

THAT WIGGLESWORTH PROPHECY

An exploration by Barry Chant

You have been chosen by God for a great move of the Holy Spirit...this move of God will be the greatest move of God ever known in mankind's history and will start towards the end of the 20th century and move into the 21st century. This move of God will start a great revival in Australia and spread throughout the world...

So reads one version of a prophecy that Smith Wigglesworth is said to have delivered many years ago. The document in which this statement occurs, prefaces it by these words, 'Across our nation many church leaders are proclaiming Smith Wigglesworth's prophecy...' and follows it with, 'This move of God is what we have been waiting and praying for.'¹

These comments reflect the deep longing that many Christians in the South Land of the Holy Spirit feel for a resurgence of the Kingdom of God. There is a widespread and justifiable conviction that the only answer to the rising tide of secularism that is creeping across the nation is an outpouring of God's Spirit. Many people are rightly praying to this end. When it appears that Smith Wigglesworth predicted just such an outpouring, the climate is conducive to such a word and it is readily received—and received readily with gladness.

There have been numerous circulars and publications over recent years containing comparable versions of the prophecy. There is no doubt that those who pass it on believe it to be true—they certainly hope it is—and their integrity is never in question. But *is* it true? Did Wigglesworth make such a declaration? In reality, it is impossible to prove that he did not. But that is not the issue. The question is, where is the evidence that he *did*? This is a particular challenge facing Christians. We trust each other and assume that what they tell us is true, especially if they are ministers of the Word. But what if the story-tellers are themselves misinformed?

Inevitably, there are those who will wonder why this question is being raised at all. What is wrong with believing that a great Antipodean revival has been prophesied? Why question it? Surely this is something every believer should instinctively be seeking?

It is easy to be excited about the Holy Spirit being the Spirit of power or of love, but in our propensity for these things, we tend to forget that Jesus spoke also of him as the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Falsehood has no part in Christian ministry. If it has no basis in fact, no story, no matter how attractive, can be told with integrity. This is being appreciated more strongly with the passing of time and the challenges threatening us from a sceptical world. For example, Christian tertiary colleges sometimes complain about the strictures of Government registration and accreditation, but one of the benefits of this has been a raising of standards and a more serious approach to diligent research and careful verification of what we believe.

Smith Wigglesworth (1859-1947) was born in 1859 in Yorkshire, England and converted to Christ as an eight-year-old at a Methodist meeting to which his grandmother had taken him. His upbringing was tough: because of his family's poverty, from the age of five he worked long hours in the fields and subsequently in a woollen mill.²

The family moved to Bradford where Wigglesworth became a plumber. They attended a Wesleyan Methodist church and had some contact with the Salvation Army where the young tradesman met and later married Mary Jane Featherstone. Polly, as he called her, taught him to read and write. Together they started a mission where they had significant success in bringing people to Christ and also in the ministry of healing, for which they came under some criticism.

In 1907, when he was 48 years old, Wigglesworth attended early Pentecostal meetings at Sunderland, where he was baptised in the Holy Spirit with the verification of speaking in tongues. His ministry stepped up to a new level and soon he and Polly were being invited to minister in many

¹ Circular letter to CRC pastors in New South Wales, 7 November 2012.

² C. Whittaker, *Seven Pentecostal Pioneers*. Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1985, 16-43; S. Burgess and E. M. Van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 1195.

churches. There were numerous conversions; people were baptised in the Spirit; many sick people were cured.

Only six years later, Polly died. Wigglesworth now travelled widely – America, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand.

In Australia, in 1922, he was hosted in Sydney by Maxwell Armstrong (1881-1959), a former Salvation Army officer who was conducting Pentecostal meetings in his home. Armstrong was later to be the State Chairman of the Assemblies of God in New South Wales and his son Norman became one of the best-known and best-loved Pentecostal pastors in the country.³ In Melbourne, meetings were organised by Sarah Jane Lancaster (1858-1934), founder of Australia's first Pentecostal congregation, commonly known as Good News Hall. They were so successful they were transferred to the great Wirth's Olympia, where the original auditorium seated five thousand people. Large crowds attended and many reported stories of miraculous healing.⁴ Smaller meetings were conducted in Adelaide and some country towns.

