.

However, in order to protect the integrity of the center, it is necessary to maintain clear boundaries. Without these boundaries, the center will inevitably crumble, and the words “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” will possess relatively little meaning. Lloyd-Jones refers to “the danger of being so broad, so wide, and so loose that in the end we have no definitions at all.”¹²⁰ We can avoid this danger by being very clear and specific in setting boundaries. Of course, the goal of these boundaries is not to exclude anyone unnecessarily but rather to include as many as possible. However, it is necessary to maintain core evangelical doctrines and values while doing that.¹²¹ Indeed, as Mohler has suggested, the boundaries need not be arbitrary but should arise from the central doctrines themselves—namely doctrines integrally bound up in the gospel. To put it another way, when setting boundary doctrines, it is helpful to ask the question, “What

¹¹⁹Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, 76.

¹²⁰Lloyd-Jones, “What Is an Evangelical?,” 309.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 317.

beliefs are impossible to deny without explicitly or implicitly denying a fundamental tenet of the gospel?” Those are the appropriate boundary lines.

The Specific Approach

Since the best view of evangelicalism is one that gives proper attention to both the center and the boundaries, this dissertation will analyze A. W. Tozer accordingly. It will examine Tozer’s passion for the center according to the categories suggested in the Bebbington Quadrilateral: biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, and activism. These are widely accepted hallmarks that have characterized evangelicalism since its inception. It would be difficult to think of someone as an evangelical if they were not zealous for these things. Therefore, this dissertation will use Tozer’s writings to demonstrate his zeal in these four areas.

However, Bebbington’s hallmarks are not sufficient by themselves to determine who is and is not an evangelical. To argue that Tozer was an evangelical without having clearly established boundaries would be of little value. Therefore, agreeing with Mohler, it is necessary to identify clear confessional boundaries that will help answer the question of Tozer’s evangelical identity. As demonstrated above, different authors have made suggestions for the exact doctrines that should be on this list. This dissertation will more or less follow the suggested list of Mohler by examining Tozer’s views of four issues: the inerrancy of the Bible, justification by faith alone (which is especially important since Tozer draws from Catholic sources so extensively), penal substitutionary atonement, and the exclusivity of the gospel. For convenience, this project groups each of the four elements of the Bebbington Quadrilateral with one of the boundary doctrines that is somewhat related to it: conversionism with justification by faith alone, activism with the exclusivity of the gospel, biblicism with biblical inerrancy, and crucicentrism with penal substitutionary atonement. Examined through the lens of these evangelical hallmarks and boundary doctrines, Tozer’s writings convincingly

demonstrate that he was indeed an evangelical.¹²²

¹²²Throughout the rest of the dissertation, “evangelical” should be interpreted as “confessional evangelical” according to the description set forth by Mohler.

CHAPTER 3

TOZER AND CONVERSION

Tozer recognized personal conversion as essential both for being with God in heaven and communing with God on earth. During his ministry, Christianity was generally in vogue in America. Since being a Christian made a person more reputable, respectable, and highly regarded, large numbers of people were involved in church. However, this does not mean all of them were regenerate. Tozer faced this reality directly and made it clear on many different occasions that, in the words of Jesus in John 3:7, “Ye must be born again.”¹

The Center: Conversionism

As mentioned above, one of the hallmarks of evangelicalism is its emphasis on personal conversion. In order for anyone to properly be considered an evangelical, this emphasis must be a prominent feature of their ministry.

Demonstrating Tozer’s Conversionism

Throughout his writings and sermons, Tozer gives significant emphasis to the need for personal conversion.

Personal conversion experience. The natural place to start in demonstrating Tozer’s conversionism is the way he describes his own conversion experience. He recounts how, at the age of seventeen, he went up to his family’s attic, knelt on his knees, and committed himself to Jesus Christ. He notes that this must have been a work of God

¹Since Tozer used the King James Version, all Scripture references in this dissertation are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

because he was surrounded by unbelief throughout his upbringing. Moreover, at the time of his conversion, “there was not a single human being to help”—nobody who “had a marked New Testament to show me how easy it is” and “no friend placing an arm over my shoulder to pray beside me.”² And yet, Tozer writes, “I can only testify that my conversion to Jesus Christ was as real as any man’s conversion has ever been.”³ On another occasion, Tozer explains how he would respond if someone were to ask him how he knows Christianity is true. Rather than give the person lofty intellectual arguments, Tozer maintains he would simply respond that, quite simply, he knows because he was there. That is, he has experienced God personally at conversion.⁴

The need for true conversion. Tozer also emphasizes the need for true conversion in order to be a true Christian. He distinguishes between “denominational ‘churchianity’” and “true Christianity,” explaining that the key element that makes the difference between the two is God implanting in the true believer’s heart “an unknown factor, which impels him to act righteously.”⁵ Elsewhere, he reminds his audience that no matter how much a person goes to church, joins various religious groups, or reads the New Testament, this does not mean they are truly saved. Salvation only comes as someone is born again—that is, as they are changed by God’s inner working in their heart, an experience commonly called “regeneration.” Until this happens, they are still in their sins.⁶ This new birth is the basis of the “clear line of demarcation” that “runs

²A. W. Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son: A Beautiful Portrait of Deity from the Gospel of John*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 143, CD-ROM.

³Ibid.

⁴A. W. Tozer, *Rut, Rot or Revival: The Problem of Change and Breaking Out of the Status Quo*, ed. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 130, CD-ROM.

⁵A. W. Tozer, *Tozer: Fellowship of the Burning Heart*, ed. James L. Snyder (Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2006), 130.

⁶A. W. Tozer, *Tozer Speaks to Students: Chapel Messages Preached at Wheaton College*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 154, CD-ROM.

through the entire New Testament, quite literally dividing one human being from another and making a distinction as sharp as that which exists between different genera of the animal kingdom.”⁷ According to Tozer, the new birth is so important that someone who has been born again and someone who has not are completely different species.

Tozer warns that a day is coming when those who depend on mere “mental assent” to Christianity instead of experiencing a miraculous new birth will face God’s judgment.⁸ This is because the main hindrance to fellowship with God is not a lack of mental apprehension but rather man’s unredeemed nature.⁹ Therefore, “men do not become Christians by associating with church people, nor by religious contact, nor by religious education; they become Christians only by invasion of their nature by the Spirit of God in the new birth.”¹⁰

In another place, Tozer contrasts “evangelical rationalists” and “evangelical mystics,” explaining that rationalists believe mentally apprehending the truth is enough and arguing that such rationalism “will kill the truth just as quickly as liberalism will, though in a more subtle way.”¹¹ This is because biblical revelation by itself cannot save. Of course, revelation is the ground Christians stand upon, and they should defend it at all costs. However, in order to be saved, a person must have something beyond revelation—namely “inward illumination” and “renewal.”¹²

⁷A. W. Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 15, CD-ROM.

⁸A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy*, ed. Gerald B. Smith, vol. 1 (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 3, CD-ROM.

⁹A. W. Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God: Teachings from the Book of Hebrews*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 29.

¹⁰A. W. Tozer, *God’s Pursuit of Man* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 120, CD-ROM.

¹¹A. W. Tozer, *Faith beyond Reason: With God Nothing Is Impossible* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 20, CD-ROM.

¹²*Ibid.*, 24

Interestingly, despite his emphasis on personal conversion, Tozer seldom issued altar calls after his sermons. According to Snyder, Tozer was a bit skeptical of the legitimacy of large responses. Instead, he would urge people to go home, open the Bible, and ask God to speak to them. On more than one occasion, people would call Tozer after returning home to tell him that they believed God had used the sermon to lead them to Christ. Snyder writes, “This was the sort of deliberate, unemotional commitment Tozer was looking for. His concern was that people come to terms with Christ. Conversions took place routinely at the Chicago church.”¹³

The neglect of teaching about true conversion. Tozer believed one of the reasons so many people do not understand true conversion is because the church has been woefully negligent in teaching about it. This perceived negligence had been present for some time and had been known by different names. For example, during the Antinomian Controversy of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1636 to 1638, individuals such as John Cotton (1585–1652) and Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) taught that obedience to God was not a necessary corollary to justification.¹⁴ Then in the eighteenth century, John Glas (1695–1773) and Robert Sandeman (1718–1781) also taught that saving faith was mere intellectual assent to the gospel, just as a person would assent to other historical facts or propositions. Followers of Sandeman became known as Sandemanians.¹⁵ Moving forward to the time of Tozer’s own ministry, some of the faculty members of Dallas Theological Seminary were beginning to advocate a position that was very similar to both

¹³James L. Snyder, *The Life of A. W. Tozer: In Pursuit of God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 105–6.

¹⁴For extensive historical documentation of this controversy, see David D. Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹⁵For more on Sandemanianism, see John Howard Smith, *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion: A History of Sandemanianism in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008).

antinomianism and Sandemanianism and that would eventually become known as the “Free Grace” view of salvation. Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952), the founder of the seminary, taught that the only thing that was necessary for a person to be saved was simple, cognitive belief in Jesus as Savior and the repentance required for salvation in the Bible was only repentance from unbelief rather than repentance from sin.¹⁶

Tozer opposed these viewpoints, believing that salvation is always tied to a distinct change in a person’s pattern of life. For this reason, he expresses suspicion of the common evangelical phraseology “accepting Christ.” Tozer writes, “I cannot estimate the number, although I think it is a very large number, of people who have been brought into some kind of religious experience by a fleeting formality of ‘accepting Christ,’ and a great, great number of them are still not saved.”¹⁷ The results of this are all around us as people who falsely count themselves saved still behave like the sinners they are instead of behaving like someone who is truly born again. This sad increase of people who are deceived in this way is a direct result of an irresponsible approach to evangelism among evangelicals—an approach that suggests “it is the easiest thing in the world to ‘accept Jesus’” and permits people to accept him simply by a fleeting emotional impulse.¹⁸

In previous generations, the call to “accept” Christ communicated the mighty and glorious truth that individuals do not have to earn heaven through good works. However, since that time, the word “accept” has degenerated quite significantly and now implies someone can become a Christian apart from real repentance and spiritual transformation. The call to “accept” Christ has produced “a generation of Christians, or so-called Christians, that are impenitent in their heart, frivolous in their spirit and worldly

¹⁶Lewis Sperry Chafer, “The Saving Work of the Triune God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 107, no. 428 (October 1950): 393. A key work advocating for the Free Grace movement after Tozer’s ministry is Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).

¹⁷Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son*, 152.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 153

in their conduct.”¹⁹

The error of many churches today is assuming someone can experience justification without transformation. Regeneration and justification may be treated as separate concepts for the purposes of systematic theology, but they can never be experienced separately in actual life. When God declares a person righteous, he instantly works to begin making that person righteous as well. The reason churches are so full of “substandard Christians” is because they do not expect a converted person to actually live as a transformed person.²⁰

It is all too common for evangelical leaders to lower the bar for conversion to sub-biblical levels in an attempt to make it as easy as possible for people to supposedly be saved. They often imply that it can be as simple as filling out a card and mailing it in. One of the reasons many leaders treat conversion so irresponsibly is because they are overly eager to brag about large numbers of converts. Tozer laments, “In our eagerness to count noses and say we had forty conversions yesterday, we let people through when in honesty to their soul we never should have done it.”²¹ Such dishonesty has eternal consequences both for the leader and for the supposed “convert.”

The absence of true conversion. Such irresponsible behavior on the part of evangelical leaders leads to an absence of true conversion among large swaths of churchgoers. Tozer observes, “Among the evangelicals it is entirely possible to come into membership, to ooze in by osmosis, to leak through the cells of the church and never know what it means to be born of the Spirit and washed in the blood.”²² We then call

¹⁹A. W. Tozer, *The Christ-Centered Church: Creating Fearless, Spirit-Filled Followers of Christ*, ed. James L. Snyder (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2009), 159–60.

²⁰Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 68.

²¹Tozer, *Tozer Speaks to Students*, 155.

²²Tozer, *Rut, Rot or Revival*, 17–18.

them to the “deeper life,” but such as life is, in reality, nothing more than basic Christianity. It is not “deeper” but rather where the convert should have been from the very beginning, enjoying real happiness, joy, and victory through Christ.²³

When people discover they have not made much spiritual progress even after being in the church for years, it is time for them to examine themselves and question whether they have truly been converted. They should look for the evidence of a changed life and radical repentance. There is a good chance they have never had these things at all.²⁴ According to Tozer, such individuals are what Revelation 3:1 speaks of when the angel says to the church, “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” They are Christians in name only, which is exactly what “nominal means.” They have not been fundamentally changed and continue to be spiritually dead just as they have always been.²⁵

Tozer posits that it is altogether possible, and even common, to teach a sinner simply to behave like a Christian. He observes, “You baptize him and confirm him and feed him the Lord’s Supper regularly and you instruct him in ethics and soon he begins acting like a Christian, just as a chimpanzee acts like a man.”²⁶ And yet, he is not a Christian. He does not have an inward pull toward true holiness and righteousness but only knows how to live as a Christian externally. This is the case with a “vast number of

²³Tozer, *Rut, Rot or Revival*. “Deeper Life” theology originated in England in the nineteenth century and was advanced especially through the Keswick Convention. It teaches that Christians need to seek another crisis experience after their conversion. This experience is commonly called “entire sanctification” or a “second blessing” and consists of encountering the Holy Spirit in a much more powerful way and immediately being empowered to experience the so-called “deeper” things of the Christian life. See Charles Forbes Harford, ed., *The Keswick Convention: Its Message, Its Methods and Its Men* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1907); Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1952); Andrew David Naselli, *Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2010).

²⁴Tozer, *Rut, Rot or Revival*, 34.

²⁵A. W. Tozer, *Reclaiming Christianity: A Call to Authentic Faith*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 92–93.

²⁶Tozer, *Tozer*, 128–29.

church members.”²⁷ Elsewhere, Tozer repeats this sobering estimate, reckoning that “a vast number of people who call themselves Christians—the overwhelming majority—are nominal” and that “only a remnant is saved.”²⁸

Tozer describes unregenerate church members as living “once removed from God.”²⁹ The person learns to say “God is love” as a small child, gets a Bible for graduating from one grade to another, makes a speech in their Sunday school class, begins to sing in the church choir, and joins the church through baptism. Eventually, they get to the point teaching a class of their own, hosting missionaries on furlough, and learning to tithe. However, through all of this, the individual never has a true experience of God. They are “once removed from God.”³⁰

Unfortunately, such unregenerate proselytes often lead others to be unregenerate proselytes as well, teaching them to have an external religious experience that falls short of true conversion and actually immunizing them to conversion. After all, they themselves have never known anything else. As a result, many churches “are comprised only of proselytes, echoes of echoes and reflections of reflections—never the true light shining.”³¹

Contours of Tozer’s Conversionism

Having seen that Tozer clearly placed a high value on personal conversion, it is also helpful to trace some of the major contours of Tozer’s conversionism. These contours give a more complete picture of Tozer’s view of the new birth.

²⁷Tozer, *Tozer*.

²⁸Tozer, *The Christ-Centered Church*, 131.

²⁹Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, 42.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Tozer, *Faith beyond Reason*, 106.

Before one experiences conversion. According to Tozer, nobody can turn to God unless God first does a “prevenient work.”³² The reason for this is that the fall of humanity into sin has affected every part of human nature, including the intellectual, psychological, spiritual, and even physical faculties. Sin has injured man’s whole being, seeping into every part of his life and wreaking havoc on his relation to God, other people, and everything around him.³³ It is as if an unregenerate person’s spiritual faculties are sleeping and, for all practical purposes, dead since they are entirely unused. The Spirit must enter a person’s heart and make the depth of their sin real to them. This is necessary to bring about true repentance. Until a person understands the extent of sin’s grasp on their heart, they will not be able to repent properly.³⁴ The Spirit has to pierce their heart and bring about severe moral discomfort, and he does this through the Word of God.³⁵ The Spirit then quickens them to active life, which is a miracle commonly called “regeneration.”³⁶

Radical nature of conversion. According to Tozer, the work of the Spirit in regeneration is no small thing but rather a major miracle. He observes how Peter likens it to the miracle of Jesus rising from the dead (1 Pet 1:3). Tozer also compares it to God creating the universe in the very beginning. Just as God’s initial genesis of the world was an unfathomable miracle, his regensis of spiritual life within a sinner is a major miracle

³²A. W. Tozer, *The Set of the Sail: Direction for Your Spiritual Journey*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 141, CD-ROM.

³³A. W. Tozer, *Born after Midnight: Spiritual Renewal Comes to Those Who Want It Badly Enough* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 6, CD-ROM.

³⁴A. W. Tozer, *Alive in the Spirit: Experiencing the Presence and Power of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016), 74.

³⁵A. W. Tozer, *God’s Power for Your Life: How the Holy Spirit Transforms You through God’s Word*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 191.

³⁶A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 49.

as well.³⁷ Elsewhere, Tozer calls the new birth “as truly a miracle of God as was the first creation” because it is “actually the creating of another man in the heart where another man had been.”³⁸

This miracle is not without effect in a person’s life. Tozer rhetorically asks,

Is justification from past offenses all that distinguishes a Christian from a sinner? Can a man become a believer in Christ and be no better than he was before? Does the gospel offer no more than a skillful advocate to get the guilty sinners off free at the day of judgment?³⁹

The implied answer, of course, is no. Once a sinner meets Christ, he is a sinner no more. The gospel changes him and shifts the center of his life from self to Christ, facing him in an entirely new direction and making him a new creation. It takes away both his supposed good and his evil and changes him into an entirely new person. This moral change of heart and life always accompanies the judicial change of status.⁴⁰

This change goes right down to the heart, beginning in the center and working out to the external conduct. People can join all the churches in their city, celebrate every holy day on the Christian calendar, and be baptized by every mode known to man, but they will still be lost if they are not changed on the inside.⁴¹ Moreover, because this change reaches to the heart, it affects every area of a person’s life. This includes what the person reads, the friends they cultivate, the places they go, how they spend their money, and what they do with their time. It leaves no part of their life unaffected but changes their entire philosophic outlook and gives them a “new orientation affecting their whole personality” so that many of the things that used to be quite attractive to them now have

³⁷Tozer, *I Call It Heresy*, chap. 3.

³⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Tozer Pulpit: Selections from His Pulpit Ministry*, ed. Gerald B Smith, vol. 2 (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1994), 37.

³⁹Tozer, *God’s Pursuit of Man*, 23.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 22–23.

⁴¹A. W. Tozer, *Living as a Christian: Teachings from First Peter*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2009), 65–66.

no value in their eyes.⁴²

In many ways, Tozer maintains, Christians are like creatures from another world. He notes how people are always talking about extraterrestrial creatures from other parts of the universe invading our planet. However, in many ways, Christians are those creatures. Although born down here, their citizenship, their thoughts, their hopes, and their power are all in heaven. This happened when they were born again. Tozer goes on to observe how this change cannot be explained through psychology. If it could, it would not be true conversion. Rather, Christianity is an ongoing miracle in which God changes a person's desires. Just as a natural baby desires food and will make all kinds of funny noises and call after food until they get it, a person born into God's kingdom has a similar "instinct after holiness."⁴³

In another place, Tozer compares the new birth to God raising the dead, referencing the teaching of John 5:21 that "as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." He then states, "If this means anything at all, it means that the working of the Son in regeneration is as radical and miraculous as the working of the Father in raising the dead."⁴⁴ Moreover, because of the radical and miraculous nature of this work, a person who has something that even remotely resembles a saving relation to Christ will be profoundly different. Having been raised to new life in Christ, they will have an attachment to Christ that is complete, revolutionary, and exclusive.⁴⁵

However, even though Tozer recognizes the radical nature of conversion, one

⁴²Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 65.

⁴³A. W. Tozer, *A Disruptive Faith: Expect God to Interrupt Your Life*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011), 178–79.

⁴⁴A. W. Tozer, *And He Dwelt Among Us: Teachings from the Gospel of John*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2014), 147.

⁴⁵Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son*, 157.

of the interesting aspects of his perspective is that he also believes in the existence of the so-called “carnal Christian.”⁴⁶ He teaches that there are four kinds of people: those who attend church regularly but are not converted, those who have been trained to act like Christians and even have responsibility for leading church activities but are actually not truly converted either, those who are true Christians but are carnal in that they have yet to develop into mature, functioning Christians, and those who are true Christians and living spiritual lives.⁴⁷ In another place, Tozer describes these “carnal Christians” in more detail. He explains that the word “carnal” comes from the Latin word meaning “flesh.” Therefore, a carnal Christian is a person who has had God’s seed planted within him but continues to hold onto the sins of his former life such as lust and jealousy.⁴⁸ Tozer believed that, in some way, it is possible to reconcile this belief in the carnal Christian with his understanding of conversion as a radical experience that has profound consequences in a person’s life.⁴⁹

A work of God. According to Tozer, the new birth is so radical that it could not possibly have a human origin but is rather a work of God. First, it happens at God’s initiative. Tozer maintains that nobody would ever turn to God if God had not first turned to them. No one can ever stand up, stick out their chest, and say, “I sought the Lord,” because the reality is that they only sought the Lord after the Lord had made them miserable in their sin and propelled them to himself.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Tozer teaches that none

⁴⁶The term “carnal Christian” comes from the King James translation of 1 Cor 3:1–3. Lewis Sperry Chafer popularized the modern idea of the “carnal Christian” in *He That Is Spiritual*. In this work, Chafer argued that there are three classes of people: the “natural man,” the “carnal man,” and the “spiritual man.” The “carnal man” is someone who is truly saved but continues to walk in carnality, behaving just like an unbeliever. See the first chapter of Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1943).

⁴⁷Tozer, *The Christ-Centered Church*, 115–16.

⁴⁸Tozer, *Reclaiming Christianity*, 20–21.

⁴⁹To the present author, it is not immediately apparent how Tozer reconciled these two ideas.

⁵⁰Tozer, *The Christ-Centered Church*, 22.

of the things that happen at conversion can be done by the convert. He states, “No man can forgive his own sins; no man can regenerate his own heart; no man can declare himself justified and clean. All this is the work of God *in* man, flowing out of the work which Christ has already done *for* man.”⁵¹

In examining Tozer’s view of conversion as a work of God, it is helpful to look at how he describes the role the Holy Spirit played in his own conversion. Tozer notes that he was not born into a Christian family but would attend a nearby Methodist church mainly because he was interested in a young lady who attended there. Unfortunately, the pastor of that church preached moralism rather than the gospel. However, Tozer had a neighbor named Mr. Holman, and one day this neighbor asked him if he was a Christian and invited him into a conversation about the subject. Tozer simply responded that he was not a Christian, and the conversation did not go anywhere. However, the Holy Spirit used that encounter to plant a seed in Tozer’s heart. Looking back, Tozer thanks God for “the winsome ways of the Holy Spirit in dealing with the heart of such an untaught lad as I.”⁵²

Not too long afterward, Tozer was walking home from work and noticed a small crowd of people gathered around an older man on the other side of the street. This man seemed to be talking, so out of curiosity, Tozer walked across the street to hear what he was saying. At first, it was difficult to understand what the man was saying because of his heavy German accent, but soon it dawned on Tozer that this man was preaching. Tozer’s initial reaction was amazement and even shock. He wondered why this man did not just preach in a church. However, still curious, Tozer listened to what the man was saying. He said, “If you don’t know how to be saved, just call on God, saying, ‘God, be

⁵¹A. W. Tozer, *Paths to Power: Living in the Spirit’s Fullness* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 2, CD-ROM. Italics in original.

⁵²Tozer, *Alive in the Spirit*, 16.

merciful to me a sinner,’ and God will hear you.”⁵³ That phrase pierced Tozer’s heart so much that he could not stop thinking about it and heard nothing else the man said subsequently. He went home and thought about it, and God gave Tozer a hunger for divine things from that moment onward. He was soon born again.

After sharing this, Tozer emphasizes how involved the Holy Spirit was throughout this whole process. It was all the Holy Spirit’s doing. Tozer writes,

All I can say, looking back, is that the Holy Spirit was at work in my life. I did not know the Holy Spirit at the time, and I did not know how he worked, but my ignorance of the situation did not in any way limit the Holy Spirit from working in my life. . . . The Holy Spirit birthed in my heart a new life I had never before experienced. This encounter with the Holy Spirit transformed my life and started me on a path of pursuing God.⁵⁴

Elsewhere, Tozer describes how the Holy Spirit illuminates the sinner’s darkened heart and reveals biblical truth. People can have biblical truth explained to them, but until that knowledge is accompanied by the Spirit’s illumination, it does them no good. The Spirit has to open the heart and mind to truly grasp the truth on a spiritual level and lead people to know not just God’s truth but God himself.⁵⁵

Sometimes, people have the idea that religious rituals in themselves bring about this supernatural change. Tozer notes how common it is for people to trust confirmation, communion, and baptism to do what only God himself can do. He states that “none of these nor all of them together can turn flesh into spirit nor make of a son of Adam a son of God.”⁵⁶ Instead, the new birth is a miracle that comes directly from God, a “vital and unique work of God in human nature.”⁵⁷

⁵³Tozer, *Alive in the Spirit*, 17.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵A. W. Tozer, *Delighting in God*, ed. James L. Snyder (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2015), 114.

⁵⁶Tozer, *God’s Pursuit of Man*, 116.

⁵⁷Tozer, *I Call It Heresy*, chap. 3.

Furthermore, the divine origin of conversion guarantees its permanency. Tozer writes,

If a sinner goes to the altar and a worker with a marked New Testament argues him into the kingdom, the devil will meet him two blocks down the street and argue him out of it again. But if he has an inward illumination—that witness within—because the Spirit answers to the blood, you cannot argue with such a man. He will just be stubborn, regardless of the arguments you try to marshal. He will say, “But I *know!*”⁵⁸

If converts changed themselves into new creatures, it makes sense that they would be able to change themselves back, but if God makes them new creatures through divine illumination, only God is able to change them back.

As a work of God, conversion can never be explained. Tozer declares that as soon as psychologists are able to accurately explain what has happened to a believer, we know that believer’s conversion is counterfeit and they are merely a church member rather than a true Christian. Neither psychologists nor psychiatrists are able to explain the new birth. Instead, even the most intelligent person has to reverently stand back and say, “Behold the works of the Lord.”⁵⁹

Repentance and faith. Although conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit, this does not mean human beings have no role or responsibility. Tozer warns that it is a grave mistake to preach the gospel in a way that gives the impression repentance is entirely a work of God. In reality, God has commanded people to repent and does not do their repenting for them. Repentance is a work only they are able to do. Christ may have been able to die for us, but he does not do our repenting for us. Of course, God may mercifully incline us to repent through his Holy Spirit and graciously assist us in repenting.

⁵⁸Tozer, *Faith beyond Reason*, 30. Italics in original.

⁵⁹A. W. Tozer, *Tozer Speaks: 128 Compelling and Authoritative Teachings*, ed. Gerald B. Smith, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 12, CD-ROM.

However, in order to be saved, we must “of our own free will repent toward God and believe in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁰

In a similar fashion, Tozer teaches that, not only will God not repent for people, he will also not believe for people. God may give help to the sinner and be very patient with them, but he will never take the sinner’s place and believe for them. God cannot be both the object and the subject of faith. Tozer states, “Faith is a gift of God, to be sure, but whether or not we shall act upon that faith lies altogether within our own power. We may or we may not, as we choose.”⁶¹

These two elements—forsaking sin and committing to Christ in faith—must be present in order for someone to know God.⁶² Teaching someone merely to “accept Christ” is not enough. People need to hear the requirements of salvation stated plainly. They must understand their need to acknowledge their sin and turn to Jesus with complete trust and utter abandonment to his Lordship. Unfortunately, Tozer states, so many people have been given a watered down call to salvation that it is necessary to start over with a lot of them and explain the requirements of salvation properly.⁶³

Tozer also lamented the teaching that people can receive Jesus as Savior without receiving him as Lord. According to Tozer, the Bible does not teach anything like that. There is no saviorhood without lordship in the Bible. Rather, “Jesus is both Lord and Savior, and He was Lord before He was Savior; and if He’s not Lord, He’s not Savior.”⁶⁴ Repentance must be present for a person to be saved, and this repentance

⁶⁰Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 2.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 181.

⁶³A. W. Tozer, *Who Put Jesus On the Cross?*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 56, CD-ROM.

⁶⁴Tozer, *And He Dwelt Among Us*, 88.

amounts to submission to the lordship of Jesus. Moreover, submitting to Christ's lordship is never a half-hearted act. Tozer teaches that receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord needs to be "an aggressive act of the total personality" rather than "a passive 'acceptance' that makes a door-to-door salesman of the Savior."⁶⁵ In other place, Tozer observes that this accords with the Bible, common logic, and the experience of saints throughout the centuries. He then declares, "Pardon without penitence is a delusion which simple honesty requires that we expose for what it is. To be forgiven, sin must be forsaken."⁶⁶ Tozer notes how horrible it is to think of a church full of people who have been forgiven but still love sin and hate righteousness. Not only that, it is even more horrible to imagine a heaven that is filled with sinners who have never repented or changed their wayward behaviors. Thankfully, the Bible always associates the promise of pardon with the command to repent.⁶⁷

Not only is it necessary for a person to repent, it is also necessary for them to exercise faith in Christ. Tozer teaches that faith is not a one-time act but rather the continuous gaze of the heart toward God. It is "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2) and lifting our eyes to "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29) without ever ceasing to behold him for the rest of our lives.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, Tozer asserts, because of their eagerness to gain converts, many evangelicals allow people to believe they can fulfill their entire responsibility with a once-for-all act of believing. However, the book of Acts pictures faith as a beginning rather than an end—as a journey, not as a bed to lie on while waiting for Jesus to return. Believing in Acts is not a "once-

⁶⁵Tozer, *Faith beyond Reason*, 1.

⁶⁶Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 67.

⁶⁷A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 44–45, CD-ROM.

⁶⁸Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 84.

done act” but “an attitude of heart and mind which inspired and enabled the believer to take up his cross and follow the Lamb whithersoever He went.”⁶⁹ The faith of Acts is a faith that remains and continues to control a person long after their initial act of believing.

This faith involves the whole person. According to Tozer, partial belief is not enough. An individual either believes with their whole person or doubts with their whole person; they are either totally lost or totally saved. Viewed in this way, faith is “the total response of the whole being to the Person of Christ” and “the flowering of the entire personality.”⁷⁰ Although Tozer distinguishes between repentance and faith, he views them as integrally related to one another and sees a lot of overlap between the two. Believers prove their faith by their lifestyle of commitment and not in any other way. Any belief that fails to control the one who holds that belief is not true belief but merely pseudo belief.⁷¹ Obedience is a key element of true faith. Tozer helpfully describes obedience and faith as two sides of the same coin since they are always found together in the Bible. It is no easier to pry them apart than it is to separate two sides of a half-dollar. Not only that, it is only when the two sides remain together that they are recognized as sound currency and can legally be tendered to pay debts. Apart from each other, they have no value. Unfortunately, many evangelicals have made faith everything and obedience nothing. As a result, the evangelical movement is fraught with spiritual blindness, moral weakness, and a gradual but steady drift away from the Christianity of the New Testament.⁷² However, to be clear, Tozer maintained that faith is not a meritorious act in itself though it always contains obedience. The merit belongs to the

⁶⁹Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 3.

⁷⁰A. W. Tozer, *The Early Tozer: A Word in Season*, ed. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 37, CD-ROM.

⁷¹Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*, 51.

⁷²A. W. Tozer, *The Size of the Soul: Principles of Revival and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 136, CD-ROM.

one toward whom faith is directed.⁷³

This kind of faith requires God's power. Faith is not a conclusion people draw from evidence but a moral response of a person's spirit. To bring about this response, God supernaturally infuses the sinner with confidence in Jesus just as he supernaturally infused Lazarus with the ability to come out of his grave at the command of Christ.⁷⁴ This is a lot different than the common assumption among evangelicals that people come to faith through the eloquence, logic, or argument of the evangelist. Rather, God is the one who moves people's heart and persuades them to repent. Without God's enablement to believe, even the most zealous seeker falls short of genuine saving faith. God's power is "more penetrating than thought, more disconcerting than conscience, and more convincing than reason." and it must be present before anyone can be saved.⁷⁵

What conversion produces. While it is important to understand that people are converted through repentance and faith, Tozer believed it is also important to understand what conversion produces—that is, the features that mark a true believer. True conversion through repentance and faith will invariably make the convert different in very noticeable ways.⁷⁶ These features are not the means by which people are saved but rather evidence they are saved.⁷⁷

⁷³Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 85. This is important to note since many proponents of the so-called "Free Grace" movement commonly accuse those who hold Tozer's position of advocating a works-based salvation. Tozer clearly rejects any teaching that makes salvation a product of human effort or achievement.

⁷⁴Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 24.

⁷⁵Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 1.

⁷⁶Patterson summarizes: "Tozer . . . insists that becoming a Christian must result in changed thoughts, emotions and deeds." Robert J. Patterson, "The Life and Thought of A.W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification: An Investigation into the Thoughts of Aiden Wilson Tozer on the Doctrine of Sanctification and the Insights He Received from Some of the Past Mystics of the Church" (ThM thesis, Regent College, 1989), 220. Patterson criticizes Tozer for teaching that a person must turn from evil before he or she can receive forgiveness. Patterson believes that this amounts to saying that good works must precede salvation. Ibid. However, this is not necessarily the case. The context of Tozer's statement makes it clear that he is referring to inward repentance rather than external works as a precursor to forgiveness. In the same passage quoted by Patterson, Tozer goes on to state, "All pardon is conditioned upon intention to reform . . .

