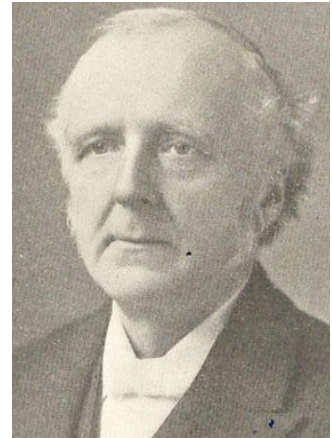


F.B. Meyer and the Call to Spirit-Empowered Witness

During the summer of 1917, two British Baptist ministers, J.S. Harrison and Alfred Bird, made an urgent call to F.B. Meyer (1847-1929), “probably the most celebrated Baptist minister of the early twentieth century.” With the battlefields of Europe strewn with millions of war dead, Harrison and Bird encouraged Meyer to bring an urgent wake-up call to the Church in relation to the Second Coming of Christ. Meyer’s response was to contact Alfred Henry Burton (Brethren) and Earl Legh Langston (Anglican), chairman and secretary of the Prophecy Investigation Society respectively.



The Prophecy Investigation Society was founded on May 24, 1842, when Henry Montagu Villiers, later Bishop of Durham, convened a conference at St. George’s Anglican Church in Bloomsbury, London. His inspiration had been the Albury Park (Surrey, England) and Powerscourt (Dublin, Ireland) conferences of the 1820s and 1830s, which had brought together a number of Britain’s leading evangelical scholars. Many who had attended the Albury Park Conferences helped establish the new society, which, as Villiers outlined in his opening address in 1842, was dedicated to investigating “the certainty, nature, and scriptural prominence of the Second Advent.” Eminent writers on Bible prophecy joined, including David Baron, W.E. Vine, J.C. Ryle, and Sir Robert Anderson, the former Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police who led the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard during the ‘Jack the Ripper’ case. Anderson was a close friend of John Nelson Darby, the founding father of Plymouth Brethrenism, and preached with Darby in southern Ireland. When the P.I.S. asked Anderson to write a

manual on Daniel 9 and the “seventy-weeks” prophecy, he wrote what would be his final treatise, entitled, *Unfulfilled Prophecy and ‘The Hope of the Church’* (1917). In conclusion he made the following appeal:

“If even a very few Christians in every place would begin to ‘speak often one to another’ about the Coming of the Lord, they would soon come together to pray for His Return ... and to pray the prayer which He Himself has given us, ‘Even so come, Lord Jesus.’”

Back to the summer of 1917, when F.B. Meyer contacted Burton and Langston about the need for a new campaign to herald Christ’s return. On October 15, 1917, Meyer hosted a prayer breakfast in London, to which he invited a small group of his ministerial friends. He asked them to consider “whether, in view of the momentous happenings in Europe, it might not be desirable to awaken the church to consider the synchronising of those events with the predicted signs of the Lord’s Second Advent.” A pre-written statement was presented to the group as a basis for discussion. As Meyer later recalled, “The unanimous sentiment was that the hour was ripe for the issuing of a call to the church.” A second prayer breakfast followed and a statement, which became known as the ‘Advent Testimony Manifesto,’ was finalised. Events now began to take a dramatic turn.

On November 2, 1917, in a letter written by British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild of the Zionist Federation, David Lloyd George’s government formally approved “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” (the Balfour Declaration). It seemed to Meyer and his colleagues that the Lord Himself was giving a clear signal for them to move forward. The seven-point Manifesto was released to the British press on November 8 headlined ‘The Significance of the Hour,’ in which the any-moment Rapture of the Church, the imminent restoration of Israel, and the present duty of Christians, were

all highlighted. In addressing some of the implications of the Manifesto, Meyer drew particular attention to the commission which the Lord had given to His Church:

“The pressing duty of the church is to exercise her witnessing function. She is to bear witness to these and similar truths as they are contained in Scripture ... It is certain that such witness-bearing will incur dislike and opposition. It has always been so. Witnesses are often martyrs. But their lives, characters and words are seed-germs, which carry life, as the sea-birds carry to the coral isles the germs of vegetation.”

The Committee of the Prophecy Investigation Society unanimously endorsed the Manifesto, and upon hearing Meyer address them in person, resolved to assist him in organising “a great public meeting in Queen’s Hall on the Lord’s Coming.” The princely sum of £158 was guaranteed in order to secure the venue. All who attended the Queen’s Hall meeting on December 13, 1917 were still coming to terms with the dramatic news of General Allenby’s liberation of Jerusalem just four days earlier.



One of the speakers at the Queen’s Hall that day was Pastor William Fuller Gooch (1843-1929). Descended from Puritan stock, his father, a Wesleyan Methodist, preached until he was 83. In addressing the crowd of 3,000 in London, Fuller Gooch placed the emphasis not on studying and dissecting Bible prophecy, but on worshipping and longing for Jesus. His words are salutary for today:

“Our desire is as little children to sit at the feet of our coming Lord, to learn of Him, and to follow no schools of interpretation, whatever

they are, but as disciples to follow Himself and His own precious Word ... Signs we discern; signs we appreciate in their solemn importance; signs we would study in the light of the Divine Word. But we are not looking for signs. We are looking for Christ ... He is coming, and ... while it is true that the day when His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives may be yet distant ... that makes no difference to the blessed hope which He has given to those who are His redeemed, watching, waiting, believing servants – that at any moment He may come for them.”