Wigglesworth returned to Australia in 1927. His book *Ever Increasing Faith* contains some of the sermons he delivered, taken down in shorthand by Leila Buchanan, Mrs Lancaster's daughter, together with some testimonies of healing.

In successive years, until his death in 1947 close to the age of 88, Wigglesworth's name grew in esteem and ultimately began to attain legendary status. There were numerous claims of miracles that occurred through his ministrations and some of people being raised from the dead. He was reputedly rough and ready in his manner of prayer, sometimes actually striking people in an effort to drive out the affliction or the spirit behind it. Yet he was also widely recognised as a gentleman: he dressed smartly and treated people with respect and compassion. All of this is well-substantiated by history, but, with due respect to the memory of a venerable and rightly revered minister of the gospel, one writer goes rather too far when he says of him that his miracles and healings 'shook the churches of Australia and New Zealand to their very core', that he 'changed the face of modern Christianity' and 'set the stage for the Charismatic Renewal' and that 'among hundreds of major ministries, his name is but one of a handful that has stood the test of time'.⁵ None of these statements is consistent with the known facts.

The claim that Wigglesworth prophesied that the last great revival of history would occur in Australia is one story of that has gained considerable purchase in the minds of many Australian Christians. I am frequently asked what I think about it and how I believe it will occur.

Written accounts

The problem lies in finding verifiable evidence that he actually uttered such a prediction. For a start, there is no reference to it in the recognised Wigglesworth biographies where one would expect a declaration of such import to be included without question. That it is not necessarily gives us pause.

So what other grounds are there for its credibility? When I first heard about it, I assumed that the prophecy was delivered during one of Wigglesworth's visits to Australia, which would appear to be the appropriate environment for such a word. One piece of Christian folklore has it that he prophesied revival in Australia at a ministers' convention in Goolwa, South Australia, in the 1930s.⁶ However, his last trip to that State was in 1927 and there is no extant record that he ever visited Goolwa at any time.

Moreover, there is no record of any such prophecy in extant contemporary journals or published documents. *Good News* magazine, first issued in 1910, is silent on the subject, although there are regular reports about or articles by Wigglesworth in its pages. There are dramatic testimonies of healing,⁷ a story of Wigglesworth testifying that the Lord Jesus stood alongside his chair while he ministered in Good News Hall,⁸ reports of his campaign meetings,⁹ transcripts of sermons preached in

³ B. Chant, *Heart of Fire*. Unley Park: Tabor, 1984, 127-8; B. Chant, *The Spirit of Pentecost*. Lexington: Emeth, 2011, 335-6.

⁴ Chant, 1984: 34-60, 67-70; Chant, 2011: 107-152

⁵ C. Stringer, *Smith Wigglesworth in Australia and New Zealand* Robina: Col Stringer Ministries, 2009.

⁶ P. Davies, personal correspondence, 21 November, 2013.

⁷ *Good News*, vol. 15, no. 8, August 1924; *Good News*, vol. 17, no.2, Feb 1926

⁸ *Good News*, vol. 17, no. 10, October 1926.

⁹ *Good News* vol 15, no 3, March 1924, cover page; Vol. 15, no. 3, March 1924, 11.

Melbourne or Adelaide such as ‘Filled with God’, ‘Whosoever’, ‘On the Incarnation of Man’, ‘The Abiding Spirit’ and ‘Full of the Holy Ghost’,¹⁰ regular advertisements for his books and even for ‘Smith Wigglesworth patent bottles of oil’¹¹—but nothing about a prediction of a divine visitation beginning in Australia.