One of the things conversion produces is changed interests. According to Tozer, a true convert will be interested in the kingdom and honor of God above all else. While they used to love themselves, their love will shift from self to God. While they used to be fiercely dedicated to their own honor, they will now be dedicated to God's honor. While they used to desire social approval, they will now desire to be approved by none but the Almighty God.⁷⁸ Elsewhere, Tozer describes how conversion produces "a shift of interest from earth to heaven, from men to God, from time to eternity, from earthly gain to Christ and His eternal kingdom."⁷⁹

All of these things are changes that reach down to a person's heart. It is not that they have simply been trained to behave in certain ways but rather that God has changed them to the very core of their being. God has planted within the believer "an unknown factor that impels him to act righteously."⁸⁰ This is the source of all true change. It is also of the major differences between the "Christians" commonly produced by mainline churches and true Christians. While mainline churches are good at teaching people to behave like Christians, true Christians are those who have been "born from within a Christian."⁸¹

forgiveness is based upon the intention to reform." A. W. Tozer, *Echoes from Eden: The Voices of God Calling Man* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1981), 71–72. The word *intention* makes all the difference.

⁷⁷Tozer understood that these evidences will not be fully manifest overnight. In fact, Dorsett records how Tozer himself began his Christian life at a very slow pace and did not grow nearly as rapidly as he could have grown at first. Instead of immediately moving forward in his walk with Christ, Tozer followed the pattern of a "zigzag." Dorsett writes, "It is tempting to present A. W. Tozer's life after conversion and call to preach in a neat, orderly pattern. The truth, however, was much more complicated. Like most new Christians, this infant believer found God's will one day at a time. There were many fits, starts, times of hesitation, and even confusion." Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 46–50.

⁷⁸Tozer, *The Christ-Centered Church*, 96.

⁷⁹Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 64.

⁸⁰Tozer, *God's Power for Your Life*, 50.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

Tozer notes how these changed interests make the convert feel like a stranger to the world in many ways. He compares the change believers experience to Abraham leaving Ur of the Chaldees and moving to the land God promised him. Apart from the company of people with him, Abraham was a stranger to everyone he met. Even if he spoke their language, he would have spoken it with an accent. Everyone in the region knew he was not one of them. This is the way in which those who possess changed interests will be strangers in this present world.⁸²

Another change true conversion produces is obedience. Changed interests invariably lead to changed behaviors. Tozer describes how believers should expect to develop a new pattern of life in which old things pass away and all things become new. The change begins inwardly but then manifests itself outwardly. In Tozer's words, "the change within [the convert] will soon begin to express itself by corresponding changes in his manner of living."⁸³

Contrary to the misguided teachings of some, it is impossible to be a Christian without also being a disciple. Tozer mocks those who even suggest "the idea that I can come to the Lord by grace, and have all my sins forgiven, and have my name written in heaven, have the carpenter go to work on a mansion in my Father's house and at the same time I can raise hell on my way to heaven."⁸⁴ Even common sense objects to this notion. Rather, when a person is converted, they should expect certain things to happen in their life. Even though they will certainly experience the inward struggle described in Romans 7, their overall direction will be established beyond all doubt toward the City of God, and they will experience "a wonderful unification of personality and a turning about of the

⁸²Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 64.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*, ed. James L. Snyder (Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2007), 117.

whole life toward God and heavenly things.”⁸⁵

While it is true that believers are never saved by good works, Tozer maintains it is also true they are never saved apart from good works either. Salvation comes by faith in Christ, but out of that faith springs righteousness and goodness.⁸⁶ Tozer refers to faith and morals as “two sides of the same coin,” arguing that “the very essence of faith is moral” and that “any professed faith in Christ as personal Savior that does not bring the life under plenary obedience to Christ as Lord is inadequate and must betray its victim at the last.”⁸⁷ Biblical faith is active, not passive. It requires that we allow Christ’s teachings to dominate our lives from the moment we believe. According to Tozer, those who attempt to enjoy the benefits of salvation while still holding onto this world are engaged in a futile endeavor. People must choose one or the other.⁸⁸ As one Tozer researcher summarizes from his writings, “The true mark of conversion and discipleship is the yielding of one’s total life to the lordship of Christ.”⁸⁹

The Boundary: Justification by Faith Alone

Having demonstrated and traced the contours of Tozer’s conversionism, it is also necessary to examine his position on a boundary doctrine related to personal conversion in order to confirm that Tozer was indeed an evangelical. It is not enough for

⁸⁵Tozer, *The Set of the Sail*, 29.

⁸⁶Tozer, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*, 117.

⁸⁷Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 30.

⁸⁸*Ibid*, 62.

⁸⁹Patterson, “The Life and Thought of A. W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification,” 319. Elsewhere in his essay, Patterson quotes a paragraph from Tozer teaching that worshipping Christ and longing to be with Christ is an essential mark of being a true Christian. Anyone who does not long for Christ in this way has no grounds to claim Christianity. Patterson then writes, “Tozer’s standards for living the Christian life were very high (and rightly so), but he occasionally made hyperbolic exhortations which were not doctrinally true according to Reformed statements of faith.” *Ibid.*, 221. Unfortunately, Patterson does not elaborate on how exactly Tozer’s teachings contradict established Reformed doctrine, and the nature of the contradiction is not immediately apparent.

him to simply emphasize conversion; his beliefs about conversion must also fall securely within an established boundary if this dissertation's argument for Tozer as an evangelical is to have any validity or significance.

One important boundary doctrine that relates to personal conversion is justification by faith alone. John Calvin describes justification as God viewing believers as righteous. He writes, "A man is said to be justified in the sight of God when in the judgment of God he is deemed righteous and is accepted on account of his righteousness."⁹⁰ This is different from saying that a person is righteous in their actual conduct. Rather, the emphasis of this view of justification is God's view of the person. He can "deem" a person righteous without them actually being righteous in practice. Martin Luther, the Protestant theologian who is probably more responsible than anyone for evangelicalism's devotion to justification by faith alone, distinguishes between "alien righteousness" and "proper righteousness." In contrast to proper righteousness, which consists of righteous living, alien righteousness refers to righteousness that is transferred to believers from a source entirely outside of themselves—namely, from Christ. This happens in a "sweet exchange" in which Jesus takes the believer's sin and they take his righteousness.⁹¹

Evangelicals believe justification comes to the believer simply by faith. Evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem explains that true faith is the opposite of trusting in oneself. It is giving up and committing not to depend on oneself or one's own good works any longer. Instead, it is looking to Jesus alone for salvation on the basis of his merit alone.⁹² Norman Geisler calls this belief "explicit" in the Bible, quoting verses

⁹⁰John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 475.

⁹¹Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 510.

⁹²Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 730. For a defense of this view of justification by a modern evangelical author,

throughout the New Testament to know that salvation is not by works but by faith.⁹³

Millard Erickson concurs, stating, “Justification is something completely undeserved. It is not an achievement. It is an obtainment, not an attainment. Even faith is not some good work God must reward with salvation. It is God’s gift.”⁹⁴

It is especially important to examine Tozer’s beliefs about justification by faith alone because of his love for mystical theologians, many of whom were Roman Catholics.⁹⁵ If Tozer believes in justification by faith alone, he passes this portion of the test for evangelical identity. If he does not, it would not be appropriate to view him as truly in line with the evangelical movement.

Tozer’s Belief in Justification

Without question, Tozer holds to the traditional Protestant and evangelical understanding of justification by faith alone. First, he teaches justification as a judicial act in which God views believers as entirely righteous even before making them righteous in practice. He compares it to a person being declared innocent in a human court. That declaration does not cause the defendant to be innocent but simply declares them innocent in the eyes of the law. In the same way, justification is simply a declaration. Tozer writes, “Justification is that which declares the sinner righteous, and that also is external to us—that is, it doesn’t reach us. Justified persons may be no better off for their justification if that’s all that happened to them, because justification is a legal thing.”⁹⁶

see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 351–62.

⁹³Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology: In One Volume* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 1014. These verses include Eph 2:8–9; Rom 4:4–5; Titus 3:5; Gal 3:11.

⁹⁴Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 972.

⁹⁵See the first chapter of this dissertation for more details.

⁹⁶A. W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God: A Journey into the Father’s Heart* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 1:138, CD-ROM.

Understanding justification as a legal declaration is perfectly in line with both the reformers and evangelicals.

In addition, Tozer believes that justification comes to believers by faith alone. His confidently asserts that “it is written all over the New Testament that the benefits of atonement are to be received by faith” and that “any departure from it is fatal to true Christian experience.”⁹⁷ That is, anyone who doesn’t believe justification is simply “by faith” is not a true Christian at all. Of course, the careful reader will notice that Tozer does not specify that justification comes “by faith alone” but simply says “by faith.” However, there are plenty of examples in Tozer’s writings that demonstrate the fact that he understands justification in the historic Protestant sense. For example, Tozer writes that “justification by faith” was lost for a long time in church history but was then brought to the forefront again by Luther, the Moravians, the Wesleys, and the Presbyterians.⁹⁸ In another place, he asserts that “Martin Luther never believed in justification by faith more strongly than I do.”⁹⁹ Clearly, as these examples indicate, Tozer uses “justification by faith” to refer to “justification by faith alone.”

Tozer was quite adamant that justification comes by faith. He laments that many people want to trust Christ along with something else. They want to add their own morals, good works, or perhaps supposed merits such as baptism, church membership, or financial stewardship. In response to this, Tozer boldly declares,

Let me tell you straight out that Jesus Christ will never stand at the right side of a plus sign. If you will insist upon adding some “plus” to your faith in Jesus Christ, He will walk away in His holy dignity. He will ever refuse to be considered the other part of a “plus” sign. If your trust is in the plus—something added—then you

⁹⁷Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 6.

⁹⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Radical Cross: Living the Passion of Christ* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 9, CD-ROM.

⁹⁹A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 13, CD-ROM.

do not possess Jesus Christ at all.¹⁰⁰

This leaves little doubt about where Tozer stands on the issue.

Moreover, justification by faith alone is taught throughout the Bible, even in the Old Testament. Tozer notes that there is a mistaken notion floating around that in Old Testament times salvation came by obeying the Law, while in New Testament times it comes by faith. However, he argues, this is a distortion of biblical teaching. From the very beginning of the world, nobody has ever been saved in any other way than by God's grace through faith. Justification by faith is as much an Old Testament doctrine as it is a New Testament doctrine, a fact which confirms the "organic unity" of the Bible.¹⁰¹

Tozer's Concern about Justification

While Tozer certainly believes in justification by faith alone, he does have significant concerns about how this doctrine has been distorted by many evangelicals. Many evangelical teachers have either totally neglected to teach God's call to obedience or else mentioned it merely as a caveat and without any sense of urgency. According to Tozer, this is a result of these teachers confusing the idea of works as obedience with works as merit. Salvation by faith does not mean salvation without obedience. He states, "To escape the error of salvation by works we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience. In our eagerness to get rid of the legalistic doctrine of works we have thrown out the baby with the bath and gotten rid of obedience as well."¹⁰²

Tozer plainly identifies this error as antinomianism. He describes antinomianism as the belief that since believers are saved by faith alone, works do not have any place in salvation. Since conduct is works, it is of no importance for the

¹⁰⁰Tozer, *Who Put Jesus on the Cross?*, 55.

¹⁰¹A. W. Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 106, CD-ROM.

¹⁰²Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 3.

Christian life. As long as we believe rightly, it does not matter what we do. This amounts to an absolute divorce between a person's creed and their conduct. Unfortunately, Tozer continues, this understanding has so fully permeated many churches that many people accept it as biblical truth. However, in reality, it is a distortion of biblical truth in that it "takes the teaching of justification by faith and twists it into deformity."¹⁰³

In reality, it is impossible to separate regeneration from reformation. Tozer observes that some preachers boast about preaching regeneration as opposed to reformation. This is a commendable rebellion against the blatantly unbiblical belief in salvation by human effort. However, it actually sets us a false dichotomy, presenting the situation as "either-or" when it is actually "both-and." Regeneration and reformation are never presented as opposed to each other in the Bible. Rather, the Bible teaches that sinners have to be willing to reform their lifestyle if they are to experience regeneration; the converted person is both regenerated and reformed. Teachers who are involved in denominations that stem from the Reformation should remember this!¹⁰⁴

It is true that believers are never saved by good works, but it is also true that they are never saved apart from good works either. According to Tozer, when true faith is present, it immediately produces righteousness and goodness. He compares it to the relationship between spring and flowers. Although spring is not brought by flowers, it is impossible to have spring without having flowers as well. In the same way, believers are not saved by their righteousness, but their salvation will always bring righteousness. As a

¹⁰³Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 5.

¹⁰⁴Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*, 43–44. Along these same lines, Wiest observes the way in which Tozer viewed justification as the foundation stone of the Christian life. However, out of justification should flow a daily experience of communion with God. Wiest writes, "For Tozer, spiritual maturity is certainly built on a foundation of justification by faith but includes an ongoing relationship marked by two-way conversation between God and the believer." Frederick Nevin Wiest, "The Impact of Personal Prayer on Spiritual Maturity among Selected Christian Missionary Alliance Pastors" (EdD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 87.

result, whoever does not desire to live righteously is not truly saved.¹⁰⁵

Thinking again of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Tozer concludes that Luther's idea of justification by faith was much different than many evangelical leaders' idea of justification by faith. For Luther, faith was something revolutionary that upset a person's entire life and changed them into an altogether different person. True faith grabbed hold of the believer's life and brought every aspect of their life under obedience to Jesus. However, according to Tozer, that is unfortunately the case no longer. Faith now means mere passive acquiescence and does not disturb people but rather comforts them. We need to return to the faith of Luther.¹⁰⁶

Significance of Tozer's Conversionism for Spirituality

In view of the prophetic nature and "down-to-earth" tone of Tozer's ministry, it is safe to say that Tozer would firmly object to any study of his teachings that did not also include a study of their significance for Christian living. Therefore, any study of Tozer's view of conversion would not be complete without a corresponding application to spirituality.

Seek a New Birth

The most significant application of Tozer's conversionism is quite simple: seeking a new birth. Tozer's words should inspire readers to look at their own hearts and ask, "Have I experienced this?" As Tozer makes clear, there are too many people who simply attend church, use Christian language, and check off many of the appropriate religious boxes but who have never experienced that wonderful new birth experience Jesus preached to Nicodemus in John 3. The fact that someone is a regular churchgoer or

¹⁰⁵A. W. Tozer, *The Counselor: Straight Talk About the Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 126–27, CD-ROM.

¹⁰⁶Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*, 47–48.

even a church member does not in any way mean that they are a new creature in Christ, nor will it get them into heaven. The issue of greatest importance for every human being is whether they have experienced a new birth.

Require Repentance

This new birth experience is inseparably joined to repentance. Tozer is adamant that merely telling someone to “accept Jesus” is not enough. Rather, an important change has to take place between that person and their sin—namely, they must forsake it. To use Tozer’s memorable dictum: “To be forgiven, sin must be forsaken.”¹⁰⁷ This should challenge every reader of Tozer to first examine their own life to make sure they are walking in repentance and then to require the same of others, especially those who are on the brink of conversion. It is neither biblical nor loving for believers to leave out a call to repentance from their evangelistic endeavors. Calling someone to forsake their sin may not be comfortable or politically correct, but it is absolutely necessary.

Look for Radical Changes

Once a person professes Christ, this in itself does not mean they are necessarily a true Christian. Tozer says a lot about the radical nature of true conversion. He emphasizes its miraculous nature and compares it to the power of God being manifested both in creation and in the resurrection of Jesus. He even goes on to spell out how that radical event will have radical consequences in a person’s life. Therefore, as Christians try to serve others well, it is very appropriate for them to look for radical changes in new converts to appear over time. While it is certainly appropriate to celebrate a convert’s initial profession of Christ, there is also wisdom in making sure they understand that if their conversion is real, there will be real changes in the coming weeks and months. If those changes never come, that is grounds for questioning the legitimacy of the

¹⁰⁷Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 67.

conversion experience.

Recognize God's Role in Conversion

Studying Tozer's writings should also lead to a greater recognition of God's role in conversion. According to Tozer, the only reason people ever repent is because the Holy Spirit makes them miserable in their sin, and the only reason they ever exercise faith is because the Holy Spirit illuminates their hearts to receive the truths of Scripture. All of it is ultimately a work of God. Carefully considering this reality takes a lot of pressure off of Christians when it comes to their evangelistic mission. They are not responsible for changing people inwardly or making them receptive and responsive to the gospel—that is God's job. Of course, they should make every effort to present the gospel as clearly and winsomely as possible while living a godly life that gives credibility to the things they say, but it is ultimately God who does the work of drawing people to himself, not the evangelist. Believing this relieves Christians of something that might otherwise be a crippling burden. It also keeps them from turning to inappropriate tactics they might otherwise employ in their evangelism such as psychological pressure or manipulation.

Glorify God for His Grace

In addition, Tozer's adherence to justification by faith alone has implications for Christian living. Since justification comes simply by faith and not by human works, people can never take any of the credit for their salvation. All glory goes to God. He is the one who gives salvation as a free gift of his grace. As Christians understand this in a progressively deeper way, they are able to marvel all the more at the kindness and goodness of God. If God provided assistance in response to human achievement, it would be entirely appropriate for Christians to pat themselves on the back. However, since rescue comes through "faith alone," the only appropriate response is profound gratitude as believers are humbled by such grace.

Rest in Christ

Tozer's teaching that justification comes by faith alone also leads believers to rest in the finished work of Christ instead of constantly straining to reach God's acceptance. So often, believers have a tendency to live as if their acceptance before God depends on their own performance. If they are successful in defeating sins on a certain day or if they faithfully pray and read the Bible, they imagine God loves and accepts them more. If they fail in these duties, they imagine God withholds his love and acceptance. The result of this mentality is a constant state of anxiety over whether each day's performance has been enough to gain God's love and acceptance. However, properly understanding what Tozer taught about justification frees believers from this taxing mentality and leads them to a state of joyful bliss as they rest in what Jesus has done rather than in what they try to do. While resting in Christ should in no way deter believers from pursuing holiness and daily fidelity, it opens the door for them to enjoy the peace and tranquility God intends for them.

Boldly Call for Obedience

However, Tozer makes it clear that the doctrine of justification by faith alone in no way negates the necessity of Christians aggressively pursuing obedience. In fact, he laments over the way in which so many preachers neglect strong calls to obedience or even say that obedience is not necessary. Tozer is clear that the kind of faith that obtains justification is a faith that leads people to obey God's commands. Therefore, readers should ensure they are not tolerating moral compromise in their own lives and should not be afraid to call for it in other Christians. It is entirely legitimate to challenge Christians to pursue good works with great vigor and devotion. Shying away from such challenges betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The solution for "works salvation" is not neglecting good works but doing them with the proper mindset, leaning on Christ's merit rather than personal merit.

CHAPTER 4

TOZER AND OUTREACH

In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus tells his disciples shortly before he ascends into heaven, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” This passage, known widely as the “Great Commission,” has inspired countless Christians to devote their lives to sacrificial missionary service, both in the United States and abroad. Evangelicals especially are known for their devotion to the Great Commission and to activism in general.

The Center: Activism

Activism includes both a passion for reaching the world with the gospel and a passion for engaging in various other social ministries. Since the inception of the evangelical movement in the eighteenth century, activism has been central to the evangelical way of life to such an extent that it is widely regarded as one of the essential hallmarks of the evangelical movement.

Demonstrating Tozer’s Activism

Tozer shared this passion for evangelical activism. His devotion to making a difference in the world, both through evangelism and—to a degree—through social action, is another aspect of his ministry that marks him as an evangelical.

Sets a consistent personal example. Tozer’s biographers reveal that he practiced what he preached with regard to evangelism. From the earliest years of his

Christian life, he was active in evangelizing his family, though he did not see immediate results. Tozer reports that being the only Christian in his family was often quite difficult.

He states,

We had a house full of people at all times and yet, in the matter of my faith, I was completely alone. I must not leave the impression that I stood as nobly as Stephen in the book of Acts, but I did stand—and it was tough to stand alone. No one else wanted to go to church. No one wanted to pray at the table. No one wanted to read the Bible. But by the good grace of God I stood alone and I have always been able to thank God for the results.¹

Although it did not happen quickly, Tozer's family eventually took note of the changes in his life, and he was able to lead both his mother and father to faith, as well as two of his sisters, a brother-in-law, and several others.²

He was especially direct in approaching his mother about the matter. One day, as she was washing dishes in the kitchen, Tozer walked into the room and said to her, "Mother, you know that I love you. Ever since I gave my life to Christ, I've been a different person. Wouldn't you like to give your life to Jesus Christ?"³ Reportedly, his mother did so on the spot.⁴

In addition to engaging in personal evangelism himself, Tozer also supported evangelism through sacrificial giving. Harris records how Tozer kept his salary low and still managed to give a substantial portion of his salary back to the church so it might be used for Kingdom purposes. She also notes that he signed over the royalties from his books to the church rather than to himself or even his family.⁵

¹Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 48.

²Ibid.

³James L. Snyder, *The Life of A. W. Tozer: In Pursuit of God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 46.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Eleanor Lynn Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth Century American Protestant* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 96.

Calls others to embrace activism. Tozer's personal commitment to evangelism gave him credibility in urging others to be faithful to their evangelistic calling as well. After all, he believed this is the main mission Jesus gave the church in the Great Commission. Tozer observes that Jesus reminds his disciples of his ultimate authority right before commissioning them to make disciples. Tozer then boldly declares that "the Christian Church must be a missionary church if it is to meet the expectations of its risen Savior."⁶ Jesus did not save the church so the church could simply enjoy a comfortable and leisurely lifestyle while waiting for heavenly glory. Rather, he saved the church and commissioned her to spread the gospel in this world. This is what he commands, and he expects nothing less.

The church is not merely a religious institution, nor is it a religious theater where performers receive payment for amusing those who attend. Rather, it is an assembly of those who have been redeemed and commissioned to spread the gospel worldwide. Opportunity to do so will not last forever but is limited to this brief period of time when God invites sinners to come to him. A day is coming when it will be too late eternally. The timing may be uncertain, but the event is sure to come, so believers must work to advance the gospel while there is still time.⁷ Tozer echoes the familiar call for Christians to pray, give, and go. He writes that "the moral obligation of the resurrection of Christ is the missionary obligation" which is nothing less than "the responsibility and the privilege of carrying the message and telling the story, of praying and interceding, and of being involved personally and financially in the cause of this great commission."⁸

⁶A. W. Tozer, *Tragedy in the Church: The Missing Gifts*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 96, CD-ROM.

⁷A. W. Tozer, *Jesus Is Victor: A Fresh Perspective on the Book of Revelation*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 11, CD-ROM.

⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Tozer Pulpit: Selections from His Pulpit Ministry*, ed. Gerald B. Smith, vol. 2 (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1994), 66.

Tozer rejoices in God's grace in salvation, but he does not stop there. He notes that, while Jesus forgives believers of all their sin regardless of how heinous it is, he expects them to spend the rest of their lives praising him and telling everyone about the wonderful glories of their salvation.⁹ Believers should not do this begrudgingly but should rejoice in the privilege of being commissioned by God himself. Tozer points out what a high honor it would be for the President of the United States to summon a person to Washington, commission them as a United States ambassador, and send them off on an important mission to another country. While that would certainly be a distinct privilege, it is an even greater privilege for an individual to be commissioned and sent by God himself to accomplish his purposes and glorify his name.¹⁰

Conversely, Tozer bemoans the fact that so many churches are not doing very much to spread the gospel. Having lived through the challenges of the first centuries of its existence, the church has now become used to an easier way of life. It has enough money to pay its bills and a membership large enough to ensure its future existence. Therefore, it has degenerated into a school rather than being a barracks, and it facilitates people living as students rather than soldiers.¹¹ The unfortunate reality is that many identify as Christians only because it does not cost them anything. As a result, "the average evangelical Christian who claims to be born again and have eternal life is not doing as much to propagate his or her faith as the busy adherents of the cults handing out their papers on the street corners and visiting from house to house."¹² Cultists have much to teach evangelicals about zeal, sacrifice, and effort, but the great majority of evangelicals

⁹A. W. Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory: Twelve Messages from the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 102, CD-ROM.

¹⁰A. W. Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son: A Beautiful Portrait of Deity from the Gospel of John*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 119–20, CD-ROM.

¹¹A. W. Tozer, *Paths to Power: Living in the Spirit's Fullness* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 4, CD-ROM.

¹²Tozer, *Jesus Is Victor*, chap. 8.

do not desire to be that serious about their faith.¹³

While Tozer was greatly influenced by mysticism and monasticism, he was clear that God does not want Christians to become hermits. God calls Christians to be distinct from the world, not by retreating from it, but by inwardly consecrating themselves. In Tozer's estimation, "The Salvation Army lassie distributing gospel literature in a saloon is a better example of the separated life than a prim and cold-faced saint who has long ago fled the world to take refuge in the barren caverns of her soul."¹⁴ There is no competition between personal holiness and faithful evangelism.

Challenges the church toward greater action. In his passion to see the gospel advance, Tozer appeals to Christians to take action in a greater way. Referencing Acts 13:36, Tozer notes that David served God in his generation before he fell asleep. He then writes that for believers to fall asleep before blessing their generation is "tragic" and "a moral calamity."¹⁵ The reason this negligence is so tragic is because the world is in a time of extraordinary crisis, and Christians are the only ones in a position to rescue those who are perishing in their sins. Therefore, they dare not live as if things are normal. The grave reality is that nothing is normal as long as sin and death are still roaming the world. Tozer expresses amazement that some Christians are able to acknowledge this crisis in theory but ignore it in practice, planning their schedules so as to give themselves plenty of time to loaf around and enjoy the pleasures this world offers. For the faithful believer, this is not an option. Christians must respond to this crisis with appropriate passion and a sense of urgency.¹⁶ Tozer writes,

¹³Tozer, *Jesus Is Victor*.

¹⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Next Chapter after the Last*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 37–38, CD-ROM.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁶A. W. Tozer, *Born after Midnight: Spiritual Renewal Comes to Those Who Want It Badly Enough* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 6, CD-ROM.

Since the fall of man the earth has been a disaster area and everyone lives with a critical emergency. Nothing is normal....The universal disaster of the Fall compels us to think differently about our obligation to our fellow men. What would be entirely permissible under normal conditions becomes wrong in the present situation, and many things not otherwise required are necessary because of abnormal conditions. It is in view of this that all our Christian service must be evaluated. The needs of the people, not our own convenience, decide how far we shall go and how much we shall do.¹⁷

By its nature, an emergency situation calls for far more effort, energy, and focus than a non-emergency situation. There is no time for luxuries that might otherwise be enjoyed. Instead, believers must use every resource at their disposal to reach people with the gospel before time runs out.

Tozer challenges believers to ask themselves what their Christian faith is costing them. Many churches brag about how “missions-minded” they are, but the only thing they do is send missionaries out to the hard places to suffer and sacrifice for the gospel. Meanwhile, the rest of the church enjoys the comforts and luxuries of America. This reveals that, in reality, most congregations are only interested in missions as long as it does not inconvenience them. Therefore, they should ask, “What is my Christian faith costing me? Am I offering to God something that has cost me absolutely nothing in terms of blood or sweat or tears?”¹⁸

As those who enjoy a level of prosperity unknown to those from other time periods or in most other countries, American Christians are able to view prosperity in one of two ways. Either they can view it as an opportunity to enjoy more earthly pleasures or they can view it as a means to help others, specifically by aiding in the evangelization of more foreign peoples. For the obedient Christian, however, only one option is valid. Greater wealth and opportunity bring with them a heightened level of responsibility. In

¹⁷A. W. Tozer, *That Incredible Christian: How Heaven's Children Live on Earth*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 125, CD-ROM.

¹⁸A. W. Tozer, *Who Put Jesus on the Cross?*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 78, CD-ROM.

Tozer's words, "ability involves responsibility."¹⁹

Expresses admiration for missionaries. Another excellent indication that Tozer valued activism is that he wrote a biography of a missionary named Robert Jaffray.²⁰ Presumably, he wrote this biography because he believed knowing about Jaffray would be highly beneficial to Christians and a challenge for them to imitate his good qualities.²¹ Throughout the work, Tozer expresses admiration for Jaffray's perspectives and methods. He states that Jaffray's philosophy of missions was "a simple philosophy based on New Testament principles and shot through with salty common sense."²² Tozer also admires Jaffray's sense of burden for the lost tribes, noting his "eager restlessness" throughout his life and how the mere sight of a world map or the sound of a foreign name aroused a longing within him to reach the nations with the gospel.²³ The admiration Tozer expresses for these qualities in Jaffray reveals that Tozer has similar dispositions himself.²⁴

Supports social action. All of these examples of Tozer's passion for missions and evangelism may cause some to wonder whether Tozer believed in social action as

¹⁹A. W. Tozer, *The Warfare of the Spirit: Religious Ritual Versus the Presence of the Indwelling Christ*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 70, CD-ROM.

²⁰A. W. Tozer, *Let My People Go: The Life of Robert A. Jaffray* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), CD-ROM.

²¹In the book's preface, Tozer writes that Christian biography may be "the greatest aid to the life of faith" next to the Bible itself. *Ibid.*, 1.

²²*Ibid.*, 60. The specific method Tozer was referring to was Jaffray's four step pattern of contacting, evangelizing, organizing, and instructing.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴The admiration Tozer expresses for Jaffray is so great that one researcher describes Tozer's biographical endeavor as "an embellished narrative studded with homiletical amplifications and homey wisdom which often blur the distinction between fact and fiction." Reid Darrel, "Jesus Only: The Early Life and Presbyterian Ministry of Albert Benjamin Simpson, 1843–1881" (PhD diss., Queen's University, 1994), 27.

well. Although it probably would not be accurate to say that Tozer places the same emphasis on social action as he does on evangelism, he certainly supports social action and calls Christians to do good in practical ways. He states that a truly Spirit-filled church will be a church that is “useful” to humanity in general and should help their local neighborhood.²⁵ Those who call themselves by the name of Christ have an obligation to imitate him in his deeds of kindness. These do not have to be big and dramatic deeds but are often plain, humble tasks such as feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. While it is good to pray faithfully and share the gospel, there is a time to put on work clothes and simply help a neighbor.²⁶

In reality, social action and evangelism are friends, not competitors; the former supports the latter. Tozer writes,

When I hear that the Church of Christ has gone throughout the whole world carrying the torch of civilization, healing and giving hope and help, I conclude the Christian Church must be of God because she is acting the way God would act. When I hear that she has founded hospitals and insane asylums, I say surely she must be of God because that is what God would do, being what He is. When I hear that she has emancipated woman and has taken her from being a chattel slave and an object of some old king’s lust to being the equal of the man and queen in his home, I say surely that must be of God. You can go down the corridors of history, and you can adduce proof of the divinity of the Church from what the Church has done. You can show how she brought civilization here and she brought help there. She cleaned up saloons in this town, and she delivered this young fellow from drink. We say that must be God.²⁷

Social action is a powerful apologetic for the gospel and supports gospel witness when utilized in an appropriate way.

However, Tozer is also clear that churches are called to more than just social action. Patterson aptly summarizes Tozer’s teaching: “Many churches...promote social

²⁵A. W. Tozer, *The Counselor: Straight Talk About the Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 8, CD-ROM.

²⁶Tozer, *The Warfare of the Spirit*, 24–25.

²⁷A. W. Tozer, *How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 2, CD-ROM.

relief programs...or other seemingly fine pursuits, forgetting that their prime purpose is to win souls for Christ by the proclamation of the Gospel.”²⁸ Tozer argues that it is possible to do many good deeds with no lasting effects. A sick person may work tirelessly to help another sick person, and it may be quite moving to watch him do so, but the sad tragedy is that both of them will die in the end. For this reason, Christians should prefer work that brings the healing touch of eternal salvation.²⁹ In another place, Tozer agrees that, without question, the Christian church is called to show compassion to the world but not because of motives rooted in mere humanitarianism. Christians should have higher motives, ministering not just to people’s bodies but also to their souls. Their ministry should extend beyond easing physical pain and hunger and should include proclaiming God’s prophetic message to the world.³⁰

Tozer also argues that the best way to redeem society is to focus on the regeneration of the individuals who comprise society.³¹ He writes, “Many church groups seem to have joined forces with the political and social reformers in the dream that the effective way to bring about a perfect society is to reform and redeem society itself” while neglecting “the redemption of the individual human natures which compose society.”³² In arguing this, Tozer places himself in the more conservative wing of the

²⁸Robert J. Patterson, “The Life and Thought of A.W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification: An Investigation into the Thoughts of Aiden Wilson Tozer on the Doctrine of Sanctification and the Insights He Received from Some of the Past Mystics of the Church” (ThM thesis, Regent College, 1989), 301.

²⁹Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, 72–73.

³⁰A. W. Tozer, *Tozer Speaks: 128 Compelling and Authoritative Teachings*, ed. Gerald B. Smith, vol. 1 (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 75–76, CD-ROM.

³¹Harris concludes, “Tozer’s writings focus on God and on cultivating spiritual uplift toward Him. He is not primarily nor significantly focused on the world. He rarely discusses specific issues in the world such as labor laws, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Since the world is not his primary concern, his discussion of it is not as fully developed as is the spiritual and thus this aspect of his thought is not as readily accessible to the reader. Tozer is typical of Fundamentalist Evangelicalism in putting chief emphasis on salvation of the individual, rather than on reformation of the sins of society, for it is believed by many Evangelicals that conversion of everyone would cure social and other problems.” Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 120.

³²Tozer, *Who Put Jesus on the Cross?*, 195.

evangelical spectrum when it comes to the relationship between evangelism and social action.³³

Contours of Tozer's Activism

In addition to demonstrating the fact of Tozer's activism, it is also instructive to trace the contours of his activism. These are teachings related to activism about which Tozer was especially passionate.