Upon hearing news of Fuller Gooch’s death in 1929, G. Campbell Morgan, who preceded Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel in London, paid him the following tribute: “Suffice it to say that for many years there has been no man in England for whom I have had a profounder regard as an expositor of the Word.” Fuller Gooch will be unknown to most people, but I include him in this article not simply because of the role he played in the foundation of PWMI, but because of his focus on the Lord Jesus, *and* on the emphasis he brought, which is sadly lacking in many parts of the pre-trib and pro-Israel Church, on the need for the ongoing empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In a sermon decrying denominationalism as a hindrance to the Gospel and to Christian growth, Fuller Gooch declared:

“In so far as the Church has got away from Pentecostal principles and paths, it has not been by the leading of the Spirit, but by the failure to walk in His ways; and the lack of Pentecostal power must surely be attributed to the lack of Pentecostal practice.”

As we will see, F.B. Meyer was just as convinced, if not more so, of the need for every believer to receive the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Born in London and of German descent (his great-grandfather was a close friend of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach), Meyer was a

much loved minister, a tireless champion for the poor and needy, a formidable crusader against immorality, and a zealous supporter of foreign missions. A popular writer of biblical biographies and devotional commentaries, five million copies of his books were sold during his lifetime. Meyer served as president of the Free Church Council (1904), president of the World's Sunday School Association (1907), and president of the Baptist Union (1907). The *Daily Telegraph* described him as "The Archbishop of the Free Churches," while another newspaper, the *British Weekly*, hailed him as "The evangelical comet of our age" on account of his many trips overseas. In 1899, the *New York Observer* described him as a preacher of "international fame" whose services "are constantly sought by churches over the wide and increasing empire of Christendom." The *New York Times* frequently covered his visits to America. Such was his reputation in the United States that in 1898 Meyer was invited to Washington D.C. to open the Senate in prayer, and spoke at length to President William McKinley, who made a lasting impression on him. However, as extraordinary as his achievements were, he was in no doubt as to where all the credit lay. As he stated on one occasion,

"I am only an ordinary man. I have no special gifts. I am no orator, no scholar, no profound thinker. If I have done anything for Christ and my generation, it is because I have given myself entirely to Christ Jesus, and then tried to do whatever He wanted me to do."



F.B. Meyer was one of the “oldest and most trusted speakers” at the annual Keswick Convention in the Lake District. During one such convention in 1887, he was listening to Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission speak, when he was suddenly struck with the realisation

that there was something missing from his Christian walk and ministry. He had been born-again, and had served as a pastor for fifteen years, and yet he knew that Hudson Taylor possessed something which he did not, namely the Pentecostal gift, or baptism, of the Holy Spirit. That evening he walked from the Keswick tent and climbed a hill. As he remembered,

“I was too tired to agonise, so I left the prayer meeting and as I walked I said, ‘My Father, if there is one soul more than another within the circle of these hills that needs the gift of Pentecost, it is I. I want the Holy Spirit, but I do not know how to receive Him and I am too weary to think, or feel, or pray intensively.’ Then a Voice said to me, ‘As you took forgiveness from the hand of the dying Christ, take the Holy Ghost from the hand of the living Christ and reckon that the gift is thine by a faith that is utterly indifferent to the presence or absence of resultant joy. According to thy *faith* so shall it be unto thee.’ So I turned to Christ and said, ‘Lord, as I breathe in this whiff of warm night-air, so breathe into every part of me Thy blessed Spirit.’ I felt no hand laid on my head, there was no lambent flame, there was no rushing sound from heaven: but by *faith* without emotion, without excitement, I took, and took for the first time, and I have kept on taking ever since.”

In his book, *Elijah and the Secret of His Power*, which he wrote the following year, Meyer focused on Pentecost, not as an historic event, but as a present necessity:

“He [the Lord Jesus] did not give at Pentecost an experience which He either would not or could not maintain. Pentecost was simply meant to be the specimen and type of all the days of all the years of the present age. And if our times seem to have fallen far below this blessed level, it is not because of any failure on God’s part; but because the Church has neglected this holy doctrine. Christians have seemed to suppose that the filling of the Holy Ghost was the prerogative of a few; the majority of them have never thought of it as within their reach; and the Church has been simply paralysed for want of the only power that can avail her in her conflict against the world ... We never can regain or hold our true position until all believers see that the filling of the Holy Ghost is equally for them as for the first Christians ... No doubt He is in us if we are Christians; but we must never be content until He is in us in power ... There must be no reserve; no holding back ... The whole nature must be unbarred, and every part yielded. There is a law in physics that forces work in the direction of least resistance. Let us present no resistance whatever to the working of the Holy Ghost. He who resists least will possess most.”

Some years later a New York newspaper reporter attended one of Meyer’s meetings and was clearly impacted by what he heard. He wrote: “There was no attempt at oratory, no effort to produce great thoughts ... yet one felt that there was a power in the message.”

Using Meyer’s words, may we *resist* everything that does not line up with Scripture, including every tradition of men in the Church which binds us to doctrines and practices which have no biblical basis, and *possess* instead everything that the Lord has for us that we may be better witnesses for Him. In conclusion, let us recall where the Lord Himself placed the emphasis, when asked by His disciples about Israel’s restoration:

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But *you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’” (Acts 1:6-8; emphasis mine).

—Paul R. Wilkinson