The Australian Evangel and Glad Tidings Messenger contains occasional reports or references to Wigglesworth,¹² but again there is no mention of any such prophecy.¹³

The same applies to the English Pentecostal journals *Confidence* and *Redemption Tidings*. Wigglesworth’s visit to Australia in 1922 was enthusiastically reported in *Confidence*. Winnie Andrews of Good News Hall told of several people who had previously been unable to walk who left the meetings on their own two feet. There is also a report quoted from Melbourne’s *Argus* newspaper of the Olympia meetings which noted that while Wigglesworth ‘was not successful in all cases’, there appeared to be many in whom there was ‘startling and immediate improvement’.¹⁴ Subsequent items tell of ‘hundreds saved and healed’; of young men offering themselves for full time service in Sydney;¹⁵ of significant healings at the 1927 Melbourne meetings; and also of unusual methodology—

In many of the meetings Brother Wigglesworth would pray for all who would stand up and believe that the Lord would heal them. He would say... that he would count three and at the time he would say three everyone who would dare to believe and receive healing were to spring to their feet and cry out to God that they received deliverance in Jesus’ name. The response to this method was always most hearty... Many testified to being healed in this way.¹⁶

Redemption Tidings quotes some specific accounts of divine healing, including the story of one woman who was due for surgery and actually made it to the operating theatre where she was told by her physician that an operation was no longer necessary.¹⁷ There is also a printed sermon by Wigglesworth in which he refers to four hundred people being baptised in the Holy Spirit, apparently in 1922.¹⁸ In neither journal is there reference to any Wigglesworth prophecy.

In *Ever Increasing Faith*, the 1924 compendium of Wigglesworth sermons, reportedly preached in Australia and transcribed by Leila Buchanan, daughter of Sarah Jane Lancaster of Good News Hall,¹⁹ certain chapters on healing are followed by testimonies of healing, some from his Australian visits.²⁰ But there are no reports of him prophesying, even at the conclusion of a chapter on prophecy.

Oral accounts

In 1993, a leading Australian Pentecostal pastor, in a published article, referred to ‘reliable accounts’ of the prophecy. So I wrote to him asking him if he could supply their source.²¹ In his reply, he apologised and said he was unable to substantiate them. He thought that maybe he had heard about it from one of the Australian Pentecostal ‘old-timers’ but was not sure. The most likely ‘old-timer’ would have been Philip Duncan (1899-1990) who was present in Wigglesworth’s first meetings in 1921-1922. In subsequent years, Duncan wrote regular reports in the *The Australian Evangel* and also authored several small books, including one entitled *Pentecost in Australia*, in which he discusses Wigglesworth’s visits—

¹⁰ *Good News*, vol 14, no 11, Nov 1923, 7; vol 16, no 12, Dec 1925, 2-3; Vol. 17, no. 12, December 1926, 7-9; vol 15, no 2, February 1924, pages 5-7; .vol 23, no 8, Aug 1932, 6-7

¹¹ *Good News*, vol 15, no 5, May 1924, 18.

¹² E.g. *Australian Evangel*, vol. 2, no. 2, August 9, 1927; no. 2, April, 1939.

¹³ It is actually surprising to see so few references to Wigglesworth in *The Australian Evangel* given the attention he is said to have aroused during his visits here.

¹⁴ ‘Healings in Australia’, *Confidence*, April-June 1922, 28; *Pentecostal Evangel*, 15 April, 1922.

¹⁵ ‘Mr Wigglesworth at the Antipodes’, *Confidence*, July-September, 1922, 43.

¹⁶ ‘Healings at Wigglesworth Meeting, Richmond Temple, Melbourne’, *Confidence*, June 1927, 8.

¹⁷ *Redemption Tidings*, June 1927, 8; reports of healing were also quoted in the American *Pentecostal Evangel*. See S. Wigglesworth, *Ever Increasing Faith*, Springfield: Gospel Publishing House (1924), 1971:48-9.

¹⁸ *Redemption Tidings*, February 1927, 5. It is not clear from the context whether Wigglesworth is referring here to his own earlier ministry in Australia or to the position at the time of his preaching (May 1926).

¹⁹ B. Chant, *Heart of Fire*, Plympton: Tabor, 1997:45.