Need for the Spirit's empowerment. In order to truly make an impact and enjoy genuine fruitfulness, Christians need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Tozer references David Brainerd comparing a man without the Spirit's power trying to engage in spiritual work to a workman without fingers trying to perform manual labor. He then declares, "The Holy Spirit is not a luxury meant to make deluxe Christians, as an illuminated frontispiece and a leather binding make a deluxe book. The Spirit is an imperative necessity."³⁴ He asserts that no one who knows the facts of the current state of world evangelization can deny the desperate need for God's empowerment to reach this world. Anyone who goes out without faith in a God who does wonders will return without fruit. No one should be so rash as to seek impossible things unless they have first been anointed by "the God of the impossible."³⁵ To state the matter succinctly, "Only

³³The relationship between evangelism and social action was a hotly contested issue among twentieth-century evangelicals. Some evangelicals believed evangelism should be the church's sole mission. For this view, see Arthur P. Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978). Others believed Christian mission should include both evangelism and social action. For this view, see John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975).

³⁴A. W. Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 69, CD-ROM.

³⁵Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 1.

God can do God's work," and God desires to use humble Christians who have so cultivated his presence that God's work flows through them naturally.³⁶

Unfortunately, Tozer estimates from his observations of evangelicalism that about ninety percent of the religious activity carried on in churches is being done by people who are not gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit.³⁷ The essence of evangelism is not about masterfully utilizing intellectual arguments or appealing to people's felt needs but rather preaching the gospel while relying on the Holy Spirit to convince the person of its truth. Only the Holy Spirit can break down a person's resistance and make them receptive.³⁸

God does not need us. While Christians are called to pour out their lives in God's service, it would be a mistake to conclude that God needs us or is in some way dependent on us to accomplish his purposes in the world. Tozer notes how some missionary appeals come very close to that error as they seek to persuade people to go to the foreign mission field because God needs more people so badly. Not one to mince words, Tozer states, "The fact is that God is riding above this world and the clouds are the dust of His feet and if you do not follow Him, you will lose all and God will lose nothing. He will still be glorified in His saints and admired of all those who fear Him."³⁹

Tozer observes how the picture of a nervous God pining over people to win their allegiance is silly and unbiblical, and yet that is the picture painted by so many. Preachers commonly represent God as eager to do more for world evangelization but

³⁶A. W. Tozer, *A Disruptive Faith: Expect God to Interrupt Your Life*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011), 175.

³⁷Tozer, *Tragedy in the Church*, 25.

³⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Dangers of a Shallow Faith: Awakening from Spiritual Lethargy*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 186.

³⁹Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son*, 39.

frustrated in his purposes because Christians fail to cooperate. He is failing for lack of support. Therefore, to rescue God from the embarrassing situation he has gotten himself into, preachers exhort hearers to devote their lives to missions. Many Christians think so highly of themselves that they find it quite easy and even enjoyable to adopt this perspective and imagine they are necessary to God. However, the reality is that the God of the Bible is an almighty God, and he needs no support.⁴⁰

Interestingly, viewing God in this way does not hinder Christian activity but actually stimulates it. According to Tozer, the belief that God has infinite power and yet sovereignly condescends to use people inspires Christians to take Christ's easy yoke and spend their lives in Spirit-empowered labor for the glory of God. They count it the highest privilege.⁴¹

Seeking God's glory. Tozer also emphasizes the motive that should drive all missionary endeavors, which is the glory of God. Far too many people are converted and come into the church without ever renouncing their prideful desire for personal glory and prestige. Because of this, some have spent decades engaged in religious work all for the purpose of acquiring glory for themselves. Ministers who work for God's glory are too often the exception rather than the rule.⁴² Such is the case especially whenever a spirit of competition develops between churches or denominations. Christian ministers are

⁴⁰A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 54–55.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 57.

⁴²Tozer, *Tragedy in the Church*, 2–3. Tozer seems to have maintained a focus on God's glory in his own ministry without undue regard for impressive numbers. He was more concerned about engaging in ministry in a way that was pleasing to God than about having large amounts of converts about which he could boast. Harris writes, "[Southside Alliance Church] was not an extremely large church, Tozer preferring quality in his congregation to quantity. He was not interested in evangelism *per se*, thinking that many evangelists left their converts as babies in diapers. Instead Tozer's church was a place to foster growth in the Christian life. According to Ms. Pearl Fardig, a long-time member of Tozer's congregation, the people who were in Tozer's church for many years were people of a spiritual depth and strength that were unique." Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 22.

especially prone to harbor a spirit of envy and rivalry within them even if they do not give any obvious indication that they are in a race for numbers. The fact that their ambition is hidden does not make it any less shameful. Tozer encourages them to humble themselves in God's presence and pray for deliverance.⁴³ In another place, he observes that as long as a spirit of competition is present, the work of God is not being done. Since God is one, he does not compete with himself. Therefore, to the degree that his Spirit is in control of believers, there will be no such thing as competition among them. The Spirit changes believers from competitors into co-workers.⁴⁴

When it comes to Christian service, motive is everything. In order for their service to be acceptable to God, believers must serve with a sincere heart. They must not do anything out of mere habit or in a careless manner. Such "service" will not stand up under God's searching eyes because "it is motive that gives to every moral act its final quality."⁴⁵

As believers evangelize, Tozer states that they should remember their chief objective is God's glory, not merely winning souls. Winning souls comes second, while God's glory comes first.⁴⁶ However, believers do not have to choose between these two ends because God has so ordered things that when he is glorified, more people will be converted. If believers try to gain converts through various man-centered techniques at the expense of seeking God's glory through an evangelistic approach that is explicitly God-centered, Tozer predicts they will merely gain proselytes who are not truly converted. The best way to get the highest number of true converts is to keep God at the

⁴³A. W. Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 98, CD-ROM.

⁴⁴Tozer, *The Next Chapter after the Last*, 59.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁶A. W. Tozer, *Voice of a Prophet: Who Speaks for God?*, ed. James L. Snyder (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2014), 187.

center and consciously strive to glorify him in all evangelistic endeavors.⁴⁷

Too much activity while not seeking God. Although Tozer was a zealous proponent of evangelism and missions, he also cautions believers not to give themselves so totally to evangelistic endeavors that they neglect personal communion with God.⁴⁸ He observes how evangelicals place a high premium on being active and would rather do something than spend time seeking God. People think the model Christian is someone who is always in a hurry and highly aggressive. Tozer warns that believers are neglecting their own souls as they make a great racket by running here and there, giving the impression that they are wonderfully devoted to their task. He compares this to Martha's mentality in Luke 10:38–42 as she hurriedly made practical preparations for her guests but neglected the “good portion” of simply sitting at Jesus' feet.⁴⁹

Those who devote themselves to Christian activity in this way need to remember that “[w]hat a man is must be shown to be more important than what he does.”⁵⁰ God has redeemed his people not just to thrust them out into service but to make worshippers out of them.⁵¹ He is not just recruiting laborers but is seeking to restore

⁴⁷A. W. Tozer, *Tozer: Fellowship of the Burning Heart*, ed. James L Snyder (Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2006), 30.

⁴⁸Warren Wiersbe describes the way in which reading Tozer “cures the fever that often makes a man mistake activity for ministry.” Warren W Wiersbe, *50 People Every Christian Should Know: Learning from Spiritual Giants of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 353.

⁴⁹Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, 41. In his biography of Tozer, Snyder notes, “A major concern of Tozer's was the lack of spirituality among professing Christians of his day. He zeroed in on its primary cause. He was convinced that the frenzied pace set by contemporary church leaders mitigated against what he termed cultivating the knowledge of God. The average church was too busy with frivolous activities to get to know God as He deserves to be known.” Snyder, *The Life of A. W. Tozer*, 16.

⁵⁰A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 85, CD-ROM.

⁵¹This was what one researcher calls the “central theme” of Tozer's ministry. For Tozer, nothing was more important than “loving and knowing God.” Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 26. Dorsett also makes a similar statement about Tozer's ministry: “[P]eople were told that knowing about Jesus Christ, understanding correct doctrine, and being a good student of the Bible are only part of our calling. The Lord wants His people to ‘know Him’ not just ‘about Him.’” Dorsett, *A Passion for God*, 125.

human beings to a condition where they are able to glorify God and enjoy him forever.⁵²

Of course, Tozer says, this does not mean there is no work to be done. There most certainly is, and God calls his children to be a part of it. However, “no one can be a worker who is not first a worshiper” lest all of his work be wood, hay, and stubble in the eyes of God.⁵³ Elsewhere, Tozer observes that it is not as though the sovereign, holy God of the universe is so desperate for workers that he will recruit people into service without regard for their moral and spiritual character. Instead, he is selective with regard to whom he desires to use, and the only acceptable workers in his eyes are those who are worshippers before they are workers.⁵⁴

Tozer advises those who simply want to make “contacts” for Jesus to let their two knees make “contact” with the ground first and stay there for a while.⁵⁵ He even proposes a “moratorium on religious activity”:

I suppose my suggestion will not receive much serious attention, but I should like to suggest that we Bible-believing Christians announce a moratorium on religious activity and set our house in order preparatory to the coming of an afflatus from above. So carnal is the body of Christians which composes the conservative wing of the Church, so shockingly irreverent are our public services in some quarters, so degraded are our religious tastes in still others that the need for power could scarcely have been greater at any time in history. I believe we should profit immensely were we to declare a period of silence and self-examination during which each one of us searched his own heart and sought to meet every condition for a real baptism of power from on high.⁵⁶

Tozer’s point is that the Christian worker’s character matters. It is not just a matter of avoiding “big” sins like adultery or dishonesty but of having a worshipful heart and a lifestyle of seeking God’s face. Until believers have a vibrant and intimate relationship

⁵²This is a reference to the first question of the Westminster Catechism.

⁵³Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 30. The “wood, hay, and stubble” is a reference to 1 Cor 3:10–15.

⁵⁴Tozer, *That Incredible Christian*, 36.

⁵⁵Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son*, 121.

⁵⁶A. W. Tozer, *God’s Pursuit of Man* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 94, CD-ROM.

with God themselves, they are in no position to try to impart that to others.⁵⁷

Harris helpfully summarizes Tozer's teaching on missions by observing how Tozer believed in the need for missions—as any faithful pastor of the Christian and Missionary Alliance would—and made his church's missionary conference the highlight of the church year. However, according to Harris, "Tozer did not actually write on missions, but rather on cultivating the state of spirit which would lead a person to the mission field, uphold him there, and produce fruit through him."⁵⁸

Conforming to Scripture. Not only is it necessary for believers to have a healthy relationship to God before attempting work for God, but their work itself must conform to the standards of the Bible. Tozer writes that every activity of service to God must pass the supreme test of having biblical authority behind it, conforming both to the letter and the spirit of the Bible. The fact that it succeeds proves nothing, and the fact that it is popular proves even less. Instead, Tozer wants to know, "Where are the proofs of its heavenly birth? Where are its scriptural credentials?"⁵⁹

Perhaps the most important aspect of biblical fidelity is being careful to preach the true biblical message. Tozer expresses concern that many evangelicals are so eager to reach people for Jesus that they have altered the gospel in an effort to make it more palatable for the natural mind. They do not want to offend people or appear judgmental,

⁵⁷Patterson goes so far as to say that while Tozer's Alliance denomination in general emphasizes evangelism over sanctification (especially on foreign mission fields), Tozer emphasizes sanctification over evangelism. Patterson, "The Life and Thought of A. W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification," 432. There may be some merit to this observation, although this difference does not mean Tozer was not passionately devoted to evangelism.

⁵⁸Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 113. The first part of Harris' quote stating that "Tozer did not actually write on missions" does not seem to take into account all of the material presented earlier in this chapter demonstrating how missions was an important emphasis of Tozer's writings. However, the quote is still helpful because it aptly describes Tozer's focus on the internal, spiritual qualifications of the missionary.

⁵⁹Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, 82.

and so they water down the truth to make it a better fit for secular culture.⁶⁰ In reality, this mentality is unfaithful to the Bible and has actually served to weaken the church rather than strengthen it. The Bible does not teach Christians to make “converts” in any way possible but to make them with the true and unaltered message of the gospel. Believers should present the truth as the Bible presents it and then trust the Holy Spirit to work and let people decide whether or not to accept it. One thing is certain, according to Tozer: “This soft, pussy idea that in order to keep people coming and giving and filling the seats we don't dare in any wise offend them, and we've got to make everything smooth and soft, is not New Testament.”⁶¹

Misguided activity: Spreading error. In line with his commitment to biblical fidelity, Tozer expresses grave concern that many foreign missions endeavors are only spreading the errors of the American churches engaging in the endeavors. He teaches that the church has a twofold task. First, Christ has commissioned her to spread Christianity throughout the world, and, second, he expects her to ensure that the kind of Christianity she spreads is pure New Testament Christianity.⁶²

Unfortunately, in Tozer's estimation, the American church as a whole is not spreading New Testament Christianity very faithfully. Tozer maintains that “the church of Christ today, the born-again evangelical Church, is in Babylonian captivity. We are among people that speak another language. We are learning their ways. . . .”⁶³ Tozer then states that, because of this spiritual fornication with the world, the church is in desperate

⁶⁰A. W. Tozer, *God's Power for Your Life: How the Holy Spirit Transforms You through God's Word*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 103.

⁶¹A. W. Tozer, *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment: Selected Excerpts*, ed. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 141, CD-ROM.

⁶²A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Men: Cultivating the Divine/Human Relationship* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 9, CD-ROM.

⁶³Tozer, *Tozer*, 32.

need of restoration back to the Promised Land, where the Shekinah glory of God is, and needs to be reformed according to New Testament standards. Until this happens, evangelism “can only result in the birth of more children in Babylon.”⁶⁴ In other words, given the current state of evangelicalism, any success evangelicals enjoy in missions and evangelism will only produce more Christians who are deviant from the New Testament in significant ways. Just as God has ordained each of earth’s plants and trees to replicate itself “after his kind” (Gen 1:11), missionaries can never produce something better than they are themselves. Any missionary who travels abroad with “a cheap concept of God and his head filled with jingly choruses” will only be “transplanting a degenerate Christianity on a foreign shore.”⁶⁵

Tozer recalls how Christ instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had been anointed with power from God in the form of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ From that, it is evident that Jesus does not entrust his work to people who are not ready or qualified. It is infinitely better for believers to be prepared for service than for them to convert others to a sub-biblical spiritual condition. This is because no church founded in a foreign country will be any better than the spiritual lives of the people who founded it. Therefore, the best thing for believers to do is to seek true repentance that results in sanctified hearts and lives. The church needs to return to the pattern revealed on the mountain.⁶⁷ When this happens, the church will see more converts, not less.⁶⁸

Tozer regards the popular idea that the church’s first obligation is to spread the

⁶⁴Tozer, *Tozer*.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶See Acts 1:4–8.

⁶⁷This is a reference to the pattern for the tabernacle that God revealed to the Israelites from Mount Sinai and which they constructed in Exod 36–39.

⁶⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Size of the Soul: Principles of Revival and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 112, CD-ROM.

gospel to the ends of the earth is false. Rather, her first obligation is to be spiritually ready to spread it. Again, he notes that if Jesus' disciples had gone out as missionaries prior to receiving the anointing they received at Pentecost, it would have been a disaster. The only thing they could have done would be to make converts who were just like themselves. Consequently, they would have altered the whole course of Christian history by starting a church that was deficient from the very beginning. Spreading a degenerate kind of Christianity does not count toward fulfilling the Great Commission. Believers should take to heart Jesus' rebuke to the Pharisees: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt 23:15). In other words, the missions endeavors of the Pharisees did more harm than good. Likewise, evangelicals should not assume that once they have reached the last tribe with their brand of Christianity, they have truly evangelized the world.⁶⁹

Misguided activity: Unbiblical means. In addition to lamenting the unbiblical form of Christianity being spread, Tozer also laments the unbiblical methods being used to spread it.⁷⁰ He first observes the compulsion American Christians feel to get things done. They possess a deep inner drive to accomplish things that can be seen and measured by others. Evangelicals travel an incredible number of miles, speak to enormous crowds, publish an unbelievably large amount of religious literature, collect massive sums of money, and build a staggering number of churches. Evangelical leaders in particular often compete with each other to obtain impressive statistics such as these.

⁶⁹Tozer, *Of God and Men*, chap. 9.

⁷⁰Tozer biographer James Snyder writes, "Some referred to [Tozer] as the conscience of evangelicalism. As such he recognized modern Christianity sailing through dense spiritual fog and pointed out the rocks on which it could flounder if it continued its course. His spiritual intuition enabled him to sense error, name it for what it was and reject it—all in one decisive act." James L. Snyder, "The Preaching Ministry of A. W. Tozer," *Preaching* 7, no. 6 (May 1992): 48.

Tozer then points out that this pragmatic philosophy asks no revealing questions about the wisdom or morality of what is being done but simply assumes that if the ends are good, the most appropriate means are those that appear most efficient. Therefore, when leaders discover something that works, they quickly find a biblical text to justify it and plunge right ahead. Soon, someone writes a magazine article about it, then they publish an entire book, and finally the person who discovered it is granted an honorary degree. After that, there is no longer any argument about whether or not the method is biblical. After all, it is impossible to argue with success. If the method works, it must be good.⁷¹

In addition, Tozer also points out the way many churches put undue pressure on their pastor to produce quick results. They expect quantity over quality and have no patience for a pastor who desires to build the church on solid values. Instead, they push the pastor “to seek size at any cost and to secure by inflation what they cannot gain by legitimate growth.”⁷² All of these unbiblical ways and activities threaten the very life of the church. Every year, they divert millions of dollars and countless hours away from legitimate Christian labor. In light of this, Tozer declares that “it is time for us to seek again the leadership of the Holy Ghost.”⁷³

Tozer acknowledges that there is a sense in which God wants Christians to be successful. The problem is the way many Christians define success, thinking according to worldly values instead of heavenly ones. From a worldly perspective, Jesus would be a total failure. The early apostles also would have died as failures. Furthermore, throughout

⁷¹A. W. Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares: God Speaks to Those Who Take Time to Listen*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 75, CD-ROM.

⁷²Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, 8.

⁷³Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man*, 37. Since Tozer does not specify the unbiblical ways and methods to which he is referring, the reader is left to speculate to a degree. One strong possibility is that Tozer is referring to various forms of entertainment churches employ in an effort to draw crowds and gain “converts.” He may also be referring to evangelistic practices that pressure and manipulate people into making a profession of faith but, in reality, produce a high number of spurious conversions.

the history of the church, many of those commonly recognized as great men of God were embarrassingly unsuccessful according to the worldly definition of success. Instead, according to Tozer, Christians need to start seeing success the way God sees it, and that begins when they realize they are pilgrims looking for a city whose designer and builder is God.⁷⁴

Tozer observes that Christians are so caught up in hurried activity that they find it difficult to take any time to sit down and think. However, thoughtful reflection about what they are doing is most necessary. God is concerned not only about the quantity of the work but also about the quality. Tozer believes that when Christians stand before Christ's judgment seat, Christ will speak very little of numbers or size and give most of his attention to the quality of service each Christian has rendered. On that day, Christians will see what God thinks of their breathless activity, and the verdict will come as a shock to many. Even when activity appears to produce positive results and "get things done," it is not necessary pleasing to God.⁷⁵

The Boundary: The Exclusivity of the Gospel

Having examined the contours of Tozer's activism, it is also necessary to look at his position on a boundary doctrine related to Christian activism in order to confirm Tozer's evangelical identity. It may be true that Tozer emphasizes something evangelicals emphasize. However, he is not a confessional evangelical unless he also holds views consistent with that approach to evangelical identity.

One important boundary doctrine that relates to activism is belief in the exclusivity of the gospel. Ronald Nash defines Christian exclusivism as "the belief that (1) Jesus Christ is the *only* Savior, and (2) explicit faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for

⁷⁴Tozer, *The Dangers of a Shallow Faith*, 33. Tozer's reference to the city designed and built by God is a reference to Heb 11:10.

⁷⁵Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, 75.

salvation.”⁷⁶ The belief that both of these propositions are false is known as “pluralism.” Pluralism teaches that Jesus is not the only Savior but is simply one of a number of options that all offer a way to God. There is validity in all religions. On the other hand, others believe that the first proposition is true while the second is false. That is, Jesus is indeed the only Savior, but people do not have to possess explicit faith in Jesus or even hear of Jesus in order to enjoy the salvation he offers. This is known as “inclusivism” and was the view of Karl Rahner, the Jesuit theologian who exercised enormous influence at the Second Vatican Council. He memorably called those who have never heard of Jesus and yet follow the ethics of Jesus “anonymous Christians.” He was able to say this because he believed there is a sense in which “Christ is present and operative in non-Christian believers and hence in non-Christian religions in and through his Spirit.”⁷⁷ Elsewhere, Rahner explains,

Anonymous Christianity means that a person lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity. . . . Let us say, a Buddhist monk...who, because he follows his conscience, attains salvation and lives in the grace of God; of him I must say that he is an anonymous Christian; if not, I would have to presuppose that there is a genuine path to salvation that really attains that goal, but that simply has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. But I cannot do that. And so, if I hold if everyone depends upon Jesus Christ for salvation, and if at the same time I hold that many live in the world who have not expressly recognized Jesus Christ, then there remains in my opinion nothing else but to take up this postulate of an anonymous Christianity.⁷⁸

In contrast to both pluralism and inclusivism, exclusivism maintains that the

⁷⁶Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 11. Italics in original.

⁷⁷Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 316.

⁷⁸Karl Rahner et al., *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965–1982* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 135. Some “post-conservative” evangelicals, such as Clark Pinnock, have held this view. See Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). For an overview of the different positions on the issue, see John Hick et al., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Inclusivism is not consistent with confessional evangelicalism as defined by Mohler and as understood in this paper.

only way people can be saved is through personal, conscious faith in Jesus alone as the way to heaven. Exclusivists commonly cite Jesus' words in John 14:6, where he states, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." They also lean heavily on Peter's teaching in Acts 4:12 that "neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Exclusivism has been the predominant belief of Christians throughout previous centuries of church history. Moreover, it is one of the boundary beliefs of confessional evangelicalism. Therefore, since confessional evangelicals are exclusivists, it is necessary to demonstrate that Tozer also was an exclusivist in order to prove the thesis that he was a confessional evangelical. His exclusivist beliefs are evident from his opposition to both pluralism and inclusivism.

Tozer against Pluralism

Tozer is quite clear in his rejection of the idea that all religions are different ways of arriving at the same destination.

Revelation in Christ alone. Tozer speaks against the popular idea that it is not important what people believe as long as they believe something. They might be Catholic, Jewish, nature mystic, occultist, deist, or Mormon—it does not matter. The important thing is that they just keep believing. In reality, however, "[I]t is not enough that we believe; we must believe the right thing about the right One. To believe in God is more than to believe he exists."⁷⁹

God has revealed himself in a unique way through his Son, Jesus. Tozer cautions against thinking that the different religions are good in varying degrees. Rather, God has spoken through Christ and commanded us, "Listen to him" (Matt 17:5). Jesus is not simply another teacher but is "the final teacher and the last Word of God to men" so

⁷⁹Tozer, *Of God and Men*, chap. 15.

that “[w]hat He has said closes all other arguments.”⁸⁰

No other way. Tozer is adamant that Jesus Christ is the only door through which humans have access to God. Therefore, it is not enough to tell people that they need to have a relationship with God. They also need to be told how to do that, and it is only through the gospel of Christ. This gospel declares that there is only one door, and that door is Jesus.⁸¹

For this reason, Tozer states that he simply cannot go along with those who say that people can get to God anywhere or in any way. They believe God has spoken to Plato, to Muslims, and to Buddhists. However, according to Tozer, “Anybody who thinks they are still a Christian, and teaches that, has been educated beyond their intelligence and needs to start over.”⁸² The Bible teaches something very different. In it, Jesus says, “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). People cannot walk straight out of the woods and into heaven but can only get to heaven by the door God has provided. Thankfully, however, that door is wide enough to accommodate all who desire to walk through it.⁸³

Tozer points out the biblical teaching that it is out of the fullness of Christ that people receive from God.⁸⁴ This does not mean that everyone in the world has received the fullness of Christ but simply that Christ is the only medium through which God dispenses his saving benefits to creation.⁸⁵ For example, in the case of an animist, it is not

⁸⁰A. W. Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God: Teachings from the Book of Hebrews*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 31–32.

⁸¹Tozer, *Voice of a Prophet*, 118.

⁸²A. W. Tozer, *The Christ-Centered Church: Creating Fearless, Spirit-Filled Followers of Christ*, ed. James L. Snyder (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2009), 23.

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴This is a reference to John 1:16.

⁸⁵A. W. Tozer, *And He Dwelt Among Us: Teachings from the Gospel of John*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2014), 85.

enough for him to have an instinct to feel his way toward an unknown God (Acts 17:27). He must actually discover the true God through God's self-disclosure in the inspired Bible.⁸⁶ Elsewhere, Tozer states that there are two important truths for people to understand. The first is that no one has ever been saved or will be saved except through grace, and the second is that grace always comes through Jesus. If people want to enjoy the wonderful, bountiful, and astounding kindness of God, they must "step under the shadow of the grace" and come to the place where God dispenses grace.⁸⁷

Tozer against Inclusivism

Tozer not only teaches against pluralism but also teaches against inclusivism, the idea that people can be saved through Christ without necessarily ever hearing about Christ. He directly states, "God's redemptive revelation in Scripture is necessary to saving faith and peace with God. Faith in a risen Savior is necessary if the vague stirrings toward immortality are to bring us to restful and satisfying communion with God."⁸⁸ Apart from conscious faith in the true God of the Bible, people will perish.⁸⁹ Just as it is impossible to please God apart from faith (Heb 11:6), it is also impossible to be saved apart from faith in the risen Savior.⁹⁰

Tozer acknowledges that a person's responsibility before God increases when they hear the Bible but maintains that it is still present even before they hear. God judges people according to the light they possess. He quotes Romans 2:12, where Paul writes, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as

⁸⁶Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 164.

⁸⁷A. W. Tozer, *The Radical Cross: Living the Passion of Christ* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 125, CD-ROM.

⁸⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 75, CD-ROM.

⁸⁹Tozer, *Jesus Is Victor*, chap. 10.

⁹⁰Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man*, 25.

have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.” With this in mind, he states, “the heathen are not innocent before they have heard the gospel, but their responsibility is vastly increased after they have heard it.”⁹¹

The idea that the only damning sin is rejecting Christ and that people are not held accountable for sin in parts of the world where the gospel has not been preached is a terrible error, according to Tozer. Rejecting Christ is not the only sin for which people are judged. Rather, they receive condemnation for sinning against any light they possess, even if that light is only that of creation and conscience.⁹² In another place, Tozer responds to another form of the same argument. Many preachers claim that people are not lost because they have sinned but simply because they have not accepted Jesus. However, the ridiculousness of this argument is evident when compared to a parallel argument on another subject: a person with cancer is dying, but it is only the rejection of a cure that is killing him rather than the cancer itself. Such a claim would be silly. The whole reason a person with cancer needs a cure is because he has already been marked for death by the cancer. In the same way, the reason people need Jesus is because they too have been marked for death by their sin. In this way, it is evident that refusing to receive Christ is simply a symptom of a deeper malady—namely unforsaken sin.⁹³

Significance of Tozer’s Activism for Spirituality

There are several ways in which Tozer’s passion for spreading the gospel in word and deed is significant for spirituality.

Avoiding Inward Focus

The first and perhaps most obvious way Tozer’s activism is significant for

⁹¹Tozer, *The Warfare of the Spirit*, 69.

⁹²Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares*, 7.

⁹³Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 5.

spirituality is the way in which his teachings encourage believers to pursue a kind of spirituality that is intent on making a difference in this world. All too often, Christians have a tendency to become inwardly focused and spend so much time examining their own hearts and seeking personal growth that they never get around to actually doing anything for the Lord. True spirituality may arise from the heart but is never confined to the heart. Rather, it compels believers to live out their faith in very visible and practical ways such as advancing the gospel.

The simple reality is that Jesus has given his followers a commission to make disciples in every corner all over the world (cf. Matt 28:18–20). Neglecting this command for the sake of personal spiritual growth is not an option if believers want to obey their Lord. It would be much different if Jesus had commanded believers to simply pursue personal holiness. However, that is not the case. Therefore, dedication to spreading the gospel is an essential part of what it means to be spiritual and a fundamental component of true godliness. Furthermore, being engaged in spreading the gospel will actually produce more personal spiritual growth than consciously focusing on oneself all the time.

Spending Time Seeking God

However, this does not mean that the Christian life should merely consist of breathlessly rushing from one activity to another. On the contrary, Tozer insightfully observes that many Christians are too quick to try to serve God without first seeking God. The fact that Tozer even speaks of a “moratorium on religious activity” shows how serious he is about this issue.⁹⁴ It is very easy to become so caught up in accomplishing things for Jesus and achieving measurable results that personal communion with God is almost totally neglected. Tozer does an excellent job of reminding believers that God

⁹⁴Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man*, 94.

saved them to be worshipers first and foremost. Part of that worship is expressed in engaging in the Great Commission, but worship is the more fundamental calling of the two. Therefore, believers would do well to follow Tozer's advice to let their own two knees make contact with the ground before trying to make more evangelistic contacts for the Lord.⁹⁵

Engaging in Social Action

Although Tozer seems to emphasize evangelism more than social action, he certainly recognizes the importance of the latter. This also is an important component of true spirituality. After all, Jesus himself states that the second greatest commandment is to "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt 22:39). Many evangelicals have a tendency to focus exclusively on evangelism and consequently neglect efforts to help people around them in practical ways. While it is true that eternal needs are more significant than temporal needs, there need not be any conflict between the two. Rather, each helps the other. Meeting temporal needs often increases the fruitfulness of evangelistic efforts, and evangelistic efforts produce more people who are concerned about loving their neighbor. Christians should not ignore Tozer's call to be faithful in helping others.

Practicing What We Preach

Looking at the wonderful fruitfulness of Tozer's efforts to reach his family as a young believer reveals that he was faithful not only to talk about evangelism but also to practice it himself. The fact that both his mother and father came to faith through his witness—as well as two of his sisters, a brother-in-law, and others—demonstrates that he was personally committed to sharing the gospel even with his own family, a task which is often more difficult than sharing the gospel with friends or strangers. In this way, he "practiced what he preached."

⁹⁵Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son*, 121.

It is not difficult to find an evangelical who claims he believes in evangelism, but it can be difficult to find one who is actually faithful to practice it personally. In this regard, Tozer's life is a challenge to believers to demonstrate integrity in their lives by doing the things they say others should do and living the kind of life they say others should live. True spirituality implies a unity of beliefs and actions.

Being Willing to Sacrifice

If Tozer is known for anything, it is his call for believers to abandon the myopic Christianity they have inherited from Christians around them and embrace Christ's call to a radically God-centered life. On the subject of activism, he does not disappoint. Tozer challenges believers to consider the extent to which they are placing personal comfort and luxury above Christ's call to spread the gospel. He urges them to ask themselves, "What is my Christian faith costing me?"⁹⁶ That is a good question. All too often, believers are willing to serve Jesus as long as it is not too much of an inconvenience to them. However, Jesus calls his followers to be radically devoted to him regardless of the cost or loss involved. He states that "whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). An essential element of true spirituality is a willingness to sacrifice anything and everything for the sake of God's call.

Having Zeal for the Glory of God

When it comes to the Christian life in general and to evangelistic efforts in particular, motive is everything. Tozer recognizes that it is not enough simply to do the right things but that believers must do the right things for the right reason—namely, the glory of God. A sincere desire see God exalted should be the foundation and driving force behind all Christian activity. Many times, when someone is converted, they do not

⁹⁶Tozer, *Who Put Jesus on the Cross?*, 78.

repent of their pride and ambition but simply express them in different ways, such as seeking evangelistic fruit in order to gain personal prestige rather than to glorify God. An important part of being the people God calls us believers to be is pursuing the goals he wants us to pursue. Christian leaders in particular should pay careful attention to this and regularly examine themselves, asking God to reveal the true motives of their heart and repenting of any personal ambition that exists. Tozer may well be right when he expresses concern that the majority of pastors are working for their own glory rather than God's and will therefore discover one day that God does not find the vast majority of their work acceptable in his sight. Ministers would be wise to check their motives and ensure that they are truly laboring out of genuine zeal for God's glory.

CHAPTER 5

TOZER AND THE BIBLE

From the earliest days of Christianity, Christians have recognized the immense value of the Bible. Even while the New Testament was still being written, Christians treasured the biblical writings enough to preserve them and begin making copies of the original autographs. Moreover, the Bible is woven into just about every aspect of church history. The Bible was instrumental in the conversion of Augustine (354–430), who, as he was experiencing intense conviction of sin, was directed to the book of Romans for truth about the only remedy to his condition. In addition, the Reformers broke away from medieval Catholicism on the basis of the Bible. None of this is surprising for those who believe that the Bible is actually breathed out by God himself (cf. 2 Tim 3:16).

The Center: Biblicism

Evangelicals have placed a particularly heavy emphasis on the Bible. As a result, the Bebbington Quadrilateral lists “biblicism” as one of the hallmarks of evangelicalism. This well-known quote from John Wesley is one of the best snapshots of the evangelical attitude toward the Bible:

I want to know one thing, the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book! Oh give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me.¹

This kind of love for the Bible and commitment to biblical authority has characterized the evangelical movement. Evangelicals have more than just a mild appreciation for the

¹John Wesley, preface to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, vol. 1 (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1851), 6.