²⁰ S. Wigglesworth, *Ever Increasing Faith*, Springfield: Gospel Publishing House. 1924:22, 41-42.

²¹ Letter dated 5 November 1993.

God was with him in truly wondrous power and unction and his meetings were of apostolic order, for the signs predicted by Christ in Mark 16 followed his ministry. Crowds confessed Christ and numbers were healed, for Mr Wigglesworth was mightily filled with the Holy Ghost and with inspired faith.

He convinced many that God's methods had never altered for the supernatural was displayed continually and the gifts of the Spirit were in constant operation in his meetings.²²

This was indeed a tribute of apostolic dimension but it makes no mention of prophetic proclamation.

Elsewhere, in recounting the story of his own conversion and decision to be a minister of the gospel, Duncan notes that when he was a 28-year-old it was Wigglesworth who laid hands on him and ordained him.²³ He goes on to say that he knew Wigglesworth 'very well' and that the evangelist often exhorted him to be faithful to the Lord. He notes that his preaching was 'more the voice of prophecy' and that Wigglesworth did prophesy on at least two occasions. The first was to the pastor of the Baptist Church where he first preached in Sydney and where they rejected his Pentecostal ministry. In response, he declared that 'they knew not the day of their visitation'. The second foretold that Duncan, would serve on a world committee, which came to pass some decades later, when he became a member of the World Pentecostal Presidium.²⁴

In a personal letter to me written in 1976, Duncan makes further reference to that prophecy—

He had the ministry gift of a prophet and spoke with great authority. He laid hands on me in 1928 and prophesied that one day I would be appointed to a World Committee which I queried, but it came to pass nearly 40 years later when I was called to the World Pentecostal Presidium to represent Australia... He preached in a prophetic way, often bursting into tongues and interpretation as he preached... He never established any churches for he wasn't an apostle, but he was a prophet who brought inspiration to the church... His public ministry offended the established ministers and in Wigglesworth's first public meeting before 1000 mixed company, he prophesied that his ministry would be rejected in Sydney, and it was.²⁵

It is interesting that here again Duncan goes out of his way to mention Wigglesworth's prophetic ministry yet makes no reference to any prophecy about Australia.

Not long after his death, I asked Duncan's widow Molly and his daughter Ruth whether the plumber-turned-prophet had foretold revival in Australia. 'I never heard my Dad say that,' said Ruth. 'The only two things he prophesied were over Dad and over Brother Greenwood.'²⁶

Charles Greenwood (1891-1969) was converted in 1910 at the age of 19 and filled with the Spirit in 1913. In 1916 he began meetings in the Sunshine area in Melbourne. When the young evangelist A C Valdez (1896-1988) came to Australia from California in 1925, they linked up and soon revival meetings were being held. The growing numbers necessitated a shift to Prahran Town Hall and within a year to their own premises, a former theatre that they renamed Richmond Temple. The Pentecostal Church of Australia developed and twelve years later merged with Queensland congregations to form the Assemblies of God in Australia.²⁷ Greenwood was primarily an evangelist with a forthright approach to preaching and a passion for overseas mission. He was for many years a recognised leader in the Pentecostal movement. Richmond Temple was one of the places where Wigglesworth preached in 1927.²⁸ But there is no record in any of Greenwood's preaching or teaching to a prophecy about Australia from the English evangelist. Years ago I personally interviewed members of his family;

²² P. Duncan, *Pentecost in Australia*, published by the author, n.d., 5.

²³ P. Duncan, *Great Things He Has Done*, published by the author, n.d., 3.

²⁴ Duncan, *Great Things*, 45-6; P. Duncan, *The Charismatic Tide*, published by the author, 1978, 4-7.

²⁵ Personal correspondence, Philip Duncan to Barry Chant, 26 May 1976. Note that Duncan may have the date wrong here. The prophecy to which he refers was probably given in 1927. Note also his comment that Wigglesworth did not plant churches, although he assisted them to grow. In Australia, in spite of Stringer's claim that the evangelist saw 'several Pentecostal churches birthed' (Stringer, 2009, 28), as far as is known, no new congregations were established directly by him, although existing small groups of people in Adelaide and Sydney were galvanised into organising themselves as a congregation as a result of his visit in 1922.

²⁶ M. Duncan and R. Woodham, personal interviews, 29 October 1993.

²⁷ Most of the Queensland congregations had previously been affiliated with Good News Hall under the name Apostolic Faith Mission.

²⁸ See Burgess and Van der Maas, 2002, 681; Chant, 1984, 87-102; Chant, 2011, 189-202.

none of them made reference to any such prophecy.²⁹

Another 'old-timer' could have been Norm Armstrong (1917-2011), one of Max Armstrong's sons.³⁰ As a five-year-old, he was present when Wigglesworth spoke to a small crowd crammed into his modest family home in Sydney and he and his brother were consigned to the bathroom to make room for others. On several occasions it was my privilege to interview him. He remembered hearing that Wigglesworth told his Dad to 'get out of this house and into a hall' but he had no memory of any prophecy being given about the nation. Given his age at the time, this is not surprising; but neither did he have any memory of ever being told about such a prophecy.³¹

Danny Nalliah, fervent revivalist, outspoken preacher and controversial head of the religio-political group Rise Up Australia,³² recently claimed that when he visited Revival Life Centre in 2008, the church where Armstrong had been pastor for over thirty years, the 92-year-old recounted how when he had been in that bathroom so many years before, Wigglesworth had stopped preaching, told him to come out, laid hands on him and prophesied:

Australia, you have been chosen by God for a great move of the Holy Spirit. This move of God will be the greatest move of God ever known in mankind's history and will start towards the end of the 20th century and move into the 21st century. This move of God will start a great revival in Australia, spread throughout the whole world and usher in the second coming of Jesus. This will be the final revival before the coming of the Lord. God will raise up a man in Australia who will lead this move of God under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This man will bow down to no one other than God. He will have tremendous favour in the nation of Australia.

Then, according to Nalliah, Wigglesworth had gone on to say that one day Armstrong would lay hands on this age-ending leader and 'pass on the mantle of God' to him; and that Armstrong had then turned to Nalliah, declared, 'You are that man I have been waiting for so many years, come here.' and laid hands on him accordingly.³³

There are some difficulties with this narrative. First, the chances of a five-year-old boy remembering a prophecy in such detail are negligible. Second, Armstrong's own family have no knowledge of any such prophecy being made about him. They cannot recall it ever being mentioned in their family history.³⁴ Were it to be true, one would expect Armstrong's parents, like Mary, to have treasured such words in their hearts and made them known to others. Third, none of the leaders of that church recalls Armstrong making any such statement to Nalliah at the time of his visit.³⁵ Finally, anyone who knew Norm Armstrong personally would find it difficult to believe that he would act in such a way.

But it is equally difficult to believe that Nalliah would deliberately concoct such a story. He himself points out that when Armstrong laid hands on him, he fell on his knees and 'started sobbing and crying out to God' and that the presence of God was 'amazing'. He was clearly in an emotional state. Further, his recounting of the event occurred three years after it happened yet, improbably, yet he

²⁹ Les Greenwood, 10 September 1990; Lois Manley-Breen, July 1990; Charles Manley-Breen, July 1990, personal interviews.

³⁰ For a brief biography of Norman Armstrong see D. O'Keefe, 'Armstrong, Norman Lloyd', <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/ADPCM/a-to-d/armstrong-norman-l-1917-/>, accessed 7 March 2013.

³¹ N. L. Armstrong, personal interviews, 30 April 1990; October 1993.

³² Danny Nalliah achieved notoriety for his victory in the law suit where he fought and won the charge of vilification against Muslims (2006); for his prophecy that John Howard would win the 2007 federal election (he didn't); for his claim that the 2008 bushfires in which 173 people died were the consequences of Victoria's decriminalisation of abortion; and for connecting the 2011 Queensland floods with Kevin Rudd's anti-Israel comments.