Bible—they cherish it.

Demonstrating Tozer's Biblicism.

In order to make the case for Tozer as a confessional evangelical, it is necessary to demonstrate that Tozer shared this level of devotion to the Bible. One Tozer researcher contends that he does: “Tozer was deeply concerned for the authority of the Word of God as the foundation of all our beliefs and activities. To Tozer, the Word of God was timeless and practical, meeting every need and answering every question.”² Another researcher observes, “Tozer had, as it were, Biblical weights on his feet, and though he might lean to the right or left, they always brought him back to the center, for he always came back to the Bible.”³ Indeed, “The Bible became the rule of his life, a guide to true wisdom.”⁴ Tozer’s sermons and writings clearly reveal that these writers are correct.

The Bible must govern experience. In spite of his self-confessed mysticism, Tozer firmly believed that an individual’s experiences are not self-authenticating but rather that Christians must interpret their experiences through the lens of Scripture. As Ewearitt concisely states, “God and His Word were the base of all spiritual development for Tozer.”⁵ Tozer writes that true spiritual guides have their feet “firmly and irrevocably planted in the Scriptures” and have “accepted the Scriptures as their only rule for faith

²J. D. Watson, *The Forgotten Tozer: A. W. Tozer’s Challenge to Today’s Church* (Meeker, CO: Sola Scriptura Publications, 2013), 21.

³Eleanor Lynn Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth Century American Protestant* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 22.

⁴Robert J. Patterson, “The Life and Thought of A.W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification: An Investigation into the Thoughts of Aiden Wilson Tozer on the Doctrine of Sanctification and the Insights He Received from Some of the Past Mystics of the Church” (ThM thesis, Regent College, 1989), 274.

⁵Daniel Ewearitt, “A. W. Tozer: The Spiritual Formation of the Prophet-Mystic” (paper presented at Southeastern Regional Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Toccoa, GA, March 16–17, 2001), 3.

and practice.”⁶ In addition, regardless of the teacher or the teaching, believers should demand biblical proof for what is taught before they are willing to believe a word of it. As Tozer states, “The Christian lives and dies by the book.”⁷ Even the most powerful spiritual experience should be suspect until it is apparent that it accords with the Bible. If it turns out that the experience is contrary to the Bible, the believer is obligated to reject it.⁸

Tozer’s underlying assumption is that the Holy Spirit will never lead believers in a way that contradicts what he inspired the biblical authors to write in Scripture. Rather than undermining biblical truth, the Spirit sets it on fire and makes it more real, more vivid, and more powerful in the believer’s life.⁹ While Tozer places great emphasis on the Holy Spirit in many places throughout his writings, he is quite adamant that the Spirit is no longer giving new doctrinal revelation in this day and age. He maintains,

Whoever, for whatever reason, denies the finality of the biblical revelation and insists upon a continuing revelation having the same authority as the sacred Scriptures has shut himself out from the name of Christian. He is simply not a Christian in the scriptural and historic meaning of the word.¹⁰

These strong words reveal a heart that is passionate about the uniqueness of the Bible and committed to defending biblical authority as a “hill to die on.”

⁶A. W. Tozer, *The Crucified Life: How to Live Out a Deeper Christian Experience*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2011), 190.

⁷*Ibid.*, 16.

⁸A. W. Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 141–42, CD-ROM. Harris states, “Tozer always insisted that the intuitive must be backed up with Scripture. If he had a vision of an angel, he wouldn’t believe it unless it were verified in the Bible.” Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 58.

⁹A. W. Tozer, *The Counselor: Straight Talk about the Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 33–34, CD-ROM.

¹⁰A. W. Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares: God Speaks to Those Who Take Time to Listen*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 8–9, CD-ROM.

True Christian's attitude toward the Bible. This look at Tozer's commitment to the Bible naturally leads to the way in which Tozer taught a true Christian will approach the Bible. Tozer not only had a deep love for the Bible himself but also expected those who are truly God's children to have that same love for the Bible as well. He taught that "a true lover of God will be also a lover is His Word."¹¹ He also complained about living during a time of "soft, easy Christianity" marked by people politely "nibbling" around the edges of the Bible but failing to truly digest and absorb it so that Scripture becomes their "controlling interest."¹²

Certainly, there are other books that have immense spiritual value, and Christians should be grateful for access to such a wealth of wisdom for their spiritual journey. However, the Bible is infinitely more important than any other book in the world and is, in a sense, just about "the only book" for Christians.¹³ Elsewhere, Tozer describes the Bible as "the book of all books, to be revered, loved, pored over endlessly and feasted upon as living bread and manna for the soul."¹⁴ He then writes, "It is the first-best book, the *only* indispensable book. To ignore it or neglect it is to doom our minds to error and our hearts to starvation."¹⁵

Prior to conversion, people may be curious about the Bible and even have an

¹¹Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 142.

¹²A. W. Tozer, *Jesus Is Victor: A Fresh Perspective on the Book of Revelation*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 12, CD-ROM.

¹³A. W. Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 28, CD-ROM.

¹⁴A. W. Tozer, *We Travel an Appointed Way: Making Spiritual Progress*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 64, CD-ROM. Joshua Nickel has described the way in which Tozer modeled this enthusiasm in approaching. The freshness with which he communicated biblical truth made it evident that he regularly feasted his soul on the Bible with a high regard for its power and relevance. Nickel writes, "Tozer had a gift for sharing familiar, foundational truths that Christians can become complacent about. He delighted in them anew and then shared them with fresh delight." Joshua Nickel, *Reading Tozer: A Chapter-by-Chapter Look at A. W. Tozer's The Pursuit of God* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, 2017), 19.

¹⁵Tozer, *We Travel an Appointed Way*.

interest in the Bible. However, after conversion, every believer should expect to have an insatiable thirst for God's Word and look to the Bible as their source of spiritual nourishment. The difference in attitude is night and day.¹⁶ True Christians will want to live in the Bible "as a fish lives in the sea," not merely studying the Bible or learning biblical doctrine but actually loving it and feasting upon it through meditation during all hours of the day and night.¹⁷

Ultimate authority of the Bible. To say that the Bible is the "ultimate authority" implies that it is more authoritative than anything else to which a believer might look for spiritual guidance. As stated above, Tozer regarded it as authoritative over personal experiences. However, it is also authoritative over other sources of influence as well.

According to Tozer, the Bible is authoritative over church tradition and practices.¹⁸ Tozer observes how most Christians do not examine the things their church teaches and does in light of biblical teaching. Instead, they merely accept the status quo, assuming it is right because it has been done in the past and because a lot of people are presently doing it.¹⁹ Tozer adamantly proclaims that if the church taught something but the Bible did not, he would reject it. He states, "I wouldn't believe an archangel if he came to me with a wingspread of twelve feet, shining like an atomic bomb just at the

¹⁶A. W. Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God: Teachings from the Book of Hebrews*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 206–7.

¹⁷A. W. Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 136, CD-ROM.

¹⁸Tozer did appreciate the insights of previous generations of Christians, even those of Christians who were much different from himself. In fact, as Dorsett states in his biography of Tozer, "Tozer was nonsectarian. He found riches in Christian tradition—riches sometimes overlooked by teachers and preachers who were confident that nothing written between the book of Acts and the Reformation, with the possible exception of St. Augustine, could be useful to true disciples of Jesus Christ." Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 17.

¹⁹A. W. Tozer, *Rut, Rot or Revival: The Problem of Change and Breaking Out of the Status Quo*, ed. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 85, CD-ROM.

moment of its explosion, if he couldn't give me chapter and verse.”²⁰ Instead, Tozer says he would like to see churches adhere to “the New Testament order of letting Scripture decide matters,” asking with regard to any activity what the Bible says about the practice.²¹ He advises,

Every activity now being carried on in the name of Christ must meet the last supreme test: Does it have biblical authority back of it? Is it according to the letter and the spirit of the Scripture? ... That it succeeds proves nothing. That it is popular proves even less. Where are the proofs of its heavenly birth? Where are its scriptural credentials?²²

The fact that an evangelistic activity or method seems to be working does not prove anything about whether Christians should be doing it. Everything comes down to what the Bible says about it.

Tozer compares this kind of compromise in the church to a relatively obscure passage in the Old Testament about Hobab. Numbers 10:29 records how Moses invites Hobab, his father-in-law, to journey with the Israelites as they go to claim the Promised Land. However, Hobab was a Midianite and not a part of God’s chosen people. Therefore, Tozer compares Hobab to “anything gratuitously introduced into the holy work of God which does not have biblical authority for its existence.”²³ In the beginning, this new thing may seem relatively innocent and even preferable over the pattern revealed in the Bible. It also has a good chance of being imitated by other churches since churches are always looking for something new. Before long, Christians forget the biblical pattern altogether and happily follow along behind Hobab, appealing to his popularity in order to justify his presence. Surely someone as popular as Hobab cannot be wrong! However, according to Tozer, it is wrong for him to be there, and each Christian must vigilantly

²⁰Tozer, *The Counselor*, 44.

²¹Tozer, *Rut, Rot or Revival*, 127.

²²A. W. Tozer, *The Price of Neglect* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 82, CD-ROM.

²³*Ibid.*, 16.

keep an eye out for Hobab in their churches and in their own lives. Whenever and wherever they discover him, they must get rid of him immediately.²⁴

Scripture is also authoritative over specific preachers and charismatic personalities.²⁵ Just because a man quotes from the Bible at great length or claims to have had exceedingly wonderful experiences with God, it does not necessarily mean he is leading and teaching biblically. Those who follow him have a “solemn obligation” to compare the preacher’s words to the words of the Bible and demand that every idea presented have “a clean bill of health from the Holy Scriptures.”²⁶

In addition, Scripture is authoritative over personal preferences. In his biography of Tozer, Dorsett writes, “A. W. Tozer heralded biblical truth. He loved the Bible and unflinchingly preached what he believed people needed to hear, regardless of what they wanted.”²⁷ Tozer notes how the Samaritans refused Jerusalem as their place of worship and opted instead for Samaria by picking and choosing certain parts of the Pentateuch that seemed to support what they wanted to do. In a similar manner, many in churches today believe what they want to believe, emphasize what they want to emphasize, and follow the path they want to follow. In order to do this, they choose from the words of God whatever suits their preferences at a given time, conveniently ignoring biblical passages that do not. Tozer calls this “Samaritan worship.”²⁸

²⁴Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, 16–17.

²⁵James Snyder, a biographer of Tozer, notes the way in which Tozer recognized the authority of the Bible in his own preaching and trusted in the Bible’s power rather than his own oratorical skill or abilities. Snyder writes, “Tozer’s method of preaching was the strong declaration of biblical principles, never merely an involvement in word studies, clever outlines, or statistics.” Snyder, “The Preaching Ministry of A. W. Tozer,” 49.

²⁶A. W. Tozer, *The Set of the Sail: Direction for Your Spiritual Journey*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 26, CD-ROM.

²⁷Dorsett, *A Passion for God*, 17.

²⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Worship-Driven Life: The Reason We Were Created*, ed. James L. Snyder (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008), 70–71.

The reason the Bible is authoritative over everything else is because supreme authority rests in God, and God exercises that authority through his Son and through his Word.²⁹ Tozer writes, “True faith does not rest upon texts alone but upon God who wrote the text. The word is an expression of the character of God and is exactly as good as that character, no more and no less.”³⁰ The Bible is authoritative because God is authoritative.

This truth has enormous implications for the way Christians should approach the Bible. Tozer emphasizes that they are not free to treat it as a “thing” which they may push around at their convenience but should approach the Bible with a humble spirit of expectancy, believing that God will speak to them.³¹ Moreover, they are certainly not free to add or take away from God’s revelation, altering and remolding it to fit their heart’s desire. Instead, just as God held the Israelites responsible for making everything in the tabernacle according to the revealed pattern (Exod 25:40), he holds Christians responsible for following his instructions exactly. Tozer writes, “God’s words are not for me to edit and tinker with, but to believe and obey.”³²

Believers must be careful not to elevate their own opinions above the clear teaching of the Bible. Tozer warns of how, so often, believers form their opinions on the basis of an influential person in their life such as the pastor through whose ministry they were saved. This leader instilled within them opinions about various subjects. While some of these opinions may be biblical, others are not. According to Tozer, there is “grave danger” in allowing these opinions to trump the Bible itself, and it is necessary for

²⁹A. W. Tozer, *God’s Power for Your Life: How the Holy Spirit Transforms You through God’s Word*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 13.

³⁰Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, 79.

³¹A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 78.

³²Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 99–100.

the believer to discard them if necessary in favor of accurate biblical teaching.³³

There is also danger in selecting a few of one's favorite Bible passages while excluding other passages that are inconveniently opposed to our preferences. Tozer states that "nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian" and that any "tinkering with the truth" or "liberties taken with the Scriptures" invites God's hand of discipline on us.³⁴

Uniqueness of the Bible. Tozer also emphasizes that the Bible is utterly unique among all other books and sources of guidance a Christian may have. Snyder records that Tozer "devoted long hours to the memorization of the Scriptures" and that the "accuracy and appropriateness of his quotations testify to his familiarity with the Bible."³⁵ Tozer himself writes, "In this Word, we have God's unique thing. This Book of the Lord—the uttered word of God—is different from and above and transcends all others of its kind; it is uncompromising, authoritative, awesome and eternal."³⁶ Publishers print millions of words every day, but the only truly authoritative words ever published are those which form the sacred Scriptures.³⁷

Toward the end of his ministry, Tozer declares that he is reading fewer and fewer things outside of the Bible as he gets older. The reason for this habit, he says, is not

³³A. W. Tozer, *A Disruptive Faith: Expect God to Interrupt Your Life*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011), 84–85.

³⁴A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Men: Cultivating the Divine/Human Relationship* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 18, CD-ROM.

³⁵James L. Snyder, *The Life of A. W. Tozer: In Pursuit of God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 103. Snyder describes the way in which Tozer valued the Bible as the book of all books, uniquely worthy of study and reflection. He writes, "High above all other books [Tozer] placed the Bible, which he read diligently. With dictionary, lexicon, and concordance at hand he sought the etymology of all doubtful words." Snyder, "The Preaching Ministry of A. W. Tozer," 49.

³⁶Tozer, *God's Power for Your Life*, 15.

³⁷A. W. Tozer, *Tozer Speaks: 128 Compelling and Authoritative Teachings*, ed. Gerald B. Smith, vol. 1 (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 147, CD-ROM.

because he is losing interest in the present world but simply because he is gaining interest in the world that is to come. He then recommends that those who want to know God should seek him in his Word. Even more specifically, Tozer says, believers who are thirsty for the Holy Spirit should look in the Word. He observes that the Spirit “wrote this Book” and that “He inspired it,” so it makes sense that “He will be revealed in its pages.”³⁸

Throughout human history, people have taken many paths in their quest for God’s presence but all to no avail. According to Tozer, there is only one path that leads to God, and that path is revealed in the Bible alone. It is only in the Bible that we are able to understand how to gain access to God. The Bible is “the only sourcebook for our rule and practice” and “the only final, authentic sourcebook of information concerning those things that have to do with salvation.”³⁹

Sufficiency of the Bible. In addition to being unique, the Bible is also sufficient. Tozer calls it “a full and sufficient body of truth.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, many Christians try to use psychology as a substitute. Tozer states that he is “quite amused and somewhat disgusted” with some of his pastoral colleagues who spend enormous amounts of time studying psychology in order to know how to minister to their congregation, and he then asks, “When you have a Bible and a mind, a mouth and the Holy Spirit, why do you have to study psychology?”⁴¹ Tozer also criticizes the way society as a whole so flippantly disregards the Bible and regards it as irrelevant. He states that modern man’s

³⁸A. W. Tozer, *How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 4, CD-ROM.

³⁹Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 44–45.

⁴⁰Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares*, 9.

⁴¹Tozer, *The Counselor*, 107. This evangelical suspicion toward psychology would be documented just a few years after Tozer’s death by Jay Adams. See Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

neglect of the sacred text is “a shame and a scandal” since “those same Scriptures tell him all he wants to know, or should want to know, about God, his own soul and human destiny.”⁴² In other words, the Bible does not contain all knowledge, but it does contain all necessary knowledge for matters of spiritual significance. This is what the sufficiency of Scripture means. Regarding the Bible, Tozer memorably declares,

This is the book; and if we know the book, well enough we will have an answer to every problem in the world that touches us. But some people get far off track. I stay by the Word; I want to preach the Word and love the Word and make the Word everything. Read it much, read it often, brood over it, think over it, meditate over it, meditate on the Word of God day and night. When you wake at night, think of a verse. When you get up in the morning, no matter how you feel, think of a verse and make the Word of God everything.⁴³

If advising readers to “make the Word of God everything” falls short of the evangelical hallmark of biblicism, it is hard to imagine what would qualify.

Power of the Bible. Lastly, Tozer’s statements regarding the power of the Bible also demonstrate his biblicism. Tozer believed that the Bible has a unique power to bring about spiritual life and transformation. He writes that “between those covers is a living Book” and that calls it “vital and effective and alive,” despite being written thousands of years ago.⁴⁴ Even though the human authors of the Bible died long ago, it was the Holy Spirit who was behind their writing so that the Bible “stays young always” and is “as fresh as every new sunrise” and “as sweet and graciously fresh as the dew on the grass the morning after the clear night.”⁴⁵

When people truly grasp the meaning of the Bible, “it has the power to kill

⁴²A. W. Tozer, *That Incredible Christian: How Heaven’s Children Live on Earth*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 95, CD-ROM.

⁴³A. W. Tozer, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*, ed. James L. Snyder (Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2007), 119.

⁴⁴Tozer, *The Counselor*, 129–30.

⁴⁵A. W. Tozer, *The Tozer Pulpit: Selections from His Pulpit Ministry*, ed. Gerald B Smith, vol. 2 (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1994), 18–19.

those who resist and the power to make alive those who believe.”⁴⁶ Regarding the Bible’s ability to make people alive, Tozer writes elsewhere that true faith rises from the Word of God. God may use sermons to help people along, but those sermons only give rise to faith to the degree that they are biblical sermons.⁴⁷ The cure for unbelief and the way to strengthen faith are one and the same. It is not about believers gritting their teeth and frantically straining to believe or trying to manufacture faith within their heart as an act of their own will. Many have tried this, but it never helps. Rather, as Romans 10:17 states, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” On the basis of this, Tozer states that the way to have “a strong and lasting faith” is relatively simple: “Get acquainted with God through reading the Scriptures, and faith will come naturally.”⁴⁸

Progressive sanctification works in a very similar way. Tozer asserts that, of all the means God uses to bring about sanctification, “the Bible is the best” and that it is “the shortest route to spiritual perfection.”⁴⁹ Just like a baby needs milk, a new believer needs the Bible to cause him to grow. If that believer is deprived of the Bible for an extended period of time, it will be no less detrimental to his spiritual health than the deprivation physical milk would be to a baby.⁵⁰ Tozer admits that he is a long way from being the greatest preacher of his era. However, he says, his commitment is to preach the Bible truly and faithfully from his pulpit. He goes on to say that every congregation needs to hear the Bible expounded and illuminated on a regular basis “until the Bible is

⁴⁶Tozer, *God’s Power for Your Life*, 17.

⁴⁷Tozer, *How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit*, chap. 3.

⁴⁸Tozer, *The Set of the Sail*, 39.

⁴⁹Tozer, *Of God and Men*, chap. 18.

⁵⁰A. W. Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer II: More Wise Words with a Prophetic Edge*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 1997), 7.

everything.”⁵¹

Contours of Tozer’s Biblicism

Having demonstrated that Tozer valued the Bible to an exceptional degree, it is also helpful to trace the contours of his biblicism.

The need for spiritual experience. As another researcher has observed, “Tozer’s chief targets were not liberalism, but rather orthodoxy and intellectualism which were deathly cold and not set on fire by the Holy Spirit.”⁵² This is an accurate statement. Tozer is clear that it is not enough to gain knowledge from the Bible or to form sound doctrine, crossing every theological “t” and dotting every theological “i.” Rather, the purpose of the Bible is to lead people to an experience of God himself. Tozer observes that there is no lack of Bible teachers today who correctly set forth sound doctrine. The problem is that their teaching does not satisfy the spiritual longing of their hearers. Instead, too many of these teachers “seem satisfied to teach the fundamentals of the faith year after year, strangely unaware that there is in their ministry no manifest Presence, nor anything unusual in their personal lives.”⁵³ Because of this, the sheep starve.

While sound doctrine is certainly important, there is more to the Christian faith than just subscribing to the correct doctrine. Just because an individual subscribes to beliefs that are theologically accurate, that in itself does not make him a child of God. Tozer observes that this was the error of the Pharisees. Just as it is not physical descent that marks a true child of Abraham but rather faith in a person’s heart, “it is not creedal descent that proves us to be true sons of Pentecost, but identity of spirit with them upon

⁵¹A. W. Tozer, *Alive in the Spirit: Experiencing the Presence and Power of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016), 123.

⁵²Patterson, “The Life and Thought of A. W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification,” 434.

⁵³Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 8.

whose heads sat the cloven tongues as of fire.”⁵⁴ Tozer then observes that this kind of language about spiritual experience is “plain heresy” to “the salvation-by-logical-conclusion devotees” but that, if such is the case, “I run to join such a glorious heretic.”⁵⁵

Tozer acknowledges the suspicion surrounds the words “experience” and “feeling” among evangelicals. Many evangelical teachers cautiously avoid these words. Tozer humorously observes,

In spite of the undeniable lukewarmness of most of us we still fear that unless we keep a careful check on ourselves we shall surely lose our dignity and become howling fanatics by this time next week. We set a watch upon our emotions day and night lest we become over-spiritual and bring reproach upon the cause of Christ. Which all, if I may say so, is for most of us about as sensible as throwing a cordon of police around a cemetery to prevent a wild political demonstration by the inhabitants.⁵⁶

A person who justifies their lack of spiritual experience with their concern for biblical propriety is unfaithful to the very Bible to which they cling so tightly.

Tozer has a name for this erroneous mindset; he calls it “textualism.” He writes, “This strange textualism that assumes that because we can quote chapter and verse we possess the content and experience is a grave hindrance to spiritual progress. I think it is one of the deadliest, most chilling breezes that ever blew across the church of God!”⁵⁷ The goal of approaching the Bible is not just gaining information but encountering God himself.⁵⁸ It is beyond understanding how so many professing Christians can simply read

⁵⁴A. W. Tozer, *Born after Midnight: Spiritual Renewal Comes to Those Who Want It Badly Enough* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 2, CD-ROM.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷A. W. Tozer, *I Talk Back to the Devil: Straightforward Appeals for Christlike Living*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 5, CD-ROM.

⁵⁸Encountering God refers to a subjective experience within a believer rather than an actual physical encounter. In his comments on the fifth chapter of Tozer’s *The Pursuit of God*, Nickel explains, “God is everywhere already. To draw near to God is never a matter of physical distance. To ask God to visit you is not to ask Him to move from one place to another. It’s really asking Him to awaken you. It’s not that God is distant, it’s that we are oblivious. The change we need is in ourselves, not in God.” Nickel, *Reading Tozer*, 26.

a bit of the Bible here and there but have no encounter with its Author. In reality, Tozer states, “The cold textualism of many today borders on blasphemy.”⁵⁹ Biblical truths like cleansing, mercy, grace, faith, cross-carrying, and the infilling with the Holy Spirit must be experienced if they are to have any true meaning whatsoever for the believer. It is impossible to truly understand them without experiencing them.⁶⁰

The need for application. Closely related to the need for spiritual experience is the need for application. Describing Tozer’s ministry, Snyder records, “Always his preaching was practical and related to the spiritual needs of people.”⁶¹ According to Tozer, the lack of application is one of the greatest weaknesses of the church. The method of the Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical text is to lay down what God is doing or has done. However, after laying this foundation of truth, the Spirit’s method and desire is to show how the truth demands a moral obligation. Tozer challenges anyone to find even a single book of the Bible that does not include a godly exhortation. Instead, the Bible always presents something true and then proceeds to make application. Therefore, preaching the truth without preaching the application is negligent to the highest degree.⁶²

According to Tozer, Charles Finney believed that teaching the Bible without making moral application could be worse than not teaching the Bible at all because it

⁵⁹Tozer, *God’s Power for Your Life*, 171.

⁶⁰Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, 143.

⁶¹Snyder, *The Life of A. W. Tozer*, 96.

⁶²A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 10, CD-ROM. Curiously, Harris suggests that Tozer did not give great emphasis to application since he thought it would be nearly automatic as long as a person was walking in closeness to God. She writes, “[Tozer] taught spiritual principles, rather than exegeting verses. The preaching made very plain the applicability to everyday life so that a person had something he could really live by. However, Tozer did not emphasize the moral and ethical, for he believed that if a right relationship between man and God were established, the moral and ethical would take care of themselves.” Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 26. In support of this latter assertion, Harris cites a personal interview with Clifford Westergren, Director of the Alliance Press in Hong Kong, who had sat under Tozer’s preaching for four years. However, it is difficult to see how this can be reconciled with Tozer’s direct statements cited in this dissertation.

could result in positive injury to those who hear it. After years of thinking this was a somewhat extreme position, Tozer says he has finally come around to it and holds a view that is almost identical. He states, “Truth divorced from life is not truth in its biblical sense, but something else and something less.”⁶³

Tozer warns his readers against being the kind of person who desires to “sniff curiously” at the truth without having any intention of obeying the things God has revealed.⁶⁴ After all, as Tozer observes, God did not say to Noah that he simply wanted him to hold to the proper doctrines and that everything would be just fine as long as Noah was careful to believe the right things. Rather, God demanded obedience. In spite of this, there are many today who “actually think that somehow they are better” because they have learned religious doctrines.⁶⁵

Tozer notes that even though the wise men who travelled to Bethlehem were Gentiles, they saw the star and left their homes in order to make the long, arduous journey to lay valuable gifts at the feet of the Son of God. Even though they had scanty knowledge, they found the Messiah. On the other hand, he notes that the chief priests and scribes of Israel were students of the Scriptures and experts in exegesis. However, there is no indication that any of them had any spiritual awareness whatsoever of Jesus’ true identity. All of their knowledge was merely intellectual, and they were blind to the true meaning of the Scriptures. With this in mind, Tozer concludes that “a longing soul with scanty theological knowledge is in a better position to meet God than a self-satisfied soul, however deeply instructed in the Scriptures.”⁶⁶

⁶³Tozer, *Of God and Men*, chap. 7.

⁶⁴Tozer, *Jesus Is Victor*, chap. 2.

⁶⁵A. W. Tozer, *Jesus, Author of Our Faith: Twelve Messages from the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 30, CD-ROM.

⁶⁶Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, 134–35.

Tozer bemoans the fact that the Scriptures lie neglected in the lives of so many who claim to hold to their inspiration and even study them diligently. He states, “It is no credit to a man to have studied the Bible half a century if he cannot discover in himself (and more particularly, if others cannot discover in him) a family resemblance to the Holy Trinity.”⁶⁷ While no one can become a Christian if he is not in some sense a theologian, it is very possible to be a brilliant theologian but not be a Christian at all. Biblical truth without biblical love is in reality nothing but “a shadow of truth,” while “doctrine held in love is very truth indeed, and we dare not allow ourselves to be satisfied with anything less.”⁶⁸

According to Tozer, churches are full of people who want to prove their sainthood by appealing to the Greek original or the concordance for authentication. Where are the people whose sainthood is proclaimed by their lives? Tozer declares, “We need the power that transforms, that fills the soul with a sweet intoxication, that will make a former persecutor to be ‘beside himself’ with the love of Christ.”⁶⁹

The need for the Spirit’s illumination. Tozer also believed that saints need the Spirit’s illumination, which is foundational for both spiritual experience and application. He observes that since the Bible is a supernatural book, it can only be understood with supernatural help.⁷⁰ As long as people approach the Bible armed only with the powers of the intellect, the Bible will lie as dead as a rock. In order for it to have

⁶⁷A. W. Tozer, *The Early Tozer: A Word in Season*, ed. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 20, CD-ROM.

⁶⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Size of the Soul: Principles of Revival and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 94, CD-ROM.

⁶⁹A. W. Tozer, *Paths to Power: Living in the Spirit’s Fullness* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 1, CD-ROM.

⁷⁰A. W. Tozer, *Man, The Dwelling Place of God: What It Means to Have Christ Living in You* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 25, CD-ROM.

its intended effect, the Holy Spirit must make it come alive in a person's heart. Tozer concludes, "Scripture must be understood through the Holy Spirit who inspired it."⁷¹

Elsewhere, Tozer describes the Bible as being hidden by a veil so that humans, by nature, do not have the ability to grasp biblical truth on their own. They may learn theology and gain an impressive intellectual command of the Scriptures, but they will always miss the true knowledge of God. All the church attendance and catechisms in the world will not necessarily lead people to God until God himself gives them eyes to see, and he does this through his Spirit. Tozer then quotes Paul's teaching that "the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11). Because of this, it is the Spirit who must make Scripture clear.⁷²

While it is impossible to have illumination apart from theology, it is very possible to have theology without illumination.⁷³ The error of "textualism," described above, is ultimately due to a lack of the Spirit's illumination. Tozer describes how fundamentalists have separated themselves from liberalism, assuming they are superior to the liberal. However, fundamentalists have fallen into their own error, that of textualism, which Tozer describes as "orthodoxy without the Holy Ghost."⁷⁴ Tozer goes on to lament that churches are filled with people who are "Bible-taught but not Spirit-taught," viewing truth as something they can grasp with their minds and imagining that because a person holds to the fundamental doctrines he therefore possesses truth from God.⁷⁵ The liberals'

⁷¹Tozer, *A Disruptive Faith*, 31–32.

⁷²Tozer, *The Counselor*, 18–19. Dorsett summarizes Tozer's thought about the subject well: "But knowledge of God and the human spirit and the soul can be grasped only through the Holy Spirit. In short, some truth can be grasped rationally and naturally but much truth can only be discovered and understood supernaturally through God's Spirit and what He chooses to reveal." Dorsett, *A Passion for God*, 95.

⁷³Tozer, *That Incredible Christian*, 63.

⁷⁴Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man*, 76.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

charge that fundamentalists are “bibliolaters” is probably not legitimate in the same sense as the liberals mean it. However, according to Tozer, if fundamentalists were honest, they would have to admit that there is an uncomfortable amount of truth in the charge.⁷⁶

In reality, Tozer claims, the fundamentalist mindset operates on the same premise as rationalism since it views the human mind as the ultimate authority in discerning what is true. According to the Bible, however, truth only comes through the Spirit rather than through human reason alone. Tozer asserts, “For a man to understand revealed truth requires an act of God equal to the original act which inspired the text.”⁷⁷

Biblical instruction may bring light, but it can never impart sight. Without the Spirit’s enlightenment and supernatural work in the human heart, there is no salvation. Untold thousands have learned the catechism but continue to walk in utter darkness because they have not received illumination from the Spirit.⁷⁸ It takes a combination of the truth and the Holy Spirit to impart genuine spiritual understanding. While faith does come by hearing the word, it is also the gift of God through the Spirit.⁷⁹

Those who desire to teach the Bible should also be aware of their need for the Spirit’s illumination. Too often, teachers are quick to reach for a commentary rather than search the Scriptures themselves with an obedient and prayerful heart. If they would give greater attention to the latter, they would discover that the Spirit will tell them what they need to know about a text.⁸⁰ Elsewhere, Tozer states that “[a] few minutes of earnest prayer will often give more light than hours of reading the commentaries.”⁸¹ Therefore,

⁷⁶A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 37, CD-ROM.

⁷⁷Tozer, *God’s Pursuit of Man*, 76–77.

⁷⁸Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 14.

⁷⁹A. W. Tozer, *Faith beyond Reason: With God Nothing Is Impossible* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 65, CD-ROM.

⁸⁰A. W. Tozer, *Men Who Met God: Twelve Life-Changing Encounters*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 4, CD-ROM.

⁸¹Tozer, *The Early Tozer*, chap. 4.

what Bible teachers need more than anything else is to get on their knees with the Scriptures open before them and allow the Holy Spirit to break their heart. After they have been thoroughly broken before Almighty God, they may then get up, go out into the world, and tell others the glorious message of Christ.⁸²

Elements of Christianity are beyond reason. Any good examination of the contours of Tozer's biblicism must also include aspects of his teachings that may initially appear to be at odds with biblicism. While Tozer certainly valued the Bible, he also believed that many elements of true Christianity are altogether beyond human reason. These elements cannot be described by any human language, including the language found in the Bible. Tozer writes, "I readily admit that it verges on the impossible to describe in any degree of adequacy the conscious, manifest presence of God."⁸³ He also states, "If you can explain it, it certainly is not the majestic presence of God."⁸⁴ Here his mysticism comes to the fore.

As a mystic, Tozer believed that God is entirely "other" than anything humans have experienced before. Their minds have no material with which they can even begin to comprehend the depths of God's being. Nobody has ever conceived a thought which describes God in any but the vaguest sense. The only way to truly know God at all must be through a means well beyond human reason.⁸⁵ Those who imagine they will be able to think their way to God are sadly mistaken. There is a sense in which God is unknowable—a "deep, divine abyss" that cannot be reached by human intelligence or

⁸²A. W. Tozer, *The Dangers of a Shallow Faith: Awakening from Spiritual Lethargy*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 22.