³³ Danny Nalliah, 'Smith Wigglesworth's Prophetic Word of Australia's Mighty Revival', 19 November 2011. <http://catchthefire.com.au/2011/11/smith-wigglesworths-prophetic-word-of-australias-mighty-revival-a-must-read/> / accessed 15 February, 2013.

³⁴ G. Armstrong, personal correspondence, 8 March 2013.

³⁵ R. Harvey, personal interview, 22 February 2013.

quotes Armstrong word-for-word. And only one line refers specifically to him. Did he simply misinterpret some of what the elderly pastor said?³⁶

The Du Plessis prophecy

In his book *Smith Wigglesworth in Australia and New Zealand*, Stringer claims to have evidence from eye-witness reports of Wigglesworth's prophecy.³⁷ In fact, none of the people he nominates actually saw or heard Wigglesworth give such a message: their testimony is second-hand. He quotes Billye Brim, an American preacher, as saying that she knew the person to whom the Wigglesworth prophecy was given. In two emails to me, she states that this was David Du Plessis.³⁸ Stringer adds that Du Plessis told Brim personally that Wigglesworth had said that the last great outpouring of the Holy Spirit would take place in Australia, New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific.³⁹ Similarly, Stringer refers to American faith-teacher Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003) who also quotes David Du Plessis as saying something similar.⁴⁰ These are not eye-witness reports.

David Du Plessis (1905-1987) was born in South Africa. He was converted as a child and baptised in the Holy Spirit at the age of 13. After several years in evangelistic and pastoral work, he became editor of the journal of the Apostolic Faith Mission of which from 1936 to 1947 he was also the General Secretary. It was while he held this office that he had a dramatic and life-changing encounter with Wigglesworth as a result of which he ultimately resigned his position and embarked on an ambassadorial ministry to church leaders of all denominations all around the world—a ministry that earned him the title of 'Mr Pentecost'.⁴¹

It is possible to arrive at a fairly accurate rendering of Wigglesworth's prophecy to Du Plessis—or at least of Du Plessis' memory of it—because he often recounted the story. A comprehensive version of the circumstances and the prophecy was given in a talk he presented in August 1970, which was carefully recorded.⁴² Fifteen years later, he delivered a shorter version on Christian television.⁴³ As with the four Gospels, there are some variations in wording and each version includes details not found in the other; otherwise the stories are identical. Further, as Du Plessis can be seen and heard relating what happened himself, these talks must be considered as of greater authority than second-hand reports of what Wigglesworth said.⁴⁴

Here is an edited transcript of the relevant sections of one of the talks:

At six o'clock [in the morning] I was in the office. The door suddenly flew open almost with a bang. Wigglesworth walked forward and commanded me to stand up and 'come out here'. I stood up and came meekly over to him and he put his hands on my shoulders and stood me up against the wall and looked straight into my eyes and began to prophesy.

The Lord says, 'You have been in your Jerusalem long enough. You have to go to the uttermost parts of the earth. And he is going to send you...' He began to prophesy things I didn't believe, didn't want and didn't expect to get. Completely out of my field, out of my vision for the Pentecostal movement. I believed in a Pentecostal movement that would

³⁶ A recording of the service would no doubt solve these problems, but so far all attempts to locate one have failed. On the other hand, one person who was present claims that 'what Danny said was basically right'; D. Crisp, personal correspondence, 27 July, 2013.

³⁷ Stringer, 2009, 75.

³⁸ Emails received 12 February 2013 and 15 February 2013.

³⁹ Stringer, 2009, 74.

⁴⁰ Stringer, 2009, 70-74.

⁴¹ Burgess and Van der Maas, 2002, 589-593.

⁴² Voices of Faith Giants,

<http://brothermel.podbean.com/category/david-du-plessis-recordings/>, accessed 12 February 2013; Colin C.

Whitaker, *Seven Pentecostal Pioneers* Springfield: Gospel Publishing House 1985, 37-39; B. Slosser, *A Man Called Mr Pentecost: David du Plessis*. Plainfield: Logos International, 1977.

⁴³ Television interview, 5 October 2008

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=s-pB6xtWqUE, accessed 12 February, 2013.

⁴⁴ For print records which are evidently based on these oral versions see also Whitaker, 1985, 37-39; B. Slosser, *A Man Called Mr Pentecost: David du Plessis*. Plainfield: Logos International, 1977.

sweep the world but ... out from the churches, separate from the churches...

‘And you will have the privilege to see and to participate in the most glorious and mightiest revival that ever has been known in Christian history. It will come to the old-line denominations’ (that’s what we called them).

‘Well,’ he said, ‘it is coming in a remarkable way. Ministers will accept the truth of the baptism and the churches will begin to accept this glorious enduement.’ He prophesied and made no distinction about any churches... I thought, ‘We haven’t even got what he is talking about. We are praying for something like that. But we want it for ourselves to show the other fellow. Here he says it will come through the other fellow.’

He went on... till finally he said, ‘It’s no use. I can’t tell you any more. There are some things even I don’t understand and I don’t know how to explain them to you.’ From two to four in the morning he had seen visions of this revival... He just bowed his head and said, ‘Lord bless him’ and walked out and closed the door.

I sat down at my desk and leaned my head on my hands and said, ‘Lord, I accept the warning but if this is going to happen I will need to be guided of you very, very much. I cannot go by what others have said. Woe betide the man who gets his life directed by some prophet or prophetess...’ I don’t know how long I sat there rather puzzled. There was a gentle knock at the door and there stood Wigglesworth again. ‘Good morning, brother David... How are you?’

‘Well, brother Wigglesworth, greatly puzzled.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you have been here, you talked to me, you prophesied and you told me visions and now you come and greet me as if you never saw me.’

‘But the Bible does say that the Lord said to the prophet, “Greet no man on the way...” Now I’ve delivered the message. What do you think of it?’

‘Brother Wigglesworth, I’m really amazed. And I just want to ask you, have you got a scripture?’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I have a Scripture. The Lord told me what Scripture to give you. Acts 6:7. This is what the Lord wants me to explain to you. First it’s a layman’s movement, a fisherman’s movement. But the second wave... becomes a clergy movement, a priesthood movement. After the work has been established through the laity and God has proven himself, then some priests will come in. and then there will be a great tremendous move because of the ministers... I wish I was younger because according to what the Lord said to me, you will see this great change and a great move of the Spirit come around about the middle of the century... Remember also this. You don’t have to worry about doing anything at all or seeing much of it until I am gone home... It will not even begin while I am alive so I won’t even see the beginnings of it... But you will see it.

And now a word of warning. God said all the things I have told you already will come to pass but you will see them and you will have a part in them on this condition that you remain humble and faithful. Then God will use you in a way that no one else is being used. Unusual. It will not be the trend. It will be you and God...’

He said to me, ‘Do you ever get airsick?’

I said, ‘Sir, I’ve never been in the air.’

He said, ‘Do you get seasick?’

‘Never been on the sea. I’ve done all my travel in my own country of South Africa.’

‘Well’, he said, ‘You going to fly a lot and you will travel more than most men... Come here.’

Out I came again. He pushed me up against the wall. He prayed that I would never get sick when I travelled for the Lord.

Several things stand out here. First, there is no reference anywhere to Australia or New Zealand or the islands of the Pacific. Du Plessis visited Australia more than once and it was my privilege to meet him on several occasions. In fact, we corresponded for several years. I cannot remember him ever referring to a prophecy about revival in Australia. This is strange, because if there had been such a word, you would expect that he would have made strong reference to it in his public ministry in this wide South Land.

Second, the prophecy was clearly a strong personal message to Du Plessis himself. Third, it primarily concerned the mainline churches. Fourth, it was to begin sixty years ago.

Clearly this is not what people are talking about today. In all honesty, no matter how you interpret the words, they don't apply.