⁸³Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 25.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁵Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man*, 96.

imagination.⁸⁶ In reality, God is so great that even for those to whom he reveals himself, it will take a thousand years of intimate communion to grasp even the outer edges of his glorious nature. Fellowship with God is something that begins now but grows as long as life lasts.⁸⁷

Tozer criticizes much modern theology for being devoid of an appropriate awe of God. Instead, it seeks to reduce what can be known of God to merely intellectual terms. Because of this, theology has no problem articulating volumes of material about God. However, there is a vast difference between knowing God by mere hearsay and knowing him by personal acquaintance. According to Tozer, “When God Himself appears before the mind—awesome, vast and incomprehensible—then the mind sinks into silence and the heart cries out ‘O Lord God!’”⁸⁸ To be sure, there is certainly an intellectual element to a relationship with God. However, the problem is when theologians ignore the elements that are wholly beyond what the intellect is capable of grasping.⁸⁹ Theological ideas are no substitute for a genuine encounter with God.⁹⁰

Tozer asserts that “more spiritual progress can be made in one short moment of speechless silence in the awesome Presence of God than in years of mere study.”⁹¹ It is when the soul is “prostrate and wordless” that it receives divine knowledge similar to “the flash of light on sensitive film” in that the results are permanent even though the exposure may be brief.⁹² When Paul expressed a desire to know Christ in Philippians 3:8,

⁸⁶Tozer, *I Talk Back to the Devil*, chap. 9.

⁸⁷Tozer, *The Counselor*, 122.

⁸⁸Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 20.

⁸⁹Tozer, *I Talk Back to the Devil*, chap. 9.

⁹⁰Tozer, *God’s Pursuit of Man*, 9.

⁹¹A. W. Tozer, *This World: Playground or Battleground*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 48, CD-ROM.

⁹²*Ibid.*

he was not talking about intellectual knowledge but about spiritual experience—“knowing God personally and consciously, spirit touching spirit and heart touching heart.”⁹³ Elsewhere, Tozer talks about immediate spiritual experience. Since this knowledge is not acquired by reason, there is no possibility for error. Through the Holy Spirit dwelling within, “the human spirit is brought into immediate contact with higher spiritual reality” so that it “looks upon, tastes, feels and sees the powers of the world to come and has a conscious encounter with God invisible.”⁹⁴

Tozer compares this to the way a symphony is heard. Humans hear a symphony with their ears rather than with their eyes. Eyes are used for seeing, while ears are used for hearing. In the same way, it is the human spirit—rather than the intellect—that apprehends the things of God.⁹⁵ In another place, Tozer states that knowledge of God comes through “the direct impression of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man.”⁹⁶

The Bible as a means to experiencing God. In spite of Tozer’s emphasis on the elements of knowing God that are utterly beyond reason, he nevertheless believed that the Bible is a reliable and helpful means to experiencing God. This confirms his biblicism. An experience of God may be beyond human reason, but it is the Bible that leads to this experience. Tozer describes how it is through reading the written Word that he experiences the Living Word. If anyone has not experienced the Living Word, he has not truly read the Bible in the way God meant it to be read.⁹⁷ The reason God has given believers the Bible is so they might know him. These Scriptures are not an end in

⁹³Tozer, *I Talk Back to the Devil*, chap. 2.

⁹⁴Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 52.

⁹⁵Tozer, *The Counselor*, 18–22.

⁹⁶Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 3–4.

⁹⁷A. W. Tozer, *Delighting in God*, ed. James L. Snyder (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2015), 108–9.

themselves, even though they are often taught as if that is what they are. Rather, the purpose of the Bible is to lead us to God. Tozer goes on to say that no one can believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible more than he does. However, verbal inspiration or any other theory of inspiration that views the Bible as an end in itself is a dangerous thing. Christians dare not allow the Bible to replace God himself.⁹⁸

According to Tozer, “The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God” and was given so that believers “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.”⁹⁹ All of this happens through, and not apart from, the Bible. Tozer notes that when believers sing, “Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee, Lord,” they are not seeking him apart from or contrary to the Bible. They simply mean that they refuse to make the sacred page a substitute for God but regard it as a means to the greater end of knowing God himself.¹⁰⁰

The Boundary: Biblical Inerrancy

Having established Tozer’s biblicism and traced the contours of that biblicism, it is still necessary to demonstrate the fact that Tozer actually held to the inerrancy of the Bible in order to verify his confessional evangelical identity. This adherence to biblical inerrancy is a key boundary belief that separates confessional evangelicals from others.

⁹⁸Tozer, *The Crucified Life*, 150–51.

⁹⁹Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 9. Harris observes, “Tozer places heavy stress on the inward, on thoughts which he asserts have an emotional ‘tug.’ As with medieval contemplatives, one must direct these thoughts and desires so as to increase awareness of the presence of God. God is present, but awareness is limited by sin-blurred minds so that one can not see His Presence. One’s mind must become unclouded so that he can *see* the radiance of the sun’s light suffusing all creation.” Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer*, 93.

¹⁰⁰Tozer, *I Talk Back to the Devil*, chap. 9.

Background of the Debate

Significant debate has taken place about whether or not the Bible is inerrant. According to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, “*inerrant* signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.”¹⁰¹ The Statement specifies that this applies to the aspects of Scripture that are often the target of skeptical scholars. It declares, “Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.”¹⁰²

These assertions are ultimately a response to the higher criticism of the nineteenth century, in which scholars attempted to approach the Bible objectively as they would any other historical document. They felt great liberty to question the integrity of the biblical text and form various theories about its origins that often undermined the Bible’s trustworthiness. Scholars often questioned whether the authors who were traditionally believed to have written the biblical books were, in fact, the actual authors. They also questioned the literary unity of the biblical documents, positing that many of them may have been compiled from several different sources. As Sydney Ahlstrom points out, it was not merely the case that some of the conclusions of the higher critical method undermined biblical inerrancy but rather that “the [higher critical] method itself undermined the idea of the Bible as the verbally inerrant Word of God.”¹⁰³

In response, conservative biblical scholars vehemently objected. For example, Princeton theologians A. A. Hodge (1823–1886) and B. B. Warfield (1851–1921)

¹⁰¹International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (Chicago: International Council in Biblical Inerrancy, 1978), accessed July 27, 2017, http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf. Italics in original.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1975), 772.

coauthored an article defending the Bible's inspiration. While they did not use the specific term "inerrancy," they did say that the Bible was either "errorless" or "without error" a total of eleven times. They assert that "the human forms of knowledge by which the critics test the accuracy of Scripture are themselves subject to error" and finally conclude, "In view of all the facts known to us, we affirm that a candid inspection of all the ascertained phenomena of the original text of Scripture will leave unmodified the ancient faith of the Church. In all their real affirmations these books are without error."¹⁰⁴ Several years later, in his classic work *Christianity and Liberalism*, J. Gresham Machen devoted an entire chapter to the Bible, contending that man's salvation depends not only on the eternal truths of the Bible but on the actual events of Bible taking place. If the events narrated in the Bible did not happen, there is no salvation.¹⁰⁵

In subsequent years, the debate continued to rage. Some evangelicals drifted away from the dogmatic views of Warfield and Machen and were more accommodating toward biblical criticism. Gary Dorrien documents this in *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology*. One of the most prominent examples of evangelical accommodation is the case of Clark Pinnock. Pinnock began his academic career as a strong advocate for complete inerrancy. He aggressively attacked any suggestion that the Bible contains error even in its incidental details and called for evangelical institutions to purge themselves of those who failed the litmus test of inerrancy. In the mid-1970s, however, Pinnock's perspective shifted. He lamented the spiritual toll the inerrancy debate had taken on evangelicalism and viewed his previous work as needlessly divisive. Pinnock began to write in favor of a new perspective that confined inerrancy to the teachings of the Bible rather than insisting on it with regard to the Bible's incidental details. He still claimed to believe in inerrancy,

¹⁰⁴Archibald Alexander Hodge and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "Inspiration," *The Presbyterian Review* 2, no. 6 (April 1881): 237.

¹⁰⁵J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 59–61.

but it was a carefully qualified inerrancy that did not extend to every verse and word of the Bible.¹⁰⁶

Fuller Theological Seminary also experienced a notable shift with regard to inerrancy. As George Marsden records in *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, Fuller was established with the vision of being a continuation of Old Princeton. Its original faculty included stalwart theological conservatives such as Harold Ockenga, Wilbur Smith, Harold Lindsell, and Carl Henry. However, as Marsden documents, Fuller soon began to slide away from its commitment to inerrancy. This began with the appointment of Edward Carnell to the institution's presidency in 1954. Unlike Ockenga, the former president, Carnell was much more flexible on the question of inerrancy and viewed the issue differently than his more conservative colleagues.¹⁰⁷ Fuller's trajectory went farther away from inerrancy in the 1960s under the presidency of David Hubbard. Eventually, under Hubbard, Fuller dropped inerrancy from its doctrinal statement altogether.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, in *The Authority and Inspiration of Scripture*, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim laid out an historical case for the progressive evangelical view of Scripture. They argued that biblical inerrancy is not only problematic from a biblical perspective but is also problematic from an historical perspective. They asserted that strict inerrancy was not taught by the church fathers, the Reformers, or the Westminster Confession.¹⁰⁹ In response to this, John Woodbridge wrote a sharp critique of their

¹⁰⁶Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 133–34.

¹⁰⁷Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 141–52.

¹⁰⁸This change happened in 1972. See Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 489.

¹⁰⁹Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Inspiration of Scripture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

argument in *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*, surveying church history from the patristic fathers all the way to nineteenth-century Princeton and concluding that Rogers and McKim were far off target in their analysis of the historical record, even to the point of being downright “unreliable.”¹¹⁰

Other evangelicals also rose up to defend an inerrantist view of the Bible. Perhaps the most well-known example is former Fuller professor Harold Lindsell’s treatise *The Battle for the Bible*. In this volume, Lindsell solemnly warns that “once a denomination departs from a belief in biblical infallibility, it opens the floodgates to disbelief about other cardinal doctrines of the faith.”¹¹¹ The conservative response to higher criticism is ultimately encapsulated in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, referenced above.

Tozer on the Idea of Inerrancy

While Tozer rarely uses the word *inerrant*, he undoubtedly affirms the concept of inerrancy throughout his writings. Many times, he uses the term “inspired” instead, but a thorough reading of his writings makes it clear that Tozer assumes inerrancy even when he only mentions inspiration. For example, in one instance, he describes “the inspired Scriptures” as writings in which “no imperfection is to be found.”¹¹² This reveals that Tozer does not speak of inspiration in order to avoid the question of inerrancy but seems to imply the latter in the former. Therefore, the vast majority of the time, Tozer simply refers to the Bible as “inspired.” For example, in a sermon on Hebrews, he states that “in its original signature...the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible to be written” and that “[w]hat we have was put down at the order of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹³ Moreover, because “God wrote

¹¹⁰John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 15.

¹¹¹Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 104.

¹¹²Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 20.

¹¹³Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 44.

the Bible as originally given,” it follows that “it is a trustworthy sourcebook of authentic truth.”¹¹⁴ He refers to a verse from Proverbs as “an inspired utterance.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, Tozer contends that God’s revelation in the Bible is not only in harmony with reason but even goes beyond what human reason is able to evaluate. He states, “Divine revelation through the inspired Scriptures offers data which lie altogether outside of and above the power of the mind to discover.”¹¹⁶ These references only scratch the surface of the number of instances in which Tozer affirms the inspiration of the Bible.

In addition, Tozer actually does use the word *inerrant* at least once. Without any hesitation, he states, “Certainly I am dogmatic when it comes to the deity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His blood atonement, His bodily resurrection and the inerrancy of the Scriptures.”¹¹⁷ This quote alone would be enough to prove Tozer’s adherence to biblical inerrancy. In addition, Tozer believes that the inerrancy of the Bible is a natural product of the perfection of the divine Author of the Bible. He states, “True faith does not rest upon texts alone but upon God who wrote the text. The word is an expression of the character of God and is exactly as good as that character, no more and no less.”¹¹⁸ Since God’s character is perfect, it follows that anything he writes will be perfect as well.

Tozer also frequently describes the Bible as being entirely true and trustworthy. He states that the Scriptures are “the only trustworthy revelation of God” and warns that “we depart from them at our own peril.”¹¹⁹ He also tells his audience, “Any movement, any church or group anywhere that questions the truth of the Bible is one that

¹¹⁴Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 45.

¹¹⁵Tozer, *I Talk Back to the Devil*, chap. 4.

¹¹⁶Tozer, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*, 52.

¹¹⁷A. W. Tozer, *Preparing for Jesus’ Return: Daily Live the Blessed Hope* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012), 193.

¹¹⁸Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, 79.

¹¹⁹Tozer, *This World*, 116.

you, as a believer, cannot afford to associate with.”¹²⁰

In opposition to those who try to pick and choose what parts of the Bible they wish to believe, Tozer insists that such an approach is simply not an option. He writes,

The Bible is an organic unity, one with itself throughout, and must be received *in toto* or *in toto* rejected. I dare not select the parts I want to believe and exclude what disturbs or offends me. That would be to set up my fallible reason as a criterion against which to judge infallible revelation, obviously in itself an unreasonable thing to do.¹²¹

Imagining that we humans know better than the God of the universe or that we are in any position to judge him is surely the height of arrogance. Yet, according to Tozer, that is exactly what those who choose for themselves what to believe and what to exclude are doing. Elsewhere, Tozer observes, “Heresy is not so much rejecting as selecting” and that a “heretic simply selects the parts of the Scripture he wants to emphasize and lets the rest go.”¹²² A person’s motivation for doing this is irrelevant. Some may want to justify a sin in their lives, while others may want to approach the Bible from a rationalistic point of view. In both cases, they are in error.

Significance of Tozer’s Biblicism for Spirituality

Tozer’s thoughts on the Bible are significant for spirituality in a number of ways, and it is important to explore these ways in order to avoid the cold textualism Tozer so despised.

Read the Bible Regularly

The first way Tozer’s teachings about the Bible should affect people is by encouraging them to pick up the Bible for themselves and read it on a regular basis.

¹²⁰A. W. Tozer, *Reclaiming Christianity: A Call to Authentic Faith*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 69.

¹²¹A. W. Tozer, *The Warfare of the Spirit: Religious Ritual Versus the Presence of the Indwelling Christ*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 37, CD-ROM. Italics added.

¹²²Tozer, *We Travel an Appointed Way*, 52.

Devotionals have their place and sermons are helpful, but there is no substitute for the Word of God. As stated above, Tozer believed that “between those covers is a living Book,” and this book is “vital and effective and alive” even though it was written thousands of years ago.¹²³ Therefore, Christians should understand that they will not experience real spiritual growth and transformation apart from regularly immersing themselves in the Bible and experiencing that power for themselves.

Evaluate Experiences with Scripture

It is also important for Christians to evaluate all spiritual experiences through a biblical lens and discard anything that fails to line up with what God has written in the Bible. Experiences are not self-authenticating, even those which seem to lead us into God’s presence. Even with his mystical bent, Tozer never abandoned this principle. He absolutely refused to accept any notion that came to him if it did not line up with biblical teachings. Likewise, believers should remember that spiritual experiences which are not tethered to and grounded in the Bible are every bit as dangerous as biblical knowledge with no spiritual experience.

Delight in the Words of God

Another way Christians should live in light of Tozer’s teachings is to actively delight in the words of the Bible with the understanding that these are the words God himself has spoken.¹²⁴ Delighting in the Bible is a natural behavior for one who delights in God. This is a step beyond reading the Bible, which has already been discussed above. Truly delighting in the Bible involves the affections as much as the will. It is not just about the behavior of reading but about a disposition to treasure what God has written.

¹²³Tozer, *The Counselor*, 130.

¹²⁴See 2 Tim 3:16.

Submit to the Bible's Authority

In addition, when a believer starts reading and delighting in the Bible regularly, there will frequently be times when the Bible exposes an area of sin in his life. This is always uncomfortable, and yet it is also a wonderful opportunity for real growth and change to take place. When a believer notices a part of his life that is contrary to Scripture, it is necessary to submit to the Bible's authority and repent of the sin. Furthermore, not only is the Bible authoritative over individual Christians, it is also authoritative over ministries, ministry leaders, and ministry practices. Pastors would do well to take note of this. As Tozer so eloquently states regarding various techniques being employed by churches, "That it succeeds proves nothing. That it is popular proves even less. Where are the proofs of its heavenly birth? Where are its scriptural credentials?"¹²⁵ These are the ultimate questions that matter when determining the legitimacy of any activity, even those which seem to be highly successful by earthly standards.

Apply the Bible

A final way in which readers should respond to Tozer's biblicism is closely related to submitting to the Bible's authority: believers must apply the Bible to their lives in general. For some reason, many Christians have embraced the notion that spiritual maturity merely consists of Bible knowledge. However, Tozer does not allow this idea to stand. As seen above, he adamantly opposes the textualism that characterizes so much of evangelicalism and frequently exhorts his audience to allow the Bible to become real in their lives, shaping and molding them to be more like Christ. Christians need to realize that Bible knowledge alone does not necessarily indicate that a person is spiritual mature. The real question is not, "How much do you know?" but rather, "How has what you know impacted your life?"

¹²⁵Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, 82.

CHAPTER 6

TOZER AND THE CROSS

Nearly all Christians throughout history have recognized the cross as one of the most important truths of their theological system. Even if some emphasize the incarnation or other truths more than the cross, this does not mean they do not believe that the cross was a necessary part of God's redemptive action as well. Without it, there would be no redemption. For this reason, the cross deserves to be the most recognized symbol of Christianity, as indeed it is.

The Center: Crucicentrism

As stated above, “crucicentrism” is a word David Bebbington uses to describe the extent to which evangelicals emphasize the cross. Evangelicals treasure the cross to such an extent that they can easily identify with the Apostle Paul when he writes to the Corinthians that he did not come to them “with excellency of speech or of wisdom” but rather decided to know nothing among them “save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:1–2). If there is one message above all others about which evangelicals are passionate, it is the message of the cross. As Bebbington writes, “To make any theme other than the cross the fulcrum of a theological system was to take a step away from Evangelicalism.”¹

Demonstrating Tozer's Crucicentrism

Tozer shares this emphasis upon the cross. He states that “even the holiest of

¹David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1989), 14.

justified men will think back over his part in the wounding and the chastisement of the Lamb of God” and that when he does, “A sense of shock will still come over him. A sense of wonder will remain—wonder that the Lamb that was wounded should turn His wounds into the cleansing and forgiveness of one who wounded Him.”² Moreover, Tozer asserts, “Every humble and devoted believer in Jesus Christ must have his own periods of wonder and amazement at this mystery of godliness—the willingness of the Son of Man to take our place in judgment and in punishment.”³ Like all evangelicals, Tozer recognizes that the cross is a message that should never become “yesterday’s news” to believers.

Importance of the cross. While there are many doctrines that are essential for salvation and many others that are important for Christian living, Tozer regularly asserts that the cross towers above them all. In one place, he calls it the “greatest event in history.”⁴ Elsewhere, he describes the cross as “the most critical event in the history of the world” since it “had about it and upon it more mighty historical significance, greater human weight of weal and woe, than any other event or series of events in the history of mankind.”⁵

Tozer bemoans the way in which many leaders who call themselves Christians intentionally leave the cross out of their messages. These men speak in such flowery language about the “Great All Father.” In their prayers, they avoid saying that they pray “in the name of Jesus” but instead simply pray “in the spirit of Jesus” in order to avoid

²A. W. Tozer, *The Radical Cross: Living the Passion of Christ* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 93, CD-ROM.

³*Ibid.*, 94.

⁴A. W. Tozer, *Paths to Power: Living in the Spirit’s Fullness* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 1, CD-ROM.

⁵A. W. Tozer, *The Dangers of a Shallow Faith: Awakening from Spiritual Lethargy*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 191.

offending anyone. Tozer observes that the pastor who does this may be “a nice fellow” but is “surely too nice to embrace the cross.”⁶ He then asserts that this “does not represent the biblical focus of Christianity” and that Christendom needs to return to the idea of a priesthood—a way of thinking that has God on one side and humanity on the other, cut off from God because of sin and standing in desperate need of a priestly sacrifice to restore his relationship with God.⁷ Those who neglect to mention the cross demonstrate that they do not truly understand the need for this priestly ministry, nor do they grasp the nature of the reconciliation accomplished at the cross.

For the true Christian, however, the cross is everything. When she fails her Lord, yielding to temptation and stumbling into sin, a part of her might want to simply give up. The guilt and distress she feels at her sin might incline her to feel like quitting. However, Tozer says, if she has been taught well concerning the atonement, the cross will raise her up out of this miserable and dejected state and give her the knowledge and encouragement she needs to continue moving forward in spite of her failures.⁸ Tozer then shares how he sometimes gets alone, kneels down, and opens his Bible to Isaiah 53. He then substitutes every first-person pronoun in the chapter with his full name, in effect laying his hand on the head of the sacrifice and identifying with that dying Lamb. He gives the example, “Surely he hath borne Aiden Wilson Tozer’s griefs, and carried Aiden Wilson Tozer’s sorrows...But he was wounded for Aiden Wilson Tozer’s transgressions, he was bruised for Aiden Wilson Tozer’s iniquities...”⁹ In this manner, Christians are able to claim the benefits of all that was accomplished on the cross whenever they feel

⁶A. W. Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God: Teachings from the Book of Hebrews*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 58.

⁷*Ibid.*, 59.

⁸A. W. Tozer, *Tragedy in the Church: The Missing Gifts*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 75, CD-ROM.

⁹*Ibid.*, 89.

overwhelmed by guilt for their sin. The cross is the ultimate answer to guilt and discouragement and gives believers the confidence they need to continue serving God even when their service is all too imperfect.

For this reason, nothing is sweeter in all of Scripture than the cross. Tozer observes that, at times, believers do not give the cross the reverence it deserves. He complains of believers talking rather loosely about the price of redemption, simply saying that Christ paid our debt and making the whole matter sound like little more than a business deal. Surely there is a world of difference between what God has done for his children than what people might do for a cow or horse at a livestock show. God's redemption is infinitely "higher and holier, more sweet and beautiful" than the human mind could possibly imagine.¹⁰

It is not surprising, therefore, to read Tozer's statement that "the cross stands out like a great, bright, shining pillar in the middle of the Scriptures" to such an extent that without the cross there could be no Scripture and no redemption.¹¹ Furthermore, the cross is not only central to biblical studies but is also central to systematic theology in that it lies at the very "heart of the Christian system."¹² In order for anyone to stand before God and enjoy fellowship with One so holy, they must be entirely cleansed of their sin and receive new garments consisting of righteousness. According to Tozer, this is exactly what the blood of Jesus accomplishes. The just died for the unjust. All of this is even more amazing since it is the "eternal Son of God" who accomplished this—"the One who made the worlds and upholds all things by the word of His power."¹³

¹⁰A. W. Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory: Twelve Messages from the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 123, CD-ROM.

¹¹A. W. Tozer, *And He Dwelt Among Us: Teachings from the Gospel of John*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2014), 134.

¹²Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 23.

¹³Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 77.

Apart from this glorious truth, Christianity does not stand. Tozer asserts that “a cross-less Christianity” is, in reality, “not Christianity at all.”¹⁴ This is how central the cross is to the Christian religion. There is no redemptive value in religious rituals, in morality, or even in the character of God himself unless the rituals point to the cross, the morality grows out of the cross, and the character of God manifests itself in the cross. The cross may not be the most popular way, but in the final analysis, it is “God’s way” and therefore “the only way.”¹⁵ Any church that does not teach redemption through the blood of Christ is guilty of what Tozer calls “Cain worship.” He states that even if such a church had the most “gentle and tender” teaching that was “adorned with beautiful flowers plucked from all parts of the world,” he would not spend one minute in that church because their worship is the false worship of Cain, which God did not accept because it did not include the shedding of blood.¹⁶

The cross alone. The cross stands alone as the only hope sinful humanity has of being reconciled to a holy God. Stated simply, nothing else works. Nothing else has the power to do what the cross does in saving the soul. According to Tozer, each believer must come to God as Abel came, claiming atoning blood as the only way to have fellowship with God and expressing repentant faith. Admittedly, this is a very old way since Jesus is the Lamb that was slain “before the foundation of the world.”¹⁷ However, this old way is the only way; there is no new way.¹⁸ Tozer is adamant that any valid hope

¹⁴Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 130.

¹⁵Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 124.

¹⁶A. W. Tozer, *The Worship-Driven Life: The Reason We Were Created*, ed. James L. Snyder (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008), 66.

¹⁷A reference to Rev 13:8.

¹⁸A. W. Tozer, *Born after Midnight: Spiritual Renewal Comes to Those Who Want It Badly Enough* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 21, CD-ROM.

for enjoying eternal blessedness after death must be rooted in God's goodness and in the atoning work of Christ on the cross.¹⁹

To reject the cross is to reject God's plan for salvation, though those who do so are often able to express their perspectives with great eloquence and nuance. With countless "subtleties and rationalizations" they explain how the breach can be healed apart from atonement, and yet they ultimately have cut themselves off from true redemption and rendered genuine reconciliation "an impossibility."²⁰ The cross is "the one method" by which humanity can be saved.²¹

Contours of Tozer's Crucicentrism

Having seen how deeply Tozer valued the cross, it is also helpful to explore more of the theology and reasoning that accompanied his profound appreciation.

Need for the cross. Tozer understood that the value of the cross becomes visible only when it is clear how desperately humanity needed redemption and their perilous condition before receiving it. The reason for this is, quite simply, sin. Tozer calls it one of the "basic tenets of Christianity" that sin has alienated humans from God and banished them from God's presence forever.²² Before redemption, people are sinners, and they cannot come to God because sin is in their way. As Tozer describes it, there has been a great moral breach in which God's laws have been violated, and every human being therefore stands as a condemned criminal before the bar of God. He then declares, "Until satisfaction is made, until this breach is healed, until justice is satisfied, man

¹⁹Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 33.

²⁰Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 6.

²¹Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 118.

²²Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 152.

cannot return to God even if he wanted to.”²³ This communicates a sense of helplessness and hopelessness on the part of humanity since the problem is too big for people to fix on their own. They need a Savior.

The situation is so bad that Tozer, using the language of Scripture, even refers to humans as enemies of God.²⁴ He laments the way liberal churches only talk about the fact that God is the great Father of the world and how all the world sings about him and even the buttercups talk about him. This all sounds so uplifting and wonderful. However, Tozer teaches, the reality is that this is not the whole picture. He states that “man and God are enemies until there has been reconciliation by a sacrifice that satisfies God.”²⁵

Tozer uses two metaphors to describe two different but interrelated aspects of human need. The first is bankruptcy. Humanity’s rebellion against the kingdom of God puts them in debt to the moral order of the universe and specifically to the Creator of the universe. This is a debt which must be paid. Interestingly, Tozer observes, people naturally seem to sense this in their hearts and consequently try to pay off that debt in various ways. This is why there are so many other religions in this world. People are searching for something—anything—to establish a sufficient fund to pay their great moral debt.²⁶

Another metaphor Tozer uses for humanity’s need for the cross is a British criminal on Skid Row seeking audience with the queen. The first thing that is necessary is for his guilty record to be fully expunged and pardoned so that he can be released from prison. However, this is not enough. Not only must his past crimes be dealt with, but his present condition needs considerable attention as well. He would not be able to simply

²³Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 58.

²⁴A reference to Rom 5:10.

²⁵Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 126.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 18.

walk off of Skid Row, dirty and unshaven, and step right into the queen's presence. Rather, he would need to be carefully groomed, properly dressed, and thoroughly cleansed of everything that would look or smell like the prison. In the same way, Tozer teaches, people must not only receive pardon for their crimes before entering God's presence but must also be cleansed of "the foul scent of sin" that is upon them and changed so that they no longer love many of the things they used to love.²⁷

All of this reveals the reason why the cross was so central in Tozer's thought. The human condition is so terrible and humanity's sin so odious that it is far beyond their ability to rectify. Only God can provide the redemption that is necessary. Thankfully, he did when he sent his Son to die on the cross to purchase their salvation—a feat which he alone could accomplish. Tozer writes, "That glorious work owes nothing to the effort of any man; the best of Adam's race could add nothing there. It was all of God, and man could simply have no part."²⁸

The purpose of the cross. God had specific purposes in mind when he sent his Son to suffer the agonies of the cross. One way Tozer speaks of these purposes is with the familiar theological categories of justification, sanctification, and glorification. He writes that the primary purpose of Christ is "to justify, sanctify and ultimately to glorify a company of persons salvaged from the ruin of the human race."²⁹ Elsewhere, Tozer notes that the most commonly recited purpose of Christ dying on the cross is to save believing men and women from God's judgment in hell by paying the debt for their sins. This is true, but it is not the full picture. According to Tozer, God had an even higher purpose in sending Jesus to the cross. He writes, "God's highest purpose in the redemption of sinful

²⁷Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 20–21.

²⁸Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 2.

²⁹Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 34.

humanity was based in His hope that we would allow Him to reproduce the likeness of Jesus Christ in our once-sinful lives.”³⁰ In other words, God does not merely want to change people’s position before him. He also wants to change every aspect of their hearts and lives, remaking them according to the likeness of his Son (Rom 8:29).

All of this is to the end that people would once again become worshipers of God. According to Tozer, this is the ultimate end for which God is working. While there may be great mystery surrounding many aspects of the work of Christ in redemption, its end is rather simple: “it is to restore men to the position from which they fell and bring them around again to be admirers and lovers of the Triune God. God saves men to make them worshipers.”³¹ This is a beautiful example of Tozer’s God-centered approach to the Christian life. He does not merely talk about salvation in terms of what believers have been saved *from* but also speaks of it in terms of what they have been saved *into*. God saves his people so that they can spend the rest of their lives in conscious, joyful worship of him. This was Tozer’s primary occupation in life, and it seems to flow out of his view of God’s purpose in redemption.

Living out the cross daily. While Tozer certainly speaks frequently about the joy of worshiping God, he also frequently describes the pain and difficulty of the Christian life in strikingly plain terms. He often references “the crucified life,” which he defines as “a life wholly given over to the Lord in absolute humility and obedience: a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord.”³² The cross is not only a symbol of the selfless and others-

³⁰A. W. Tozer, *Who Put Jesus on the Cross?*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 136, CD-ROM.

³¹Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 30.

³²A. W. Tozer, *The Crucified Life: How to Live Out a Deeper Christian Experience*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2011), 15. One researcher has even gone so far as to state that “the central focus of the transformed life is the cross of Christ.” Daniel Ewearitt, “A. W. Tozer: The Spiritual Formation of the Prophet-Mystic” (paper presented at Southeastern Regional Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Toccoa, GA, March 16–17, 2001), 10.

centered life of Christ but also a symbol of what should be the normal Christian life. Tozer quotes Jesus' words in Luke 9:23 in support of this point: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Believers have a cross to carry just like Jesus had a cross to carry.³³ Bearing this cross means allowing it to remove from their lives everything that does not belong there, no matter how painful that removal process may be. As Tozer so eloquently states,

If we are wise we will do what Jesus did: endure the cross and despise its shame for the joy that is set before us. To do this is to submit the whole pattern of our lives to be destroyed and built again in the power of an endless life. And we shall find that it is more than poetry, more than sweet hymnody and elevated feeling. The cross will cut into our lives where it hurts worst, sparing neither us nor our carefully cultivated reputations. It will defeat us and bring our selfish lives to an end. Only then can we rise in fullness of life to establish a pattern of living wholly new and free and full of good works.³⁴

The pain the cross inflicts on believers is not senseless or purposeless pain but rather a pain that leads to a fullness, freedom, and joy that is unlike anything they could otherwise experience. It was "for the joy that was set before him" that Christ "endured the cross" (Heb 12:2), and he calls his followers to adopt that same perspective.

Part of experiencing the cross involves allowing God to break the self-reliance that is so characteristic of the human heart. Tozer observes that God has graciously given some believers a significant array of talents and a high level of intelligence, and while these things can be good if they are used for the glory of God, there is also a sense in which they are human weaknesses in disguise. Ultimately, Tozer declares, God desires to crucify believers from head to foot and lead them to see their own strengths as utterly useless. Once that happens, he will then raise them anew and be able to work through them for his glory and their good.³⁵

³³A. W. Tozer, *The Set of the Sail: Direction for Your Spiritual Journey*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 120, CD-ROM.

³⁴Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 5.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 75.

The cross ends every aspect of a believer's former way of living. Tozer states that it "destroys the old pattern, the Adam pattern, in the believer's life, and brings it to an end" with the result that "the God who raised Christ from the dead raises the believer and a new life begins."³⁶ All of this is based on the objective reality that when Christ died, believers died with him. Tozer asserts that in God's eyes, "every true believer is reckoned to have died when Christ died" and that all "subsequent experience of personal crucifixion is based upon this identification with Christ on the cross."³⁷

Unfortunately, the entire notion of the cross embraced by many evangelicals is not the cross of the New Testament, according to Tozer. Instead, they have replaced the cross of Jesus with a new kind of cross that does not offend people and stops short of demanding radical sacrifice and obedience. Tozer asserts,

The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it. The old cross brought tears and blood; the new cross brings laughter. The flesh, smiling and confident, preaches and sings about the cross; before the cross it bows and toward the cross it points with carefully staged histrionics—but upon that cross it will not die, and the reproach of that cross it stubbornly refuses to bear.³⁸

Elsewhere, Tozer notes the fact that many Christians have made the cross objective instead of subjective and external instead of internal. In doing so, they are partially correct since the cross is indeed both objective and external insofar as it was a real historical event that happened. However, the cross also needs to be something that believers experience within themselves, voluntarily enduring suffering similar to that of their Savior.³⁹

³⁶A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 69, CD-ROM.

³⁷A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Men: Cultivating the Divine/Human Relationship* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 11, CD-ROM. Tozer cites 2 Cor 5:14 and Gal 2:20 in support of this assertion.

³⁸A. W. Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 53, CD-ROM.

³⁹A. W. Tozer, *Jesus, Author of Our Faith: Twelve Messages from the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 84, CD-ROM.

Of course, enduring the cross of Christ does not mean experiencing actual Roman crucifixion. Rather, it consists of believers counting themselves to be dead with Christ and then willingly accepting the repentance, self-denial, and humble sacrifice the path of obedient living requires. This is the cross Jesus calls his people to bear.⁴⁰ Contrary to what many Christians seem to assume, following Christ is not always an easy path. It is filled with many different kinds of trials and difficulties. When Christians patiently endure these difficulties and remain obedient even when disobedience would—at least temporarily—afford them a measure of comfort, they are very similar to Christ. The path of obedience led Jesus to the cross, and it will lead his followers to a cross as well.⁴¹

Results of the cross. The cross also has a number of specific results in and for the lives of believers. One of these is that it brings forgiveness. According to Tozer, the “glory of the cross” consists in the way in which it allows repentant sinners to come into fellowship with God and enjoy his purification and cleansing.⁴² Jesus died in order to “bear away the sins of the world,” and his death is a “sacrifice that has perpetual efficacy” as it purges people of their sins.⁴³

Another result of the cross is regeneration. Tozer describes how all of the spiritual faculties of unsaved, unregenerate people lie asleep within them as a result of being born as sinners. These faculties are unused and for every purpose dead. However,

⁴⁰Tozer, *Of God and Men*, chap. 11.

⁴¹Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 36. It is important to note that Tozer preached not only the death of the cross but also the glory of the resurrection. Citing an interview with Betty Brown, Harris writes, “Tozer’s former secretary states that the cross, suffering, was not Tozer’s main thrust, for he went on to glory, resurrection. ‘He never left you in the dumps, but pulled you up and made you a worshipper.’” Eleanor Lynn Harris, *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth Century American Protestant* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 107.

⁴²Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 93.

⁴³Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 77.

they may be quickened to life once again through the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Tozer identifies this as one of the priceless benefits that ultimately comes to believers through the cross of Christ.⁴⁴

The cross also results in believers experiencing freedom from the sins that formerly dominated their lives. Through Christ, believers can be free from evil habits, superstition, the fear of men, the slavery of popular customs, and the necessity of pleasing the self-appointed dictators of society. Tozer describes this total freedom as “a precious heritage from the cross” that should be “treasured as one of life’s most wonderful possessions” and as “near to the joy of heaven itself.”⁴⁵

All of these results of the cross can be summed up in the word “salvation.” Jesus died to bring salvation to those who desperately needed it. However, Tozer makes it clear that there are limitations to what Jesus actually accomplished on the cross. Strictly speaking, the cross is a work that is “potentially saving,” which means that it was done for the benefit of every person, but it did not actually save any person.⁴⁶ Tozer describes the cross as something that simply made salvation possible for people. He states that forgiveness, regeneration, justification, and cleansing are things God does within believers that all flow out of the cross but were not actually accomplished *at* the cross. Christ may have made atonement for every person, but his atonement is not operative or “effective” toward every person.⁴⁷

⁴⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 49.

⁴⁵A. W. Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 64, CD-ROM.

⁴⁶Tozer, *Paths to Power*, chap. 2.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

Corrections to modern thought. Tozer believed there are several key areas in which believers today need to change the way they view and related to the cross. He criticizes those who place so much emphasis on what Jesus accomplished on the cross that they neglect talking very much about the beauty, worth, and glory of Jesus himself. The work of Christ has eclipsed the person of Christ. This has resulted in Christians being more concerned about what Jesus has done for them than they are about who he is to them. They now see redemption as a sterile transaction they merely “accept” without much, if any, emotional response. According to Tozer, this is not what God has in mind in salvation. God wants a personal relationship with his people, not merely a contractual one.⁴⁸ Tozer expresses gratitude that, in spite of this problem with the way many professing believers relate to Christ, there are still many others who truly yearn for him and long to see him when he appears. These saints understand that it is more important to appreciate who Jesus is to them personally rather than merely dwelling on what he accomplished on the cross for their benefit. They have avoided the trap of emphasizing the utility of the cross to the exclusion of marveling at the one who died on it.⁴⁹

Another deficiency Tozer identifies in the way many Christians approach the cross is emphasizing the cross more than the resurrection. He describes how placing such a heavy emphasis on the cross brings pessimism, gloom, and unfruitful remorse. In reality, the glory of Christianity is that this Jesus who died on the cross did not stay in the tomb but rose again for the justification of those who would believe in him. Without question, there is a place for joyfully remembering the birth of Christ and gratefully musing on the death of Christ, but the crown of all Christian hope is that Jesus currently sits at the Father’s right hand, robed in splendor and majesty, having triumphed over the

⁴⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 114, CD-ROM.

⁴⁹A. W. Tozer, *Jesus Is Victor: A Fresh Perspective on the Book of Revelation*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 2, CD-ROM.

grave. Therefore, “Should the Church shift her emphasis from the weakness of the manger and the death of the cross to the life and power of the enthroned Christ, perhaps she might recapture her lost glory.”⁵⁰

While both of these corrections are primarily addressed to Tozer’s own evangelical tradition, he was also deeply critical of the way many Protestants of a more liberal bent approached the cross. According to Tozer, these liberal theologians seek to paint Christianity as something elegant, flowery, and artistic. They love their stained-glass windows, their beautiful paintings, and their eloquent poetry. For them, this kind of beauty is the main thing that makes religion attractive. They frequently accuse those who hold to more conservative beliefs about the cross of propagating a “slaughterhouse religion.” Tozer admits that, in one sense, they are right. Believing in a religion that is based on sacrifice does not easily fit with the cultured desires of liberal theology. For example, in Old Testament times, the sight of the altar in the tabernacle was anything but picturesque. Rather, the spray of blood surrounding the altar and the overwhelming stench of death must have been quite awful. Stated simply, it was a gory mess—a far cry from the pretty, uplifting, beautiful, and positive religion that liberal theologians today would desire to be associated with. However, according to Tozer, the reality is that a religion without sacrifice is a religion that leaves people in their sins and cut off from fellowship with God. This is true even if the religion is falsely labeled as Christianity. Even so, many are embracing this kind of “cross-less Christianity,” which, in Tozer’s estimation, is “not Christianity at all.”⁵¹

In addition to being bothered by the liberal Protestant approach to the cross, Tozer was also deeply bothered by the way Catholics approach the cross. He references the writings of Roman Catholic theologians who dramatically describe how Jesus dies

⁵⁰Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 13.

⁵¹Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 130.

over and over again each time the Mass is said and the sacrament offered. In this way, Christ's atonement is an act that is perpetually repeated. However, Tozer passionately argues for the traditional Protestant view that Christ's death functioned as a finished sacrifice and that this sacrifice has perpetual efficacy. He asserts that believing Christ's sacrifice must be repeated weekly boils down to believing the sacrifice is only effective for a single week. However, the Bible presents it as being effectual for all eternity. In support of this, Tozer quotes Peter's teaching that "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). This verse clearly portrays the cross as a once-for-all sacrifice that can never be repeated.⁵²

Approaching the cross. The proper way to approach the cross, in Tozer's view, is with deep humility and self-abasement. He observes that an individual will never know the meaning nor the value of the cross until the Holy Spirit has worked within her to break her down and destroy her pride, change her mind about her own goodness, humble her stubbornness, blast away her defenses, and take away her weapons. Only then will she be in a position to truly grasp and appreciate the magnitude of what was accomplished on Calvary.⁵³

Of course, there is a sense in which nobody will ever be able to understand such a magnificent event. Tozer notes how Jesus died in darkness. This is a picture of the fact that many of the aspects of what he did can never be fully understood. According to Tozer, it is no more possible for believers to know how the blood of Jesus is able to atone for sin than to know what God's nature is like. Ultimately, they must just believe. They may not know how Christ's blood redeems, but they know that it does, and simply

⁵²Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 78.

⁵³A. W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God: Deeper into the Father's Heart*, vol. 2 (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 51, CD-ROM.

knowing that truth is enough for them.⁵⁴ Elsewhere, Tozer says that he is afraid of the person who is too knowledgeable about the atonement and who can explain it too well. Paul calls it the “mystery of godliness” (1 Tim 3:16). No human mind will ever be able to intellectually understand all that Jesus accomplished on the cross, much less be able to explain it.⁵⁵

The Boundary: Penal Substitutionary Atonement

Tozer not only places sufficient emphasis on the cross to be worthy of the evangelical label, he also expresses ideas about the cross that fit comfortably into evangelicalism. Specifically, he espouses a view of the cross that has traditionally been labeled “penal substitutionary atonement.”

Background of the Debate

Wayne Grudem, a proponent of penal substitution, explains that the word “penal” means Jesus bore a penalty when he died. Divine wrath against sin was being poured out on him. However, since he was sinless, it was not for his own sins that he suffered. This leads to the “substitution” element of the phrase. Christ’s death was a substitution because he was dying in place of sinful people. Justice required that their sin be dealt with, and normally they would have been the ones to bear that penalty. However, Jesus acted in their stead and bore the penalty in their place.⁵⁶ One of the most famous treatises on this view of the atonement is *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott. In it, Stott observes that two essential attributes of God are holiness and love. He then writes, “How then could God express simultaneously his holiness in judgment and his love in pardon?”

⁵⁴Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, 2:87.

⁵⁵A. W. Tozer, *Delighting in God*, ed. James L. Snyder (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2015), 141.

⁵⁶Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 579.

Only by providing a divine substitute for the sinner so that the substitute would receive the judgment and the sinner the pardon.”⁵⁷ In this way, the cross is the preeminent example of both God’s holiness and his love, displaying both with unparalleled clarity. At least, this is what those who believe in penal substitution would argue.

However, there has been considerable debate surrounding the idea of penal substitution in recent decades, even among those who identify with the evangelical community. One example is *The Lost Message of the Bible* by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann. In this book, Chalke and Mann contend that the idea of Father pouring out wrath on the Son is contrary to the biblical picture of who God is. They quote John 3:16 to remind readers of the fact that God loves the world. The authors then ask,

How then have we come to believe that at the cross this God of love suddenly decides to vent his anger and wrath on his own Son? The fact is that the cross isn’t a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith.⁵⁸

Even more, Chalke and Mann argue, this concept of a wrathful God stands in total contradiction to John’s assertion that “God is love.”⁵⁹ In the end, the doctrine of penal substitution makes a mockery of Jesus’ instructions for people to love their enemies and abstain from repaying evil with evil.⁶⁰

In addition, Joel Green has written an essay entitled, “Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms?” According to Green, the answer is no. He laments the way in which penal substitution has had the effect of divorcing Jesus’ life from his all-important crucifixion, as if the only thing Jesus did that was of any value was

⁵⁷John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 134.

⁵⁸Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 182.

⁵⁹See 1 John 4:8.

⁶⁰Chalke and Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, 182–83.

die. It suggests that the only reason for the incarnation was the crucifixion—that Jesus was born for no other reason than to one day die. However, according to Green, this fails to account of the witness of the New Testament itself and diminishes the significance of the incarnation. Jesus saved people through his life. He fulfilled the law (Matt 5:17), called sinners to repentance (Matt 9:13), proclaimed the good news of God’s Kingdom (Luke 4:43), and lived a Kingdom-centric life in many other ways. Therefore, any view of the atonement that undermines the saving significance of Jesus’ life cannot be accurate. Moreover, Green states that it is not clear to him “how the model of penal substitutionary atonement can help but strip Jesus’ death from its historical context in the Roman world and from its narrative context in the gospel” and asserts that penal substitution results in “a serious deficit of interest in the incarnation and in Jesus’ human life and mission.”⁶¹

These writings are only two examples of the myriad of publications and essays—even by self-identifying evangelicals—that call into question penal substitutionary atonement. Garry Williams, a scholar who affirms this traditional evangelical view of the cross, remarks that “criticisms of penal substitutionary atonement...are legion, and in works on the subject, they often come like machine gun fire.”⁶² Williams then identifies four categories of objections to penal substitution. The first is that penal substitution mistakenly attributes retributive justice to God. This is essentially Chalke and Mann’s objection outlined above. The second objection is that penal substitution undermines the doctrine of the Trinity by severing the Father from the Son. Third, penal substitution grows out of the uniquely Western value of individualism.

⁶¹Joel B. Green, “Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms? Questions, Caveats and a Plea,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement*, ed. Steve Chalke et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 159.

⁶²Garry J. Williams, “Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (March 2007): 72.

And fourth, penal substitution is unable to look beyond itself and embrace the importance of the life of Christ, the cosmic work of Christ on the cross, and the need for moral transformation within the believer after conversion.⁶³

Robert Peterson also helpfully outlines various objections to penal substitutionary atonement. He lists eleven of them: it was not taught prior to the Reformation, it is a product of modern western individualism, it contradicts Jesus' instructions to turn the other cheek, it pictures punishment as impersonal rather than personal, it misrepresents the God of the Bible as a vengeful being who must be appeased before he forgives, it pits the Son against the Father, it neglects the importance of the life of Jesus, it leaves no room for the necessity of the resurrection, it fails to account for the cosmic scope of Christ's death and resurrection, it undermines progressive sanctification within believers, and it is basically a form of divine child abuse. These objections against penal substitution are so numerous and widespread that they require a response, especially given the fact there some of these objections are even being made by those within the evangelical community.⁶⁴

The argument of whether it is necessary to believe in penal substitutionary atonement in order to be an evangelical or even to be a Christian at all is beyond the scope of this dissertation.⁶⁵ For our purposes, it is sufficient to assert that belief in penal substitution is necessary in order to be considered a *confessional* evangelical as it has been defined in this dissertation. With reference to Tozer, this requires demonstrating that he firmly adhered to penal substitution.

⁶³Williams, "Penal Substitution."

⁶⁴Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 396–406.

⁶⁵Joel Green and Garry Williams, cited above, directly address this issue in their respective essays. Green believes it is not necessary, while Williams believes it is necessary. See Green, "Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms?," and Williams, "Penal Substitution."

Tozer on Penal Substitutionary Atonement

In analyzing Tozer's view of penal substitutionary atonement, it is helpful to arrange his teachings according to some of the key words and concepts that are commonly used in this discussion.

Substitutionary atonement. A good place to start is the most direct: substitutionary atonement. There are a number of instances in which Tozer uses this exact term. He first describes the wounding and punishment inflicted on Jesus as he died on the cross, making it possible for believers to be at peace with God. Because “the blows fell on Jesus” as he “stood in our place,” believers are able to proclaim the “gracious message from God that there is a substitutionary atonement through the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶⁶ In another place, Tozer references the famous Suffering Servant passage, including the teaching that “with his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5), and calls it a “message of substitutionary atonement.”⁶⁷

Vicarious sacrifice. Tozer also refers to the death of Christ as being “vicarious.” He teaches that God will—and indeed must—insist upon people receiving the forgiveness, cleansing, and protection which are only available through “the vicarious death of Christ.”⁶⁸ Tozer also defines exactly what he means by “vicarious,” saying that “a vicarious act is one performed on behalf of someone else” and then notes that Jesus’ death was “a vicarious death” since he “died on behalf of us all, the innocent One for the guilty many.”⁶⁹ Jesus deliberately forsook a normal life for the pain, tears, and dying that

⁶⁶A. W. Tozer, *Men Who Met God: Twelve Life-Changing Encounters*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 4, CD-ROM.

⁶⁷Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 92.

⁶⁸Tozer, *Born after Midnight*, chap. 33.

⁶⁹Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 124.

“rightfully belonged to those for whom He was vicariously suffering.”⁷⁰ This “vicarious death” of Jesus for sinners is “the very foundation of the Christian faith.”⁷¹

Tozer also defends vicarious atonement against arguments that are commonly raised in objection to it. He notes that critics of the doctrine wonder how responsibility for sin can rightfully be transferred from one person to another. One common and easily understood illustration for the injustice of such a transfer comes from human courts and trials. If a man was brought before a judge and found guilty of murder, it would be terribly unjust for the judge, in sentencing the man, to tell him, “The law requires you to die. Therefore, I sentence the man standing over there to be hanged.” Such a sentence would make no sense because it would be the man on trial, rather than the man who happened to be standing in the courtroom, who had committed the crime. It is not just to punish one person for the sins of another. After presenting this argument commonly offered against the idea of vicarious atonement, Tozer then answers it. He admits that those who make such an argument have a lot in their favor and says they are right about moral responsibility not being able to be transferred from one person to another. However, he states that “there never was made a transfer of moral responsibility from one personality to another in atonement” but rather “in Jesus Christ Himself, we became part of Him and He became part of us and took us up into himself so that in one sense, when He died...we all died.”⁷² Therefore, it is an oversimplification to say that God put one man to death for everyone and leave the matter at that. Rather, it is better to say that he put everyone to death and raised those who believe in Christ. Consequently, everyone dies for their own sins: they either die alone for their sins and suffer the penalty in hell, or

⁷⁰A. W. Tozer, *The Size of the Soul: Principles of Revival and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 157, CD-ROM.

⁷¹Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 124.

⁷²Tozer, *And He Dwelt Among Us*, 180–81.

they die for their sins as they are joined to Christ.⁷³

Bearing sin. Tozer often speaks in terms of Christ “bearing,” “taking,” or “carrying away” sin through his death on the cross. He teaches that sin does not just go away on its own but rather demands an answer. God’s justice must be satisfied. Therefore, sin must “be carried away by redeeming blood,” and this redeeming blood was shed by the Lamb of God alone.⁷⁴ At the cross, the Father turned his back on the Son as the Son took on himself the “putrifying mass of our sin and guilt, dying on the cross not for His own sin, but for ours.”⁷⁵

According to Tozer, when Jesus died, all of “the accumulated putrefaction and moral filth of the whole race of man” was laid upon him, and he agreed to “carry it to the tree and die there in agony and blood.”⁷⁶ Elsewhere, Tozer describes how God the Father “laid the sins of the world on Jesus...and He bore them all” on our behalf in order to free people from having to carry them on their own shoulders.⁷⁷

The just for the unjust. The Apostle Peter teaches that “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. . . .” (1 Pet 3:18). Tozer frequently employs this terminology of Jesus, “the just,” dying in place of humans, “the unjust.” He notes that in order for a person to enjoy fellowship with a holy God, they must receive forgiveness and pardon for their sins, experience cleansing, and be clothed with new garments of righteousness to replace their old garments that have been stained

⁷³Tozer, *And He Dwelt Among Us*.

⁷⁴Tozer, *The Next Chapter After the Last*, 71.

⁷⁵A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?*, ed. Gerald B. Smith (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 119, CD-ROM.

⁷⁶A. W. Tozer, *Prayer: Communing with God in Everything—Collected Insights from A. W. Tozer*, ed. W. L. Seaver (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016), 194.

⁷⁷A. W. Tozer, *Success and the Christian: The Cost of Spiritual Maturity*, ed. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 124, CD-ROM.

by sin. This is the purpose for which Jesus shed his blood. Tozer then declares, “The eternal Son of God has accomplished all this, the just dying for the unjust—an awesome and amazing act by the One who made the worlds and upholds all things by the word of His power.”⁷⁸

According to Tozer, when Jesus died forsaken and in darkness for humanity, he made it possible for God to forgive all of the ways in which humanity had broken his law. Because of this sacrifice, God is able to restore repentant sinners to fellowship with him so that it is now as if they had never even sinned in the first place. Moreover, God does all of this without compromising his justice in the least or relaxing the severity of the law. Tozer marvels at what a high mystery this is—a mystery that is far beyond the ability of any human mind to grasp. Rather, Christians are able to honor God more by simply believing in the cross without insisting on understanding exactly what happened. Tozer teaches that the main thing believers need to grasp is simply this: “The Just died for the unjust; and because He did, the unjust may now live with the Just in complete moral congruity.”⁷⁹

An exchange of sin and righteousness. Tozer also describes the atonement as a transaction between God and humans in which sin and righteousness are exchanged. He teaches that, in essence, the atonement is about “a transfer of guilt from the sinner to the Savior.”⁸⁰ Even though he admits this idea is vehemently attacked by non-Christians, he notes that those who are wise according to the standards of the world often miss the treasures which those with humble hearts find on their knees in prayer. The atonement is one of those treasures. Moreover, the Apostle Paul plainly describes what took place at

⁷⁸Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 77.

⁷⁹Tozer, *Of God and Men*, chap. 13.

⁸⁰A. W. Tozer, *That Incredible Christian: How Heaven’s Children Live on Earth*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 30, CD-ROM.

the cross: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). Tozer asserts that the meaning of this verse is so plain that only those who are willfully blind can miss it. By his death on the cross, Jesus “made it possible for the sinner to exchange his sin for Christ’s righteousness.”⁸¹ In another place, Tozer states that Jesus “acted in our stead” on the cross in that he “took our guilt” and “gave us his righteousness.”⁸²

Paying a debt. Another way to speak of penal substitutionary atonement is to describe Jesus dying on the cross as the payment of a debt. This is another phrase Tozer often employs. He teaches that Jesus won a decisive victory over death “by paying a debt He did not owe”—the debt for the sins of the entire human race.⁸³ This debt is a debt to God’s justice, a quality which compels God to sentence every sinner to eternal death. However, when Christ suffered on the cross, his blood was of such value and was shed in such agony that God the Father counted his death as sufficient payment for the sins of the world. On the cross, Christ suffered all the agony that humanity would have otherwise had to suffer in hell.⁸⁴ In this manner, “Christ our Redeemer has paid the whole slate of debt and sin that was against us.”⁸⁵ It was in his suffering and eventual death that the “just penalty for sin was exacted.”⁸⁶

⁸¹Tozer, *That Incredible Christian*.

⁸²Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 52.

⁸³A. W. Tozer, *Preparing for Jesus’ Return: Daily Live the Blessed Hope* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012), 65.

⁸⁴Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 8.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁶A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 137.

Propitiation. A final word worth noting that Tozer uses to describe what happened at the cross is “propitiation.” This word translates the Greek ἱλασμός, which refers to “appeasement necessitated by sin,” “expiation,” or an “instrument for appeasing.”⁸⁷ According to Tozer, even though the world was so lost that it did not know how lost it was, God determined to make a way for humanity to be redeemed. He did this by making “full reparation” for the sins of humanity so that those who believe can be redeemed.⁸⁸ This involves sending Christ to die as the “propitiation” and “compensation” for all sin, resulting in humanity being brought back to God.⁸⁹ It is through this “act of propitiation for our sins” that those who are Christians enjoy justification and regeneration.⁹⁰

Significance of Tozer’s Crucicentrism for Spirituality

Tozer’s emphasis on the cross has enormous implications for the day-to-day lives of Christians.

Embracing the Cross

One implication is the importance of embracing the cross, understanding that it is foundational to all Christian spirituality. A person might practice every spiritual discipline in the Bible with unparalleled rigor, but all of his efforts will be of no value unless he first comes humbly before God, admits his need for a Savior, and puts his trust in Jesus to provide that salvation on the basis of his finished work on the cross. For a

⁸⁷Walter Bauer, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 474.

⁸⁸A. W. Tozer, *Alive in the Spirit: Experiencing the Presence and Power of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016), 62.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰A. W. Tozer, *God’s Power for Your Life: How the Holy Spirit Transforms You through God’s Word*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 133.

human to grow physically, she must first be born physically. Likewise, for a Christian to grow spiritually, she must first be born spiritually. This spiritual birth (or rebirth) happens only as a person comes to the end of herself and embraces the cross. Only then will she be able to live and grow as a Christian. As stated above, Tozer refers to any attempts to be spiritual or to worship God apart from the cross as forms of “Cain worship” since they do not involve a blood sacrifice.⁹¹ He also refers to the cross as “God’s way” and “the only way” to have a right relationship with God.⁹²

However, before anyone can embrace this way, they must first become aware of their sin and the fact that their sin cuts them off from God. This is why the cross is so necessary and prerequisite to all Christian spirituality. As Tozer so aptly puts it, “Until satisfaction is made, until this breach is healed, until justice is satisfied, man cannot return to God even if he wanted to.”⁹³ Realizing one’s utter helplessness and need is the first step to embracing the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, which, in turn, is the first step to genuine Christian spirituality.

Being Led to Awe and Amazement

After becoming a Christian, it is not as though people move beyond their need to think about the cross. Rather, the cross is just as central for sanctification as it is for justification. A healthy Christian experiences awe and amazement at the cross on a regular basis. When she thinks about the Son of God leaving the glories of heaven to live as a human being and take her place at Calvary, it should be a shocking thing—something that continually humbles her and leads to speechless gratitude that God would be so good and loving. As Tozer asserts, “Every humble and devoted believer in Jesus

⁹¹Tozer, *The Worship-Driven Life*, 66.

⁹²Tozer, *Jesus, Our Man in Glory*, 124.

⁹³Tozer, *Experiencing the Presence of God*, 58.

Christ must have his own periods of wonder and amazement at this mystery of godliness—the willingness of the Son of Man to take our place in judgment and in punishment.”⁹⁴ The cross is the impetus for all spiritual pursuit and provides the passion and motivation that drive the Christian life, continually compelling believers to pursue deeper spirituality.

Carrying the Cross

There is also a sense in which believers need to imitate what happened at Calvary in their own lives if they are to be truly spiritual. Just as Jesus experienced the cross, believers also must be willing to take up their own cross if they are to follow him (cf. Luke 9:23). They must embrace what Tozer calls “the crucified life,” which is “a life wholly given over to the Lord in absolute humility and obedience: a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord.”⁹⁵ This is a key aspect of biblical spirituality.

According to the Bible, the Christian life is not an easy path. It frequently involves difficult experiences that come as a result of being a devoted Christian in a fallen world. It also involves painful experiences as God sanctifies his children, cutting out of their lives everything that does not belong there and making them more like Jesus. This is necessary if they are to grow to be everything he wants them to be. Moreover, this pain is not without a purpose but enables believers to “rise in fullness of life to establish a pattern of living wholly new and free and full of good works.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 94.

⁹⁵Tozer, *The Crucified Life*, 15.

⁹⁶Tozer, *The Radical Cross*, 5.

CHAPTER 7

TOZER'S RELATIONSHIP TO MYSTICISM

The preceding chapters demonstrate that Tozer was sufficiently aligned with the evangelical movement in both his beliefs and emphases to be considered a confessional evangelical. However, the curious nature of his mystical tendencies remains. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to examine in greater detail the ways in which Tozer related to mystical writers.

Elements of Mysticism Tozer Appreciated

Tozer quotes extensively from mystical authors because he appreciates many of their contributions and believes they have much to offer readers of all eras.

Knowledge of God Himself

One characteristic Tozer deeply appreciates about the mystical writers is that they knew God himself. They went beyond theological doctrines and biblical morals and possessed a personal relationship with God that was deeply personal and highly experiential. For example, Tozer commends the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* for leading readers beyond theology to God himself. The anonymous writer builds his theology of God on a firm biblical foundation since he describes God as one who created the world, purchased believers on the cross, and graciously calls them to new life. However, the writer also recommends that believers practice in their prayers “a further stripping down of everything, even of theology” and approach God simply with “a naked intent direct unto God without any other cause than God himself.”¹ Tozer believes this

¹A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Camp Hill, PA:

desire for God himself is desperately needed in the modern church.

Unfortunately, Tozer laments, believers have become very rationalistic in their approach to God. They have become so caught up in sound theology and practical endeavors that they have abandoned their call to know God in a deep and meaningful way. In contrast, the mystical authors had come to know God in a way that made an indescribably deep impression on them. Therefore, evangelicals should embrace a kind of evangelical mysticism. Tozer explains,

A definite difference exists between the evangelical mystics and the evangelical rationalists. An evangelical mystic like John stands in the presence of the awesome God and cries, “Holy, holy, holy,” and falls down at His feet as dead. The evangelical rationalist figures it all out and says, “We can understand it; we know how it is,” then writes a long, learned book about it, describing exactly what it is like.²

The reason so-called evangelical rationalists are able to be so confident in their knowledge about God is because it is just that: knowledge *about* God rather than knowledge *of* God. Evangelicals desperately need to reexamine the need to know God himself.

Union with God

A closely related—and in many ways overlapping—concept to knowing God himself is experiencing union with God. According to Tozer, union with God consists of a “direct knowledge of God” and “intimate fellowship between two personalities, God and the individual worshiper.”³ In another place, Tozer observes the way in which prayer for many evangelicals is in constant danger of degenerating into a “glorified gold rush.”⁴

Wingspread, 2007), 19.

²A. W. Tozer, *Preparing for Jesus' Return: Daily Live the Blessed Hope* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012), 71.

³A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Men: Cultivating the Divine/Human Relationship* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), chap. 25, CD-ROM.

⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Set of the Sail: Direction for Your Spiritual Journey*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 14, CD-ROM.

The vast majority of evangelical books on prayer spend most of their pages talking about how to use prayer to get things from God. Of course, Tozer admits, there is nothing wrong with receiving various gifts and benefits through prayer. However, the highest kind of prayer goes beyond making requests of God and focuses mainly on experiencing union with him. Tozer writes, “Prayer at its holiest moment is the entering into God to a place of such blessed union as makes miracles seem tame and remarkable answers to prayer appear something very far short of wonderful by comparison.”⁵ Tozer recommends that Christians force themselves to be completely quiet for a period of time until they get better acquainted with their own souls and are able to listen in silence for the distinct voice of God. Not only would this do more for their ulcers than all the pills that doctors could prescribe, it would also be a good first step to experiencing union with God.⁶

Lofty Concept of God

In addition to knowing God and experiencing deep union with God, Tozer also appreciates the mystical writers’ lofty concept of God. He muses that he always gets in trouble when he uses the word “mystic.” However, Tozer contends, it is well worth the controversy since “mystic” communicates what he is trying to say very nicely. Down through the ages of church history, great mystical writers have without exception been persecuted by church authorities. The reason for this, according to Tozer, is that the concept of God they possessed was so lofty, pure, and holy that the average person could not comprehend it. For them, God was indescribably immense and infinitely beyond human understanding. When they wrote about this incomprehensible God, they were persecuted.⁷

⁵Tozer, *The Set of the Sail*.

⁶Ibid.

⁷A. W. Tozer, *Delighting in God*, ed. James L. Snyder (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2015),

Contemplative Lifestyle

It is most helpful to describe other elements of mysticism Tozer appreciates simply under the heading of a generally contemplative lifestyle. He describes this lifestyle extensively in the pages of his classic work *The Pursuit of God*. In the book, Tozer commends living in God's presence throughout every moment of the day in such a way that believers are personally experiencing that presence. He states, "God wills that we should push on into His presence and live our whole life there."⁸ This is the chief purpose for which God redeems his children—the very center of Christianity. Regrettably, according to Tozer, the kind of Christianity that is currently popular knows God's presence only in theory and fails to emphasize the distinct Christian privilege of experiencing God's presence even before heaven. It teaches that believers are in God's presence positionally but says nothing about experiencing his presence actually. Moreover, because modern Christians are so woefully ignorant of the fiery urge that drove the mystics of the past, they do not realize anything is even missing in their own lives. Measuring themselves by deficient standards, they allow contentment to take the place of burning zeal. Instead, they rest in their positional possessions and—more often than not—are not even bothered by the absence of personal spiritual experience. Yet God is waiting for his children to push into a "conscious awareness of His presence."⁹

In line with mystical writers, Tozer had a particular appreciation for the doctrine of God's immanence. He describes this doctrine as the teaching that "God dwells in His creation and is everywhere indivisibly present in all His works."¹⁰ However, even though this doctrine appears in the vast majority of theology books, for some reason it

16.

⁸Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 34.

⁹Ibid., 35.

¹⁰Ibid., 57.

has never found a place in the typical Christian's heart so as to become part of his lived experience. In addition, many Christian teachers shy away from the full implications of this doctrine and scale down its full meaning—if they even mention it at all. Practically speaking, God's immanence means simply that "God is here," which is critically important if believers are to have a conscious awareness of his presence.¹¹

A few pages later, Tozer explains that the reality of God's presence and the manifestation of his presence are not the same. The former is true all the time, while the latter is dependent on an individual's awareness. In other words, God's presence is manifest when believers become experientially aware of him. This happens when they surrender to and cooperate with the Holy Spirit, since it is the Spirit's job to reveal the Father and Son. Therefore believers should pray for "increasing degrees of awareness" and "a more perfect consciousness of the divine Presence" since these are what make the difference "between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light of His face."¹²

According to Tozer, healthy Christians are those who have learned to enjoy communion with God continually. They may be forced to withdraw their conscious attention from God in order to engage in various earthly duties, but they never forget him. Moreover, if they are released for a moment from these obligations, their attention will fly straight to God once again. They have cultivated the habit of "inwardly gazing upon God."¹³ Elsewhere, Tozer elaborates on the balance between being a contemplative and engaging in the practical activities of life. He asserts that "every real Christian, however, practical, is in some degree a mystic, his mysticism lying on the upper side of his life."¹⁴

¹¹Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 57–58.

¹²*Ibid.*, 60–62.

¹³*Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 41, CD-ROM.

He prays, worships, meditates on divine things, and experiences communion with God. Yet, no matter how spiritually-minded he is, he still has to interact with the practical realities of life. He needs to eat, sleep, and pay his taxes. God also calls him to engage in Christian service to the world in which he finds himself. The great challenge of the Christian life is keeping these two elements—the inward and the outward—in proper balance.¹⁵

Elements of Mysticism Tozer Rejected

While Tozer had obvious appreciation for the mystical movement, it is important to note that he did not approve of everything that is commonly associated with mysticism.

Roman Catholicism

One thing Tozer clearly rejected was Roman Catholicism. Even though a sizeable majority of the mystical writers he loved were Roman Catholics, Tozer made no secret of his disapproval of Rome.¹⁶ He asserts that the early church set out to convert the world but ended by being converted *by* the world just a few centuries later. The institution that came about as a result of this reverse conversion was the Roman Catholic Church, a “half-Christian, half-pagan institution” that has been continually introducing “her pagan ways into the pure stream of the Christian faith.”¹⁷ Even after countless efforts to remedy the problem, the waters are still muddy. In essence, therefore, Roman Catholicism is a “disgraceful surrender” to the pagan tendencies of the human heart.¹⁸ In

¹⁵Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*.

¹⁶As stated in chapter one, twenty-eight of the thirty-five books on Tozer’s recommended reading list were written by Roman Catholics who lived either during or soon after medieval times. See David J. Fant, *A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth-Century Prophet*. (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 1964), 181.

¹⁷Tozer, *The Price of Neglect*, 89.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

another place, Tozer states that God brought about the Reformation because “the Roman Church apostatized.”¹⁹

Tozer also clearly affirms the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. He declares that if church tradition said something but the Bible did not say it, he would flatly reject it. He states, “I would not believe an Archangel if he came to me with a wingspread of twelve feet shining like an atom bomb just at the moment it goes off, if he could not give me chapter and verse” and that, in this way, “[a]ll tradition must bow in reverence before the clear testimony of God’s Word.”²⁰

Asceticism

Tozer also rejects the asceticism that is commonly associated with some forms of mysticism. He believes it is possible for every aspect of our lives to bring glory to God, noting that Paul even mentions eating and drinking to God’s glory (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). This humble lifestyle of eating and drinking is one that we share with the beasts of the earth. Therefore, if such base animal acts can be done in a manner that glorifies God, it is difficult to imagine what cannot. Tozer then states, “That monkish hatred of the body which figures so prominently in the works of certain early devotional writers is wholly without support in the Word of God.”²¹

Tozer also references the way many monks pursued holiness by withdrawing from society and from all human relationships, choosing instead to go out into the desert in order to fast, toil, and seek to mortify their flesh. While their desire for holiness is commendable, their method is not. According to Tozer, the flesh “is altogether too tough to be killed by abusing the body or starving the affections” and “yields to nothing less

¹⁹A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 126, CD-ROM.

²⁰A. W. Tozer, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*, ed. James L. Snyder (Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2007), 30–31.

²¹Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 114.

than the cross.”²²

Lest the biblical injunction to mortify the flesh be misunderstood—as it has been by those practicing asceticism—Tozer flatly denies that “flesh” in that sense is a reference to the physical body. According to Tozer, the ascetical idea that God is angry with the body is quite silly. Instead, he asserts, the body is morally neutral. In his usual down-to-earth tone, he states, “Your body is just the goat you ride around on, that is all. It is neither good nor bad; it is just your bones and flesh and blood, that is all. It is what the thinkers and the philosophers call amoral—not moral or immoral, just neutral.”²³ Because the body is neutral, treating it harshly in the pursuit of holiness is entirely unnecessary.²⁴

Apophaticism

Tozer also opposed the common mystical approach of apophaticism. Apophaticism is an approach to knowing God through negation. Those embracing the apophatic way believe that God is unknowable through images, ideas, or even language. Such vehicles are wholly inadequate to convey a true knowledge of God. Rather, they believe, the only way to describe God is to describe what God is *not*, and the only way to experience God is to enter the “cloud of unknowing” in detachment from the world and one’s own senses, seeking God in prayerful silence and contemplation.²⁵

While Tozer emphasizes the absolute holiness of God as one who is “of

²²Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*, 73.

²³A. W. Tozer, *Success and the Christian: The Cost of Spiritual Maturity*, ed. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 42, CD-ROM.

²⁴Though Tozer’s point is valid, he seems to advocate a dualism that downplays the physical body in favor of the immaterial soul. This is highly questionable, especially in view of biblical teaching that God will renew and glorify believers’ physical bodies (cf. 1 Cor 15:35–49).

²⁵Bruce A. Demarest, “Apophatic and Kataphatic Ways,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 271. A number of the authors on Tozer’s recommended reading list (referenced above) embraced apophaticism, including the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, John of the Cross, and Meister Eckhart.

another kind from anything with which the mind is acquainted” and acknowledges that the mind that attempts to discover God is “confronted by obscurity” and “surrounded with mystery and blinded by the light no man can approach unto,” he directly denies key tenets of apophaticism.²⁶ Tozer notes how some thinkers of previous generations have taught that people cannot discover God through human faculties and have therefore related to God as both unknown and unknowable. However, these thinkers overlooked God’s ability to reveal himself to people when he so chooses. According to Tozer, “The Spirit of God is able to make the spirit of man know and experience the awful mystery of God’s essential being.”²⁷ In saying this, Tozer rejects apophaticism.

Drawing Too Much from Experience

A final element of mysticism Tozer rejects is the tendency of many mystical writers to draw too much from their personal spiritual experiences to the point that they end up basing their lives more on those experiences than on biblical truth. He laments that so many believers have been led astray from sound biblical teaching by following the popular advice to “trust the light within you.” This is a great error.²⁸

Instead, Tozer emphasizes, believers must judge all experiences in the light of clear biblical teaching. He states, “I do not believe that God teaches doctrine by direct unmediated experience.”²⁹ Rather, the Bible is the source of all rational knowledge about religious matters. Tozer admits that many things are revealed by nature—as taught in Psalm 19:14 and Romans 1:19–20—but asserts that these are relatively few and wholly

²⁶Tozer, *The Set of the Sail*, 47.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 47–48.

²⁸A. W. Tozer, *God’s Power for Your Life: How the Holy Spirit Transforms You through God’s Word*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 27.

²⁹A. W. Tozer, *The Size of the Soul: Principles of Revival and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Harry Verploegh (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 104, CD-ROM.

inadequate.³⁰ Elsewhere, Tozer unequivocally states, “I have no place in my sympathies for Christians who neglect the Word, ignore the Word or get any revelations apart from the Word.”³¹ This simple statement directly undercuts all of the tendencies within the mystical movement to lean too heavily on personal spiritual experience or neglect the Bible in any way.³²

³⁰Tozer, *The Size of the Soul*.

³¹Tozer, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*, 119.

³²Much of Tozer’s teaching described in chap. 5 of this dissertation about the importance and centrality of the Bible for spirituality is also highly relevant here. As that chapter demonstrates, there is no shortage of material in Tozer’s writings describing his deep appreciation of biblical authority and his firm stance against anything that might undermine that authority.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has argued that, while A. W. Tozer had a number of notable mystical tendencies, his spiritual insights are demonstrably within confessional evangelical boundaries. He was able to draw from a sizeable list of authors who held beliefs that were, in many ways, quite different from his own while remaining true to his doctrinal convictions. To borrow one of his own metaphors, he was the “hungry bee [that] could get nectar out of any old flower and turn it into honey.”¹ By getting nectar from Christian theological traditions that varied in significant ways from his own, Tozer blessed the evangelical world with treasures of inestimable value.

Why Turn to the Mystics?

In spite of the blessing Tozer was and continues to be, there is one question in particular that needs to be asked, especially in view of all the elements of mysticism Tozer rejected.² Why did Tozer still turn to the mystics for inspiration rather than authors with whom he had more in common theologically? Undoubtedly, Tozer recognized these differences and saw himself as an evangelical. He declares,

Let it be understood by everyone that I am now and have always been an evangelical. I accept the Bible as the very Word of God and believe with complete and restful confidence that it contains all things necessary to life and godliness. I embrace the tenets of the historical Christian faith without reservation and am conscious of no spiritual sympathy with liberalism in any of its manifestations.³

¹A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 38.

²These elements have been outlined in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

³A. W. Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares: God Speaks to Those Who Take Time to Listen*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 107, CD-ROM.

With this statement, Tozer places himself squarely within the evangelical Christian tradition. And yet, he is not afraid to habitually reach outside that tradition in order to draw upon authors from other traditions—usually mystical authors who were Roman Catholics. Why does he feel the need to do this? Were there not authors in his own theological tradition to whom he could have turned?

Superior Devotion to God

One reason Tozer habitually reached outside his own evangelical tradition to various mystical authors is that he believed those authors had a superior devotion to God. To let Tozer speak for himself,

In my search for God, I quite naturally was led to the Christian mystics. As a young Christian, I had never heard of them nor saw any of their books in the bookstore. A retired missionary thoughtfully placed into my hands one of these old Christian books and I was immediately in love. I discovered that these great saints were uncontrollably in love with God. My love and appreciation for these writers sprang out of my own heart's deep longing after and thirsting for God. These people knew God in a way that I did not, and I wanted to know that they knew about God and how they came to know it. Certainly, in my admiration for these writers, I by no means endorsed everything they did or taught. I early learned that a hungry bee could get nectar out of any old flower and turn it into honey. For me, it was their utter devotion to God along with the ability to share their spiritual insights and observations that I valued. They assisted me in my walk with God as no other writers even of my day have. And, after all, that is all that really matters. I cannot place too much emphasis on the contemplation of divine things, which will result in the God-conscious life. These old mystics did just that for me.⁴

In other words, these mystical authors have a quality of devotion to offer that, in Tozer's opinion, no one else has. It does not appear as though Tozer was ignorant of the contributions of other authors, including authors of his own theological tradition, but that he simply considered the contribution of mystical authors generally superior.

This is also apparent in the way Tozer speaks of specific mystics. He describes the way in which Frederick Faber was “one whose soul panted after God as the roe deer pants after the water brook” and how “God revealed Himself to his seeking heart and set

⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 183–84.

the good man's whole life afire with a burning adoration rivaling that of the seraphim before the throne."⁵ According to Tozer, Faber's "love for the Person of Christ was so intense that it threatened to consume him" and "burned within him as a sweet and holy madness and flowed from his lips like molten gold."⁶ Even though Faber was a Catholic priest, it is evident that Tozer was quite overwhelmed by the man's love for the Lord. It seems as though Faber blessed Tozer in a way that few—if any—from Tozer's own tradition were able to do.

Tozer believed he lived in an era when there was a dearth of spiritual writers worth reading. The quality of devotion that existed in the past simply had no contemporary parallel. Tozer laments,

How few, how pitifully few are the enraptured souls who languish for the love of Christ. The sweet "madness" that visited such men as Bernard and St. Francis and Richard Rolle and Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Rutherford is scarcely known today. The passionate adorations of Teresa and Madame Guyon are a thing of the past. Christianity has fallen into the hands of leaders who knew not Joseph. The very memory of better days is slowly passing from us and a new type of religious person is emerging. How is the gold tarnished and the silver become lead!⁷

Writers of the past are simply unsurpassed in their passion and "madness" for the Lord. Of course, the fact that such figures as Edwards and Rutherford are on this list shows that Tozer appreciated their contributions and recognized there were some in theological traditions similar to his own from whom he could benefit spiritually. However, the majority are from other Christian traditions. In Tozer's judgment, these men and women "languish[ed] for the love of Christ" to a far greater degree than any of his contemporaries and also surpassed those of his own tradition from previous generations—with very few exceptions.

⁵Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 38.

⁶Ibid.

⁷A. W. Tozer, *That Incredible Christian: How Heaven's Children Live on Earth*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 161, CD-ROM.

Superior Spiritual Experience

Tozer not only found mystical writers to have superior devotion to God but also found that they experienced God in a superior way. That is, they had a depth of intimacy in their relationship with the Lord that surpassed any others Tozer had encountered. He writes,

Some have chided me about my affection for some of these old mystic friends of mine. I have learned to live above that. For me, I only require that a person must know God other than by hearsay. The intimacy of their relationship with God is all that truly matters. If a writer has information to offer that he has obtained by research, I will pass on him. Give me the writer who has the passion and fire of God in his soul, which flows onto the page.⁸

Tozer's comment of knowing God "other than by hearsay" reflects his impatience with those who simply repeat tired old clichés and speak of things they have not themselves experienced. Neither was Tozer interested in those whose writings merely consisted of academic research. Rather, he desired to read people who truly knew God and had experienced a level of intimacy with God that was truly remarkable.

Tozer believed that evangelical Christians of his own day were suffering from a severe over-emphasis on sound doctrine and a corresponding under-emphasis on spiritual experience. He describes evangelical Christianity as only recently emerging from a kind of ice age in which evangelical authors made the grave mistake of only comparing themselves to each other rather than looking back at the way previous generations of Christians experienced God. Unlike contemporary evangelicals who allow objective truth to eclipse subjective experience, these writers of the past were "superior lovers of God whose devotional works and inspired hymns linger like a holy fragrance long after they themselves have left this earthly scene."⁹

Perhaps the way in which those in the mystical tradition are able to surpass those in the evangelical tradition in their spiritual experience has been articulated the

⁸Tozer, *The Purpose of Man*, 183–84.

⁹Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*, 76.

most clearly by J. I. Packer in his book *Knowing God*. Packer discusses the all-important difference between simply knowing about God and actually knowing God. He observes, “Yet the gaiety, goodness, and unfetteredness of spirit which are the marks of those who have known God are rare among us—rarer, perhaps, than they are in some other Christian circles where, by comparison, evangelical truth is less clearly and fully known. Here, too, it would seem that the last may prove to be first, and the first last. A little knowledge *of* God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge *about* him.”¹⁰ Tozer would agree. Even though the mystics he quotes may have understood less evangelical truth, they did more with that small amount of truth than the vast majority of evangelical writers have been able to do with a large amount of truth.

More Conscious of Commonalities

Tozer saw that he had much in common with mystics of the past and paid more attention to these commonalities than he did to the differences. In one place, he asserts that evangelical theology is in accord with many of the actual beliefs of mystics, even though many of those mystics identified with a church tradition that would typically be regarded as quite different. Tozer writes that, in addition to checking his beliefs against Scripture itself, the evangelical “can check the tenets of his total creed against the life-giving, transforming beliefs of church fathers both East and West, reformers, mystics, missionaries, saints and evangelists, and they will check out one by one.”¹¹ The fact that mystics are on this list of those who are aligned with the major points of the evangelical “creed” demonstrates that Tozer saw a high degree of theological like-mindedness between evangelicals and mystics.

For example, while speaking of Julian of Norwich, Tozer observes that she

¹⁰J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 25–26. Italics in original.

¹¹Tozer, *The Set of the Sail*, 93.

lived before Martin Luther and therefore had never heard of the Protestants.

“Nevertheless,” Tozer confidently asserts, “I am sure that if she had ever met Luther she would have come out wholeheartedly on the side of the evangelicals, because she was evangelical, born out of due time.”¹² Later in that sermon, Tozer calls Julian “a part of the Reformation long before it was ever born.”¹³ If this is the way he felt about Julian of Norwich, it would be interesting to know how many other mystical writers Tozer viewed in a similar manner. For example, Tozer acknowledges that he frequently gets into trouble when he uses the word “mystic” but then argues that “through the years, there have been great evangelical mystic writers” who were “so in tune with God that all of them, without exception, suffered persecution at the hands of church authorities.”¹⁴ In Tozer’s view, just because a writer was associated with Roman Catholicism, that does not necessarily mean they were a Roman Catholic at heart or even that they were necessarily fully Catholic in their theology. Of course, all of this is not to say Tozer was not conscious of any theological differences at all between mystics and evangelicals, but he did not allow those differences to crowd out the long list of beliefs in which the two camps agreed.

Overall, Tozer seems to be much more comfortable than many evangelicals in moving past doctrinal differences for the sake of benefitting from the insights of the mystics. In Tozer’s estimation, most evangelicals have an unreasonably low tolerance for any deviation from their theology. He observes that “Christian literature, to be accepted and approved by evangelical leaders of our times, must follow very closely the same train

¹²A. W. Tozer, *Tozer Speaks to Students: Chapel Messages Preached at Wheaton College*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007), 63, CD-ROM. It is important to note that “evangelical” in this context simply carries the idea of “Protestant.”

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Tozer, *Delighting in God*, 16.

of thought, a kind of ‘party line’ from which it is scarcely safe to depart.”¹⁵

The result of this is that evangelicals have become spiritually impoverished since they have cut themselves off from the rich spiritual insights of other Christian traditions. Tozer writes,

A half-century of this [“party line” mentality] in America has made us smug and content. We imitate each other with slavish devotion. Our most strenuous efforts are put forth to try to say the same thing that everyone around us is saying—and yet to find an excuse for saying it, some little safe variation on the approved theme or, if no more, at least a new illustration.¹⁶

This inability to open the windows and let in any fresh air has been a significant detriment to evangelical spirituality. Yet, ironically, evangelicals do not even know how impoverished they are, according to Tozer. As the saying goes, they “do not know what they do not know” and are thus doomed to simply repeat what other evangelicals around them are saying.

The solution is to open the windows a little bit. Tozer uses the example of Nicolas Herman, commonly known as Brother Lawrence. Instead of focusing on all of the doctrinal differences between Nicolas and himself, Tozer is content that Nicolas is “a true follower of Christ” with “orthodox” theology, which enables Tozer to deeply appreciate Nicolas as “a lover of the Lord, radiant and shining in his devotion to the person of Jesus” with writings that are “fragrant and sweet as everything about Jesus might properly be expected to be.”¹⁷ Elsewhere, Tozer describes Thomas Merton as “a seeker after God” and “an example of those who have never left the ancient Roman Church” but who nevertheless “know God and are seekers after God,” though Tozer admits, “I personally cannot see why they do not leave.”¹⁸

¹⁵Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 86.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 86–87.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁸A. W. Tozer, *The Crucified Life: How to Live Out a Deeper Christian Experience*, ed. James L. Snyder (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2011), 83.

Tozer believes that the mystical writers were able to edify believers from all sorts of theological traditions because they typically wrote of their experiences in a way with which all zealous Christians should be able to identify. They may have had different theological beliefs, but they spoke the same spiritual language. In one instance, Tozer lists a number of mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Bernard of Clairvaux, Jan van Ruysbroeck, Michael Molinos, John of the Cross, Thomas Traherne, Richard Rolle, William Law, Walter Hilton, Francis de Sales, Jakob Boehme, Gerhard Tersteegen, François Fénelon, Madame Guyon and Thomas à Kempis. He then states,

To a large extent these were universal Christians who experienced the grace of God so deeply and so broadly that they encompassed the spiritual possibilities of all men and were able to set forth their religious experiences in language acceptable to Christians of various ages and varying doctrinal viewpoints. Just as a sincere hymn may strike a worshipful chord common to all Christians, so these works of devotion instantly commend themselves to true seekers everywhere.¹⁹

The writings of these “universal Christians” are able to nourish the spiritual devotion of Christians of all traditions, despite their doctrinal differences. Since they strike that “worshipful chord,” a diverse array of Christians should be able to join in the singing. Tozer goes on to admit that a few basic points of agreement are necessary. These include true faith in Christ, radical separation from the world, dying to oneself, carrying one’s cross, and eagerly seeking God. As long as these requirements are met by all parties, Tozer believes the Holy Spirit will use the writings of mystics to “introduce His people to each other across the centuries and teach them the meaning of spiritual unity and the communion of saints.”²⁰

Reflection

The reasons listed above that Tozer gives for preferring the mystical authors are understandable and certainly help clarify some of the mystery surrounding his love

¹⁹Tozer, *The Size of the Soul*, 37.

²⁰Ibid.

for the mystics. However, some mystery remains. The superior spirituality and closeness to God of the mystical writers is not self-evident. There are many writers in the Reformed and evangelical traditions who seem to have enjoyed incredible intimacy with God and lived lives that were full of his presence. Examples include John Bunyan (1628–1688), George Müller (1805–1898), Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), John Owen (1616–1683), Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), and Andrew Murray (1828–1917). And yet, with few exceptions, Tozer leaves writers such as these virtually untouched. Why did he not reference these writers more often? Why were his references so heavily weighted toward the mystical writers instead? Tozer’s preference for the mystics is so strong that it does not seem that even his own comments about the issue quoted above adequately answer these questions.

Of course, there is the possibility that Tozer simply was not fully aware of the wealth of spiritual resources from the Reformed tradition. Although Reformed writings were certainly available during Tozer’s lifetime, they were not as available as they are today.²¹ If there is any validity to this explanation, it is interesting to think about how Tozer’s spirituality might have been different if he had had more of a Reformed influence and more access to Reformed writings.

Is Tozer a Good Model?

It is also important to consider whether Tozer is a good model for evangelicals to follow in his interaction with the mystics. Tozer saw a need among evangelicals for a deeper communion with God and was able to make a significant contribution toward meeting that need. He said things virtually no other evangelical was saying while remaining true to his confessional evangelical convictions. He also demonstrated that the

²¹In recent years, there has been an explosion of Reformed reprints from publishers such as Banner of Truth. These reprints did not begin to become more widely available until the final years of Tozer’s life.

mystical authors of the past have much to commend themselves to modern Christians. However, there is still a question of whether his approach to the mystics and focus on their writings is something that twenty-first century evangelicals should seek to imitate. In the opinion of the present author, there are some aspects of Tozer's approach that are a good model and should be imitated, while there are others that are not a very good model and should not be imitated.

Positive Aspects

Perhaps the most significant way in which Tozer's interaction with the mystics is a good model to follow is his charitable spirit toward them. Many evangelicals approach those from other theological traditions with an inherent suspicion that colors the way they see these authors and hinders them from truly understanding what the authors are trying to say. Because they expect to find things with which they disagree, many evangelicals often end up seeing only those areas of divergence without seeing anything from which they might genuinely benefit.

In contrast, Tozer read the mystics looking for the best in them rather than the worst. He was not preoccupied with fault-finding but simply sought to benefit from the ways these writers were helpful while ignoring the ways they were unhelpful. He was able to see through the theological differences that existed between him and his beloved mystical companions and rightly appreciated their love and zeal for the Lord—a love and zeal that are often missing among many evangelicals in their endless quest for efficiency and productivity. Tozer was then able to imitate their zeal and allow himself to be swept away by the current of the love for God they displayed. Moreover, as Tozer did this, he carefully maintained his confessional evangelical convictions. He is therefore a model for evangelicals of how to learn from Christians of other traditions and approach them with

charity while not compromising on doctrine.²²

Negative Aspects

There are also a number of negative aspects of Tozer's approach to the mystics. The most apparent is that he was arguably *too* charitable in reading them with the result that he seemingly ignored significant theological differences. Although, as seen in the previous chapter, Tozer contends that many of the mystics would be Protestants if Protestantism had existed during their lifetime, the fact remains that they still believed many of the teachings of Catholicism. For many of them, this includes a Catholic understanding of justification rather than the Protestant belief in justification by faith alone. Far from being insignificant, this issue relates to the core gospel question of "How can people be made right with God?" Anyone who does not answer this question correctly will almost certainly have a distorted view of the Christian life.

Therefore, Tozer should have been more sensitive to the doctrinal deviations of the mystical writers—especially those deviations which are integrally related to the gospel. This does not mean that he was wrong to read them or extract valuable insights from them, but it does mean he should have demonstrated more of an awareness of the doctrinal differences. Also, for the sake of his audience, Tozer should have openly critiqued the mystics for these deviations instead of giving his audience the impression that these writers were of a nearly heroic stature. For example, some of the mystics Tozer loved and recommended were condemned as heretics.²³ It is difficult to see how one can

²²Not every believer has the spiritual maturity to read authors of divergent viewpoints with theological discernment. Therefore, pastoral wisdom should guide all book recommendations.

²³Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1327) is one notable example of a mystic who was considered heretical. In 1326, a diocesan commission charged Eckhart with heresy. In response, Eckhart appealed to Pope John XXII, and the pope also determined that his writings contained heresy. Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to Medieval Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 265. Another example is Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), who was also denounced as a heretic and even temporarily banished from his city, though city authorities eventually allowed him to return on the condition that he ceased writing. Adam McLean, introduction to *The 'Key' of Jacob Boehme*, by D. A. Freher (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1991), 9.

be considered a “universal Christian” if many have concerns about your baseline orthodoxy.

Concluding Thought

The most important idea to take away from Tozer’s ministry is that God calls all Christians to yearn for him and seek after him as their supreme passion in life. Too often, believers can fall into the ruts of cold orthodoxy, empty ritualism, shallow enthusiasm, or mindless ministry activity. God beckons his people beyond these things and invites them to be entirely “caught up” in him. He warns them against hewing for themselves “broken cisterns, that can hold no water” and invites them to delight in him, “the fountain of living waters” (Jer 2:13). Only then will they know their true purpose in life, and only then will they experience true fullness, for God alone can satisfy the thirsty soul.

APPENDIX

DR. TOZER'S RECOMMENDED BOOKS¹

Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, Jan van Ruysbroeck

Amendment of Life, Richard Rolle

Ascent of Mt. Carmel, The, John of the Cross

Ascent of Mt. Zion, The, Berdardeno de Laredo

Book of Eternal Wisdom, Henry Suso

Centuries of Meditations, Thomas Traherne

Christian Perfection, Fénelon

Cloud of Unknowing, The, Anonymous

Confessions, St. Augustine

Dark Night of the Soul, John of the Cross

Goad of Love, The, Walter Hilton

Guide to True Peace, A, Molinos and others

Hymns, Gerhard Tersteegen

Imitation of Christ, Thomas à Kempis

Introduction to a Devout Life, De Sales

Letters of Direction, de Tourville

On the Incarnation, Athanasius

On the Love of God, Bernard of Clairvaux

¹David Fant includes this list at the end of his biography of Tozer. It is helpful to see the extent to which Tozer gravitated toward mystical authors. Taken from David J. Fant, A. W. *Tozer: A Twentieth-Century Prophet*. (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 1964), 181. All book titles, forms of names, and capitalizations are taken from Fant.

Poems, Frederick Faber

Poems, Isaac Watts

Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence

Private Devotions, Lancelot Andrewes

Proslogium, Anselm

Quiet Way, The, Gerhard Tersteegen

Revelations of Divine Love, Julian of Norwich

Scale of Perfection, The, Walter Hilton

Sermons, John Tauler

Song of Songs, Bernard of Clairvaux

Spiritual Combat, The, Lorenzo Scupoli

Spiritual Guide, The, Michael Molinos

Talks of Instruction, Meister Eckhart

Testament of Devotion, A, Thomas Kelly

Theologia Germanica (Winkworth Translation), Anonymous

Vision of God, The, Nicholas of Cusa

Way of Christ, The, Jacob Boehme

In recommending these books Dr. Tozer did not mean to put his stamp of approval on the entire contents. Rather they were offered as products of men and women who ardently loved their Lord; if any doctrinal defects should appear these would be far overbalanced by the spiritual verities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Tozer, A. W. A. W. *Tozer: An Anthology*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1984.
- _____. “A. W. Tozer Audio Sermons.” *Sermon Index*. Accessed February 12, 2016. <http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/mydownloads/viewcat.php?cid=6>.
- _____. *The A. W. Tozer Bible: King James Version*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Bibles, 2012.
- _____. “About Tozer’s Children.” *Alliance Life*, May 13, 1992.
- _____. *Alive in the Spirit: Experiencing the Presence and Power of God*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016.
- _____. *And He Dwelt Among Us: Teachings from the Gospel of John*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2014.
- _____. “Are We Fundamentalists Missing Something?” *Moody Monthly*, February 1, 1986.
- _____. *The Attributes of God: Deeper into the Father’s Heart*. Vol. 2. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Attributes of God: A Journey into the Father’s Heart*. Vol. 1. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Best of A. W. Tozer: 52 Favourite Chapters*. Edited by Warren W. Wiersbe. Nottingham, UK: Crossway Books, 1991.
- _____. *The Bible: An Unchanging Book in an Ever-Changing World*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1991.
- _____. “A Blueprint for Worship.” *His Magazine*, October 1965.
- _____. *Born after Midnight: Spiritual Renewal Comes to Those Who Want It Badly Enough*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. “Can a Christian Commit Suicide?” *Alliance Life*, September 7, 1994.

- _____. "Can Fundamentalism Be Saved?" *Christian Life*, August 1954.
- _____. "Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?" *Alliance Life*, March 1, 2002.
- _____. "Caught Between." *His Magazine*, February 1964.
- _____. *The Christ-Centred Church: Creating Fearless, Spirit-Filled Followers of Christ*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2009.
- _____. *Christ the Eternal Son: A Beautiful Portrait of Deity from the Gospel of John*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Christian Book of Mystical Verse*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1963.
- _____. "The Christian Life Is Not Easy." *Decision*, March 1, 1990.
- _____. "Christian Look at the Space Age." *Christianity Today*, October 13, 1958.
- _____. "The Communion of Saints." In *Foundations of the Faith: Twelve Studies in the Basic Christian Revelation*, edited by David J. Fant, 145–56. Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1951.
- _____. *The Contemporaries Meet the Classics on the Holy Spirit: From the Writings of Such Authors as A. W. Tozer . . . [et al]*. Edited by Randy Harris. West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishers, 2004.
- _____. "Counsel for Busy Christians." *Moody Monthly*, May 1, 1966.
- _____. *The Counselor: Straight Talk About the Holy Spirit*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Crucified Life: How to Live Out a Deeper Christian Experience*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2011.
- _____. "Cultivating the Spirit's Companionship." *Alliance Life*, September 30, 1987.
- _____. *Culture: Living as Citizens of Heaven and Earth: Collected Insights from A. W. Tozer*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2016.
- _____. *The Dangers of a Shallow Faith: Awakening from Spiritual Lethargy*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012.
- _____. "Dare We Alter the Pattern?" *Prairie Overcomer*, September 1, 1988.
- _____. "The Decline of Expectancy." *Alliance Life*, January 4, 1989.
- _____. "Decline of Good Reading." *United Evangelical Action*, October 1, 1959.

- _____. "The Deeper Life: What Is It?" *Christian Life*, August 1957.
- _____. *Delighting in God*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2015.
- _____. *A Disruptive Faith: Expect God to Interrupt Your Life*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011.
- _____. "The Divine Indwelling." *Alliance Life*, November 1, 1995.
- _____. "Doctrine at Work and Going Places." *Moody Monthly*, February 1957.
- _____. "Do Your Prayers Please God?" In *Prayer: Its Deeper Dimensions: A Christian Life Symposium*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963.
- _____. *The Dwelling Place of God: What It Means to Have Christ Living in You*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Early Tozer: A Word in Season*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Echoes from Eden: The Voices of God Calling Man*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1981.
- _____. "Editorials." *The Alliance Weekly*, June 17, 1950.
- _____. "Editorials." *The Alliance Witness*, January 1, 1958.
- _____. "Embrace the Day." *Woman's Day*, February 2014.
- _____. "Enabled by an Anointing." *Alliance Life*, February 4, 1987.
- _____. *Essays on Prayer: A HIS Reader on Conversing with God*. Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1968.
- _____. "Experiencing the Invisible God." *New Man*, May 2002.
- _____. *Experiencing the Presence of God: Teachings from the Book of Hebrews*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010.
- _____. *Explaining the Deeper Life*. Tonbridge, UK: Sovereign World, 1991.
- _____. *Faith beyond Reason: With God Nothing Is Impossible*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "Faith Without Expectation Is Dead." *Discipleship Journal* 16 (July 1, 1996): 94.

- _____. *Fiery Faith: Ignite Your Passion for God*. Edited by W. L. Seaver. Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread Publishers, 2012.
- _____. *Five Vows for Spiritual Power*. North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2016.
- _____. "Five Vows to Make and Keep." *Alliance Life*, January 2009.
- _____. "Following Hard after God." *Alliance Life*, February 2007.
- _____. "Four Ways to Find God's Will." *Moody Monthly*, June 1, 1970.
- _____. *From Heaven: A 28 Day Advent Devotional*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2016.
- _____. "Gaze of the Soul." *Alliance Life*, October 27, 1993.
- _____. *Gems from Tozer: Selections from the Writings of A. W. Tozer*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007.
- _____. "Gifts of the Spirit: Are They for Today?" *Christian Life*, October 1957.
- _____. *God Is Easy to Live With*. Lindale, TX: Last Days Ministries, 1988.
- _____. "God Manifest in the Flesh." *The Alliance Witness*, December 8, 1982.
- _____. "God Must Be Loved for Himself." *Decision*, June 2009.
- _____. "God's Goodness." *Alliance Life*, April 9, 1997.
- _____. *God's Greatest Gift to Man*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1960.
- _____. *God's Power for Your Life: How the Holy Spirit Transforms You through God's Word*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013.
- _____. *God's Pursuit of Man*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *God Tells the Man Who Cares: God Speaks to Those Who Take Time to Listen*. Edited by Anita M. Bailey. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "God Walking Among Men." *American Holiness Journal* 23 (December 1, 1963): 17–20.
- _____. "A God Who Is Easy to Please." *Discipleship Journal* 8 (September 1, 1988): 10.
- _____. "Great Is the Mystery." *The Alliance Witness*, February 16, 1983.
- _____. "Handing Over the Keys: How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit." *Alliance Life*, October 2005.

- _____. "The Holiness of God." *Decision*, March 2007.
- _____. *How the Lord Leads*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, N. d.
- _____. *How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "How to Have a Personal Revival." *Alliance Life*, March 3, 1993.
- _____. "How to Make Spiritual Progress." *The Evangelical Christian*, July 1962.
- _____. "How to Read a Christian Book." *Christian Life*, October 1, 1956.
- _____. "How to Try the Spirits: A 7-Step Test for Staying Out of the Cult Trap." *Fundamentalist Journal* 4, no. 9 (October 9, 1985): 32–34.
- _____. "How to Try the Spirits: Not Every New Experience or New Truth Is Valid." *Moody Monthly*, December 1979.
- _____. *How to Try the Spirits: Seven Ways to Discern the Source of Religious Experiences*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1997.
- _____. *I Call It Heresy*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *I Talk Back to the Devil: Straightforward Appeals for Christlike Living*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "The Impact of God's Holiness." *His Magazine*, March 1961.
- _____. *In Spirit and in Truth*. Bristol, TN: STL, 1985.
- _____. "Is Ours Merely an Instant Christianity?" *Journal of Christian Camping* 21 (September 1, 1989): 26–27.
- _____. *Jesus, Author of Our Faith: Twelve Messages from the Book of Hebrews*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Jesus Is Victor: A Fresh Perspective on the Book of Revelation*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Jesus, Our Man in Glory: Twelve Messages from the Book of Hebrews*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Keys to the Deeper Life: Revised and Expanded*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988.
- _____. "Knowing God in Justice, Love and Holiness." *Christianity Today*, January 18, 1985.

- _____. *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 1961.
- _____. *Leaning into the Wind*. Wheaton, IL: Creation House, 1984.
- _____. *Let My People Go: The Life of Robert A. Jaffray*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "Let's Cultivate Simplicity and Solitude." *His Magazine*, October 1, 1956.
- _____. "Lift Your Glad Voices." *Alliance Life*, April 15, 1992.
- _____. *Living as a Christian: Teachings from First Peter*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2009.
- _____. "Living Out Our Faith: God, Our First Option." *Decision*, July 1, 2002.
- _____. "Look at God. . . look at His Work." *Decision*, October 1, 1981.
- _____. "Making Good in the Christian Life." *The Light of Life* 1, no. 1 (January 1925): 2–3.
- _____. *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*. Edited by Anita M. Bailey. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "The Man Who Exalted God Above All." *Christian Medical Society Journal*, Autumn 1960, 14–20.
- _____. "The Man Who Met God in the Fire." *Christian Medical Society Journal*, Spring 1960, 20–26.
- _____. "The Man Who Saw God on the Throne." *Christian Medical Society Journal*, Summer 1960, 16–22.
- _____. "Marks of a Spiritual Man." *Moody Monthly*, September 1963.
- _____. *The Menace of the Religious Movie*. North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2014.
- _____. *Men Who Met God: Twelve Life-Changing Encounters*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "Miracles Follow the Plow." *Alliance Life*, February 2, 1994.
- _____. *Mornings with Tozer Devotional Journal*. Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2013.
- _____. "Must Christians Be Fed on a Diet of Harmless Fun?" *American Holiness Journal* 23 (January 1, 1964): 17–19.

- _____. "My Christian Manifesto." *The Alliance Witness*, May 11, 1983.
- _____. *My Daily Pursuit: Devotions for Every Day*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2013.
- _____. *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2007.
- _____. "The Naked Power of God." *Alliance Life*, April 27, 1994.
- _____. *The Next Chapter After the Last*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "No Revival without Reformation." *Christian Life*, May 1957.
- _____. *Of God and Men: Cultivating the Divine/Human Relationship*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007.
- _____. "Of Loneliness and Saintliness." *Moody Monthly*, September 1, 1979.
- _____. *The Old Cross and the New: And Other Essays on the Cross*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1995.
- _____. "On Fire." *His Magazine*, December 1970.
- _____. *Out of the Rut, into Revival: Dealing with Spiritual Stagnation*. Edited by James L. Snyder. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993.
- _____. *Paths to Power: Living in the Spirit's Fullness*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "Pilgrims of Eternity." *Alliance Life*, May 11, 1988.
- _____. "Pivots." *His Magazine*, February 1967.
- _____. "A Plea for Christian Dignity." *Reformed Journal* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1953): 14.
- _____. *Prayer: Communing with God in Everything—Collected Insights from A. W. Tozer*. Edited by W. L. Seaver. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016.
- _____. "Prayer of a Minor Prophet." *Moody Monthly*, January 1, 1964.
- _____. "The Praying Plumber." In *Three Condensed Books*. Westchester, IL: Christian Readers Club, 1957.
- _____. *Preparing for Jesus' Return: Daily Live the Blessed Hope*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012.

- _____. *The Price of Neglect*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009.
- _____. "Pursuing God." *Discipleship Journal* 11 (January 1, 1991): 62.
- _____. *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007.
- _____. *The Pursuit of God: A 31-Day Experience*. Edited by Edythe Draper. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1995.
- _____. "The Pursuit of God: Living the Call." *Alliance Life*, November 1, 2008.
- _____. *The Quotable Tozer: Wise Words with a Prophetic Edge*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Quotable Tozer II: More Wise Words with a Prophetic Edge*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 1997.
- _____. *The Radical Cross: Living the Passion of Christ*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Reclaiming Christianity: A Call to Authentic Faith*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009.
- _____. *Renewed Day by Day: A Daily Devotional*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. 2 vols. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1991.
- _____. "Rest: Sweet Surrender." *Discipleship Journal* 22 (January 2002): 49–51.
- _____. "The Resurrection Obligation." *Alliance Life*, March 2005.
- _____. *The Root of the Righteous*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Rut, Rot or Revival: The Problem of Change and Breaking Out of the Status Quo*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "Saint Must Walk Alone." *Eternity*, August 1, 1956.
- _____. "The Search : Revelation 4 & 5." *His Magazine*, February 1, 1995.
- _____. *The Set of the Sail: Direction for Your Spiritual Journey*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "Seven Significant Postures." *Alliance Life*, April 26, 1995.

- _____. *Signposts: A Collection of Sayings from A. W. Tozer*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988.
- _____. *The Size of the Soul: Principles of Revival and Spiritual Growth*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Success and the Christian: The Cost of Spiritual Maturity*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007.
- _____. "Take Me to Your Leader." *Eternity*, July 1, 1963.
- _____. "Terror and the Glory." *His Magazine*, March 1, 1967.
- _____. *That Incredible Christian: How Heaven's Children Live on Earth*. Edited by Anita M. Bailey. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "They Shall See God." *Discipleship Journal* 1 (July 1, 1981): 30–31.
- _____. *This World: Playground or Battleground*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Those Amazing Methodists: A Tribute to the Ministry of John & Charles Wesley*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1995.
- _____. "Thoughts on Prayer." *Partnership*, July 1, 1984.
- _____. *Total Commitment to Christ: What Is It?* Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1970.
- _____. *Tozer: Fellowship of the Burning Heart*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2006.
- _____. *Tozer on Christian Leadership: A 366-Day Devotional*. Edited by Ron Eggert. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 2001.
- _____. *Tozer on the Holy Spirit: A 366-Day Devotional*. Edited by Marilynne E. Foster. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment: Selected Excerpts*. Edited by James L. Snyder. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Tozer Pulpit: Selections from His Pulpit Ministry*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. 2 vols. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1994.
- _____. *Tozer's Little Instruction Book*. Tulsa, OK: Honor Books, 1996.
- _____. *Tozer Speaks: 128 Compelling and Authoritative Teachings*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. 2 vols. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.

- _____. *Tozer Speaks to Students: Chapel Messages Preached at Wheaton College*. Edited by Lyle W. Dorsett. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Tozer Topical Reader*. Edited by Ron Eggert. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007.
- _____. *Tragedy in the Church: The Missing Gifts*. Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007.
- _____. "Transmute Your Wealth." *Alliance Life*, November 2, 1994.
- _____. *A Treasury of A. W. Tozer: A Collection of Tozer Favorites*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.
- _____. "Use and Abuse of Good Books." *Alliance Life*, March 17, 1993.
- _____. "The Vital Need for Strong Desire." *Moody*, August 1, 2000.
- _____. "The Voice." *The Alliance Witness*, April 10, 1985.
- _____. *Voice of a Prophet: Who Speaks for God?* Edited by James L. Snyder. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2014.
- _____. "Voice of the Spirit." *His Magazine*, October 1, 1965.
- _____. *The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches: Is He Lord or Merely a Beloved Symbol?* Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, N. d.
- _____. *The Warfare of the Spirit: Developing Spiritual Maturity*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1993.
- _____. *The Warfare of the Spirit: Religious Ritual Versus the Presence of the Indwelling Christ*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. "We Are Becoming What We Love." *Eternity*, October 1956.
- _____. "We Need Men of God Again." *Founders Journal* 4 (Spring 1991): 27–28.
- _____. *We Travel an Appointed Way: Making Spiritual Progress*. Edited by Harry Verploegh. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *What the Bible Says about God, You and How You Can Know Him*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1998.
- _____. *Whatever Happened to Worship?* Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.

- _____. *What's in the Bible That People Today Ought to Know About?* Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1962.
- _____. *When He Is Come: Ten Messages on the Holy Spirit.* Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1968.
- _____. *Who Put Jesus on the Cross?* Edited by Gerald B. Smith. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *Wingspread: A. B. Simpson, A Study in Spiritual Altitude.* Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 2007. CD-ROM.
- _____. *The Worship-Driven Life: The Reason We Were Created.* Edited by James L. Snyder. Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008.
- _____. *Worship: The Missing Jewel.* Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1992.
- _____. "Wrath of the Lamb." *His Magazine*, May 1, 1965.
- Tozer, A. W., and Ron Eggert. *Tozer for the Christian Leader A 365-Day Devotional.* Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015.
- Tozer, A. W., and A. B. Simpson. *A. W. Tozer and A. B. Simpson on Spiritual Warfare.* Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993.
- Tozer, A. W., and Harry Verploegh. "The Tozer Anthology." *Alliance Life*, February 2015.

Secondary Sources

- Adams, Jay E. *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Ahlstrom, Sydney E. "From Puritanism to Evangelicalism: A Critical Response." In *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, edited by David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, 289–309. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.
- _____. *A Religious History of the American People.* Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1975.
- Aldrich, S. P. Review of *Keys to the Deeper Life*, by A. W. Tozer. *Christian Herald*, January 1, 1990.
- Allison, Gregg R. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Andrewes, Lancelot. *The Private Prayers of Lancelot Andrewes.* Edited by Hugh Martin. London: SCM Press, 1957.

- Anselm. *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo*. Translated by Sidney Norton Deane. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1939.
- Armstrong, Karen. *The Battle for God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.
- Ash, Carisa A. "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of Revelation in Evangelical Theology." PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2012.
- Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*. Translated by C. S. Lewis. London: A. R. Mowbray & Company, 1953.
- Augustine. *The Confessions*. Translated by Edward B. Pusey. New York: Collier Books, 1961.
- Ayer, H. D. *The Christian and Missionary Alliance: An Annotated Bibliography of Textual Sources*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001.
- Bailey, Nathan. "A Mighty Oak Has Been Harvested." *The Alliance Witness*, July 24, 1963.
- Barabas, Steven. *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention*. Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1952.
- Barlow, Lauren, ed. *Inspired by Tozer: 50 Artists, Writers and Leaders Share the Insights and Passion They've Gained from A. W. Tozer*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011.
- Barrett, George S. *The Secularization of the Pulpit*. London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1894.
- Barthgate, Andrew. Review of *Out of the Rut, into Revival: Dealing with Spiritual Stagnation*, by A. W. Tozer. *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 12 (1994): 66–67.
- Bauer, Walter, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Edited by Frederick W. Danker. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Beale, David O. *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850*. Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1986.
- Bebbington, David, and David Ceri Jones, eds. *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Bebbington, David. "The Evangelical Quadrilateral: A Response." *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 87–96.

- _____. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1989.
- Bell, James S., ed. *From the Library of A. W. Tozer: Selections from Writers Who Influenced His Spiritual Journey*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011.
- Bernard of Clairvaux. *Life and Works of Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*. Edited by John Mabillon. Translated by Samuel J. Eales. 4 vols. London: Hodges, 1896.
- _____. *On Loving God*. Edited by Hugh Martin. Translated by W. Harman van Allen. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959.
- Bickersteth, Edward. *The Works of Rev. E. Bickersteth*. New York: Appleton and Hall, 1832.
- Boehme, Jacob. *The Way to Christ*. Translated by John Sparrow. Canterbury, UK: G. Moreton, 1894.
- Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity through the Centuries*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008.
- Carpenter, Joel A. *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Carson, D. A. *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *He That Is Spiritual*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1943.
- _____. "The Saving Work of the Triune God." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 107, no. 428 (October 1950): 389–419.
- Chalke, Steve, and Alan Mann. *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Chon, Joseph Joon-Hong. "Albert B. Simpson's Theology and Practice of Evangelism." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003.
- Anonymous. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Translated by Clifton Wolters. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961.
- Corduan, Winfried. *Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991.
- Dayton, Donald W. *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001.

- Demarest, Bruce A. "Apophatic and Kataphatic Ways." In *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Edited by Glen G. Scorgie, Simon Chan, Gordon T. Smith, and James D. Smith. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- DeVries, V. T. Review of *I Talk Back to the Devil: Straightforward Appeals for Christlike Living*, by A. W. Tozer. *Chrisitan Herald*, July 1, 1991.
- Dochuk, Darren. *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011.
- _____. "Revisiting Bebbington's Classic Rendering of Modern Evangelicalism at Points of New Departure." *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 63–72.
- Dollar, George W. *A History of Fundamentalism in America*. Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973.
- Dorrien, Gary. *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.
- Dorrien, Gary J. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805–1900*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Dorsett, Lyle. *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008.
- _____. *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997.
- Eckhart, Meister. *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*. Translated by Raymond Bernard Blakney. New York: Harper & Row, 1941.
- Ekvall, Robert. *After Fifty Years: A Record of God's Working through The Christian and Missionary Alliance*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1939.
- Elliott, Kelly Cross. "The Bebbington Quadrilateral Travels into the Empire." *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 46–53.
- Enlow, David R. "Lessons from a Twentieth Century Prophet." *Moody Monthly*, September 1980.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998.
- Evearitt, Daniel. "A. W. Tozer: The Spiritual Formation of the Prophet-Mystic." Paper presented at Southeastern Regional Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Toccoa, GA, March 16–17, 2001.
- Faber, Frederick William. *Hymns*. London: Richardson and Son, 1862.
- _____. *Poems*. 4th ed. Baltimore, MD: John Murphy and Co., N. d.

- Fant, David J. A. W. *Tozer: A Twentieth-Century Prophet*. Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 1964.
- Feirtag, James. "Spiritual Formation Under the Jesus Creed." DMin diss., Anderson University, 2011.
- Fenelon, Francois. *Christian Perfection*. Edited by Charles F. Whiston. Translated by Mildred Whitney Stillman. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947.
- Finney, Charles G. *Lectures on Revival*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988.
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson. "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" Sermon, First Presbyterian Church of New York, May 21, 1922. Accessed December 19, 2017. <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/shall-the-fundamentalists-win.pdf>.
- Francis de Sales. *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Edited by John K. Ryan. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950.
- Fremantle, Anne, ed. *The Protestant Mystics*. New York: New American Library, 1974.
- Friesen, Kenneth L. "A Study of the Doctrine of Holiness in the Thought of A. W. Tozer." MDiv thesis, Western Seminary, 1971.
- Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology: In One Volume*. Condensed. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011.
- George, Timothy. "Directions: If I'm an Evangelical, What Am I?" *Christianity Today*, August 9, 1999.
- Gerstner, John H. "Theological Boundaries: A Reformed Perspective." In *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, edited by David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, 21–57. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.
- Gilley, Gary E. Review of *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer*, by Lyle Dorsett. *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 13, no. 38 (April 2009): 78–79.
- Glass, Clyde McLean. "Mysticism and Contemplation in the Life and Teaching of Albert Benjamin Simpson." PhD diss., Marquette University, 1997.
- Gloege, Timothy E. W. *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Gordon, James. *Evangelical Spirituality: From the Wesleys to John Stott*. London: SPCK, 1991.
- Graef, Hilda. *Mystics of Our Times*. New York: Paulist Press, 1963.

- Green, Joel B. "Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms? Questions, Caveats and a Plea." In *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement*, edited by Steve Chalke, Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker, 153–71. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Hall, David D., ed. *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History*. 2nd ed. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990.
- Hall, Matthew, and Owen Strachan, eds. *Essential Evangelicalism: The Enduring Influence of Carl F. H. Henry*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Hambrick-Stowe, Charles E. *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Harford, Charles Forbes, ed. *The Keswick Convention: Its Message, Its Methods and Its Men*. London: Marshall Brothers, 1907.
- Harland, Gordon. "Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism." *Touchstone* 5, no. 2 (May 1987): 26–42.
- Harris, Eleanor Lynn. *The Mystic Spirituality of A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth Century American Protestant*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992.
- _____. "The Thought of Aiden Wilson Tozer: An Analysis and Appraisal with Special Emphasis on His Mysticism and Conceptual Approach to the World." PhD diss., New York University, 1980.
- _____. "A Twentieth Century Protestant Mystic." *14th Century English Mystics Newsletter* 7, no. 2 (June 1, 1981): 84–85.
- Harris, Frankco J. "Created to Worship: Rescuing the Local Church from Having a Good Time." DMin diss., Drew University, 2014.
- Hart, D. G. *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*. The American Way Series. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002.
- Haykin, Michael A. G. "Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment: A Reassessment." In *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, edited by Michael A. G. Haykin, Kenneth J. Stewart, and Timothy George, 37–62. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008.
- Henry, Carl F. H. "Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in Christian Life." *Christianity Today* 5, no. 23 (August 28, 1961): 50.

- _____. *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947.
- _____. *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Hick, John, Clark H. Pinnock, Alister E. McGrath, R. Douglas Geivett, and W. Gary Phillips. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Edited by Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips. Counterpoints. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Hilton, Walter. *The Goad of Love*. Edited by Clare Kirchberger. London: Faber and Faber, 1952.
- _____. *The Scale of Perfection*. Edited by Evelyn Underhill. London: J. M. Watkins, 1948.
- Hodge, Archibald Alexander, and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. "Inspiration." *The Presbyterian Review* 2, no. 6 (April 1881): 225–60.
- Hodges, Zane. *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.
- Horton, Michael Scott. *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991.
- Hutchinson, Mark, and John Wolffe. *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*. Chicago: International Council in Biblical Inerrancy, 1978.
http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf.
- Irvin, Maurice R. Review of *The Counselor*, by A. W. Tozer. *Alliance Life*, November 24, 1993.
- _____. Review of *The Warfare of the Soul*, by A. W. Tozer. *Alliance Life*, November 24, 1993.
- Jeon, Sin Soo. "An Examination of A. W. Tozer's Life as Practical Applications for Korean Pastors to Combat the Prosperity Gospel." DMin thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014.
- John of the Cross. *John of the Cross: Selected Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
- John of Ruysbroeck. *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*. Edited by Evelyn Underhill. Translated by C. A. Wynschenk. London: J. M. Watkins, 1951.

- Johnston, Arthur P. *The Battle for World Evangelism*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978.
- Jones, Charles E. "People to Meet, Books to Read." *Fundamentalist Journal* 5, no. 1 (January 1986): 35–36.
- Julian of Norwich. *The Revelations of Divine Love*. Translated by James Walsh. St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey Press, 1975.
- Keisling, Gary Eugene. "Spiritual Disciplines in the Life and Ministry of A. B. Simpson." DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000.
- Kelly, Thomas. *A Testament of Devotion*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 1943.
- Kidd, Thomas S. "The Bebbington Quadrilateral and the Work of the Holy Spirit." *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 54–57.
- _____. *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.
- _____. "'Prayer for a Saving Issue': Evangelical Development in New England before the Great Awakening." In *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, edited by Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart, 129–45. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008.
- King, Louis L. "First and Foremost a Preacher." *The Alliance Witness*, July 30, 1986.
- King, P. "Seek Not, Forbid Not: The Early Christian and Missionary Alliance Position in Glossolalia." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (September 2005): 184–219.
- Kinlaw, Dennis F. "Don't Ever Read a Good Book." *Christianity Today*, 1986.
- Laredo, Bernardino de. *The Ascent of Mount Sion*. Edited by E. Allison Peers. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1952.
- Larsen, David L. *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998.
- Larsen, Timothy. "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, edited by Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Larson, Edward J. *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*. New York: BasicBooks, 1997.
- Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God: Critical Edition*. Translated by Scieurba Salvatore. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1994.
- Laws, Curtis Lee. "Convention Side Lights." *The Watchman-Examiner*, July 1, 1920.

- Leonard, Bill. "The Origin and Character of Fundamentalism." *Review and Expositor* 79, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 5–17.
- Lewis, Charles Thomas. "Far and Near: Christian Worship of the Transcendent and Immanent God of Wonders." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015.
- Lindsell, Harold. *The Battle for the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.
- Lints, Richard. *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. "What Is an Evangelical?" In *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942–1977*, 299–355. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989.
- Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity and Liberalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Mains, Karen Burton. "Up from the Misty Lowlands." *Christian Herald*, November 1980.
- Mar, Jaqueline. "Fulfillment: An Integrative Synthesis of Psychological and Christian Perspectives." PsyD diss., Biola University, 1984.
- Marsden, George M. "Defining American Fundamentalism." In *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within; a Response from Without*, edited by Norman J. Cohen, 22–37. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- _____. ed. *Evangelicalism and Modern America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.
- _____. "From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism: A Historical Analysis." In *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, edited by David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, 142–162. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.
- _____. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- _____. "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon: A Comparison with British Evangelicalism." *Church History* 46, no. 2 (June 1977): 215–32.
- _____. "Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination." In *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, vii–xvi. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.
- _____. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
- _____. *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

- _____. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Martin, William. "The Transformation of Fundamentalism Between the World Wars." In *Critical Moments in Religious History*, edited by Kenneth Keulman, 141–60. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994.
- Marty, Martin E. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Munich: K. G. Saur, 1993.
- Mathis, E. Review of *Reclaiming Christianity: A Call to Authentic Faith*, by A. W. Tozer and James L. Snyder. *Worship Leader* 18 (October 2009): 70–71.
- McAfee, Raymond. "He Fell Down to Worship: Reflections on a Worshiping Man's Life." *The Alliance Witness*, July 24, 1963.
- McCune, Rolland D. "The Formation of the New Evangelicalism: Historical and Theological Antecedents." *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (Fall 1999): 109–50.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- McGraw, Gerald E. "The Doctrine of Sanctification in the Published Writings of Albert Benjamin Simpson." PhD diss., New York University, 1986.
- McLean, Adam. Introduction to *The 'Key' of Jacob Boehme*, by D. A. Freher, 7–12. Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1991.
- Mellinger, Laurie. "A. W. Tozer: Prophet to a Generation." *Evangelical Journal* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1–16.
- Miller, Steven P. *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Molinos, Michasel de. *The Spiritual Guide*. Edited by Kathleen Lyttelton. London: Methuen & Company, 1950.
- More, Hannah. *The Works of Hannah More*. Vol. 5. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835.
- Murray, Iain H. *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism ; 1750–1858*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994.
- Narchison, J. Rosario. "Understanding Christian Fundamentalism Through American Evangelicalism." *Journal of Dharma* 15, no. 2 (April 1990): 95–113.
- Naselli, Andrew David. "Keswick Theology: A Survey and Analysis of the Doctrine of Sanctification in the Early Keswick Movement." *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, no. 13 (2008): 17–67.

- _____. *Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2010.
- Naselli, Andrew David, and Collin Hansen, eds. *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Nash, Ronald H. *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Neff, David. "The Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals." *Christianity Today*, October 2006.
- Nelson, David R. "A Call to Gospel Integrity: The Nature of True Christianity in Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Boston." DMin diss., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2008.
- Nieuwenhove, Rik Van. *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- New, David S. *Christian Fundamentalism in America: A Cultural History*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012.
- Nicholas of Cusa. *The Vision of God*. Translated by Emma Gurney Salter. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1928.
- Nickel, Joshua. *Reading Tozer: A Chapter-by-Chapter Look at A. W. Tozer's The Pursuit of God*. Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, 2017.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *The Kingdom of God in America*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937.
- Nienkirchen, Charles W. *A. B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement: A Study in Continuity, Crisis, and Change*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992.
- Niklaus, Robert L, John S Sawin, and Samuel J Stoesz. *All for Jesus: God at Work in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Over One Hundred Years*. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1996.
- Noll, Mark A. *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001.
- _____. "Noun or Adjective? The Ravings of a Fanatical Nominalist." *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 73–82.
- _____. *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- _____. *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

- Oats, Larry Russell. *The Church of the Fundamentalists: An Examination of Ecclesiastical Separation in the Twentieth Century*. Watertown, WI: Maranatha Baptist Press, 2016.
- Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Pardington, George P. *Outline Studies in Christian Doctrine*. New York: Christian Alliance Publishing Company, 1916.
- Patterson, Robert J. "The Life and Thought of A.W. Tozer Concerning Sanctification: An Investigation into the Thoughts of Aiden Wilson Tozer on the Doctrine of Sanctification and the Insights He Received from Some of the Past Mystics of the Church." ThM thesis, Regent College, 1989.
- "People God Uses: A. W. Tozer—In Pursuit of Knowledge." *Discipleship Journal* 14, no. 46 (November 1994).
- Peterson, Robert A. *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Pinnock, Clark H. *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Porterfield, Amanda. "Bebbington's Approach to Evangelical Christianity as a Pioneering Effort in Lived Religion." *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 58–62.
- Prayer Warriors: Powerful Portraits of Soldier Saints on God's Front Lines*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1998.
- Price, Keith A. "Thirsting after God." *The Alliance Witness*, April 9, 1997.
- Rack, Henry D. *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*. 3rd ed. London: Epworth Press, 2014.
- Rahner, Karl. *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. New York: Crossroad, 1982.
- Rahner, Karl, Paul Imhof, Hubert Biallowons, and Harvey D. Egan. *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965–1982*. New York: Crossroad, 1986.
- Ramm, Bernard. *The Evangelical Heritage*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1973.
- Randall, Ian M. "Outgrowing Combative Boundary-Setting: Billy Graham, Evangelism and Fundamentalism." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 2 (April 2010): 103–18.

- _____. *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.
- Ravenhill, Leonard. *Why Revival Tarries*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2004.
- “Rev. A. W. Tozer, Editor, 66, Dead.” *New York Times*, May 14, 1963.
- Rivard, Eugene Francis. “The Hymnody of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (1891–1978) as a Reflection of Its Theology and Development.” DMA diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991.
- Rogers, Jack, and Donald K. McKim. *The Authority and Inspiration of Scripture*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.
- Rolle, Richard. *The Amending of Life*. Translated by Richard Misyn. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1927.
- Sandeen, Ernest R. *The Origins of Fundamentalism: Toward a Historical Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968.
- Sandeen, Ernest Robert. *The Roots of Fundamentalism; British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Sasser, Samuel Lee. “Worship: An Encounter with the Living God.” ThM thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1996.
- Saunier, Michael. “A Tozer Bibliography.” *Alliance Life*, May 11, 1988.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Scorgie, Glen G. “Tozer, Aiden Wilson (1897–1963).” Edited by Glen G. Scorgie, Simon Chan, Gordon T. Smith, and James D. Smith. In *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Scupoli, Laurence. *The Spiritual Combat*. Edited by W. H. Hutchings. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1940.
- Seume, R. H. Review of *A Treasury of A. W. Tozer*, by Warren W. Wiersbe. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (October 1, 1981): 378.
- Smith, John Howard. *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion: A History of Sandemanianism in the Eighteenth Century*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008.
- Smith, Margaret. *An Introduction to Mysticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Snyder, James L. “A. W. Tozer: A Heart to Worship.” *Alliance Life*, November 3, 1999.

- _____. "A. W. Tozer: A Man in Pursuit of God." *Fundamentalist Journal* 5, no. 3 (March 3, 1986): 46–48.
- _____. *The Life of A. W. Tozer: In Pursuit of God*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009.
- _____. "The Preaching Ministry of A. W. Tozer." *Preaching* 7, no. 6 (May 1992): 48–50.
- _____. "A Profile in Devotion." *Alliance Life*, May 11, 1988.
- _____. "A Prophet to Profit By." *Herald of Holiness*, May 1992.
- Soulen, Richard N., and R. Kendall Soulen. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*. 4th ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.
- Spader, Larry L. "The Development of a Theology in the Christian and Missionary Alliance." DMin diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, 1990.
- Stone, Jon R. *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
- Stott, John. *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Cross of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006.
- Suso, Henry. *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom and Little Book of Truth*. Translated by James M. Clark. New York: Harper & Brothers, n. d.
- Sutton, Matthew Avery. *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Sweeney, Douglas A. *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Sweet, Leonard I. *The Evangelical Tradition in America*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984.
- Syan, Vinson. "Theological Boundaries: The Arminian Tradition." In *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, edited by David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, 38–57. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.
- Tauler, John. *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler, the Illuminated Doctor*. Translated by Walter Elliott. Washington, DC: Apostolic Mission House, 1910.
- Temple, Todd, and Kim Twitchell. *People Who Shaped the Church: 20th Century*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2000.

- Tersteegen, Gerhard. *Gerhard Tersteegens Geistliche Lieder*. Gütersloh: G. Bertelsmann, 1897.
- _____. *The Quiet Way*. Translated by Emily Chisholm. New York: Philosophical Library, 1950.
- Thomas a Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007.
- Thompson, A. E. *The Life of A. B. Simpson*. New York: The Christian Alliance Publishing Company, 1920.
- Thulson, Stephen John. “God-Focused Discernment in Leading a Congregation to Health and Growth.” DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999.
- Tourville, Abbe de. *Letters of Direction, Thoughts on the Spiritual Life from the Letters of the Abbe de Tourville*. Translated by Lucy Menzies. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1959.
- Towns, Elmer. “Tozer, Aiden Wilson (1897–1963).” Edited by Ed Hindson and Dan Marshall. In *The Popular Encyclopedia of Church History*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013.
- Traherne, Thomas. *Centuries*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960.
- Treloar, Geoffrey R. “The Word Disputed: The Crisis of Evangelical Biblicism in the 1920s and 1930s.” *Lucas* 2, no. 7 (June 2014): 105–22.
- Wacker, Grant. *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Warden, Bert. Review of *The Attributes of God*, by A. W. Tozer. *Alliance Life*, October 29, 1997.
- Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Edited by Samuel G. Craig. N.p., n.d.
- Watson, J. D. *The Forgotten Tozer: A. W. Tozer’s Challenge to Today’s Church*. Meeker, CO: Sola Scriptura Publications, 2013.
- Wells, David F. *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- _____. Introduction to *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, edited by David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.

- _____. “‘No Offense: I Am an Evangelical’: A Search for Self-Definition.” In *A Time to Speak: The Evangelical-Jewish Encounter*, edited by A. James Rudin and Marvin R. Wilson, 20–40. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.
- Wells, David F., and John D. Woodbridge. *The Evangelicals*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975.
- Wenninger, J. C. “Tozer Still Speaks.” *Alliance Life*, April 9, 1997.
- Wesley, John. *The Journal of John Wesley: A Selection*. Edited by Elisabeth Jay. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- _____. *Sermons on Several Occasions*. Vol. 1. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1851.
- Wick, Robert Stanley. “A. W. Tozer on Sanctification: A Study Emphasizing Doctrine and Practical Application.” MA thesis, Seattle Pacific University, 1967.
- Wiersbe, B. “The Pursuit of God.” *Partnership*, September 1, 1985.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. “A. W. Tozer and the Mystics.” *Moody Monthly*, December 1, 1971.
- _____. *50 People Every Christian Should Know: Learning from Spiritual Giants of the Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.
- _____. “The File-Card Mentality.” *Good News Broadcaster*, September 1982.
- _____. *Walking with the Giants*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976.
- Wiest, Frederick Nevin. “The Impact of Personal Prayer on Spiritual Maturity Among Selected Christian Missionary Alliance Pastors.” EdD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005.
- Wilkins, Steve, and Don Thorsen. *Everything You Know about Evangelicals Is Wrong (Well, Almost Everything): An Insider’s Look at Myths and Realities*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.
- Williams, Daniel K. *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Williams, Garry J. “Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (March 2007): 71–86.
- Wilson, Ernest Gerald. “The Christian and Missionary Alliance: Modifications of Its Original Objectives.” PhD diss., New York University, 1984.
- Winkworth, Susanna, trans. *Theologica Germanica*. London: Stuart & Watkins, 1966.
- Woodbridge, John D. *Biblical Authority*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

Worthen, Molly. "Defining Evangelicalism: Questions That Complement the Quadrilateral." *Fides et Historia* 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 83–86.

ABSTRACT

A.W. TOZER: A MYSTICAL AND CONFESSIONAL EVANGELICAL

James Joshua Tancordo, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018
Chair: Dr. Nathan A. Finn

One of the most intriguing aspects of Tozer's ministry is the extent to which he drew from the writings of medieval Catholic mystics. In fact, twenty-eight of the thirty-five books on his recommended reading list were written by Catholics who lived either during or soon after medieval times. Needless to say, this is not something people would normally expect from a pastor in the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Nevertheless, Tozer appears to have been profoundly influenced by these writers and developed a deep appreciation for them. This dissertation argues that while A. W. Tozer had a number of notable mystical tendencies, his spiritual insights are demonstrably within confessional evangelical boundaries. In other words, he drew deeply from the well of medieval Catholic mysticism but was, in the end, successful in maintaining his confessional evangelical identity and values. He was nourished by what he viewed as true and carefully discarded the rest. Furthermore, in demonstrating Tozer's confessional evangelical identity, this dissertation also describes the distinct contours of his thoughts about various matters central to evangelicalism. And to conclude, the dissertation considers how Tozer is a model of how Christians can be uncompromising in their doctrinal convictions and yet benefit from a wide variety of spiritual writers, even those of other traditions.

VITA

James Joshua Tancordo

EDUCATION

B.S., Liberty University, 2010

M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Hospice Chaplain, Amedisys Hospice, Florence, Alabama, 2011–2014

Lead Pastor, Redeeming Grace Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2014–