There is at least one other comment of interest. Lester Sumrall (1913-1996) was an American evangelist who had an effective ministry in the Philippines for many years where thousands were converted and there were significant signs and wonders. Later he was the first person to gain a 24/7 Christian television licence in the US, an achievement which opened the way for him to develop many other television and radio stations touching most countries. In the last decade of his life he founded LeSEA Global Feed the Hungry, an international program to alleviate poverty.⁴⁵

In the early 1930s, as a young man, Sumrall lived in England for a couple of years and was strongly influenced by both Assemblies of God leader Howard Carter (1891-1971)⁴⁶ and Smith Wigglesworth. In a television broadcast he tells how Wigglesworth once prophesied to him. Interestingly, this was probably not long before Wigglesworth addressed Du Plessis.

He said, 'You will be blessed and faith will reside within you: you will do unusual things.' I presumed it was a kind of a prophecy. And then he said, 'I wish to tell you something. Oh, I see it'. His eyes were burning like Elijah's eyes. His face was so strong as he was looking at me. I asked him, 'What do you see?' He said, 'I see revival coming to planet earth. I see revival coming to planet earth, maybe as never before. It will reach untold numbers and uncounted multitudes will be saved. No man will say, "So many, so many" because nobody will be able to count those that come to Jesus...'

He was prophesying and seeing a vision because he said, 'I see it'. He said, 'The dead will be raised, the arthritic will be healed, cancer will be healed.' He began to tell me of mighty things and that no disease would be able to stand before God's people and that it would be a world-wide situation, not local. It would be a world-wide thrust of God's power and thrust of God's anointing upon mankind. I was listening so intently to it and then he opened his eyes and looked at me and said, 'I will not see it but you shall see it.' And that was the end of it.⁴⁷

The similarity between this prophecy and the one given to Du Plessis is evident. If these reports are accurate—and there is no reason to believe they are not—it is evident that the concept of a marvellous, world-wide visitation from God was very much on Wigglesworth's heart at that time he spoke to Du Plessis. His words were coming from a long-term conviction that the Spirit was laying upon him, not just a momentary inspiration. But as in the other recorded incidents, there is no specific reference to Australia in the word given to Sumrall.

So what is the answer?

So what is the origin of Wigglesworth's alleged prediction of sweeping age-ending revival beginning in Australia? The answer seems disarmingly simple. Its origin almost certainly does lie in

⁴⁵ For brief biographical details see Burgess and Van der Maas, 2002, 1109-10; LeSEA Global Feed the Hungry, <http://www.feedthehungryaustralia.org/lestersumrall.php>, accessed 28 February 2013..

⁴⁶ Howard Carter was Chairman of the Assemblies of God in Great Britain for eleven years. For brief details see Burgess and Van der Mass, 2002, 456.

⁴⁷ Lester Sumrall, 'My Relationship with Smith Wigglesworth', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujZ1-6QGzC8>, accessed 28 February 2013. This transcript has been slightly edited to remove unnecessary repetition.

the prophecy to Du Plessis. But it appears that somehow or other, like a so-called Chinese whisper, the initial message has morphed into something else. It is highly probable, for example, that Wigglesworth's statement about Du Plessis being sent to the uttermost parts of the earth has been taken to apply specifically to the Antipodes: Stringer, as it happens, specifically claims this,⁴⁸ although it is doubtful that Wigglesworth understood it in such narrow terms. Other nations also see themselves in this way.⁴⁹ Then Wigglesworth's comment that the charismatic renewal would be the 'most glorious and mightiest revival' ever seen obviously appeals to many people in the isles of the sea who long for just such a visitation. Put these two elements together and you have the kind of thing presented in the opening paragraph of this paper—an excited conviction that Wigglesworth prophesied a mighty end-of-the-age revival in Australia and New Zealand.⁵⁰

Of course, such a prophecy does resonate with the widespread yearning for revival that dwells in the hearts of so many Christians. How we would love it to be true! But the issue is not what we would like Wigglesworth to have said but what he actually did say. The Spirit of Truth is not honoured by fanciful fables or urban myths, no matter how appealing they may be.

Other questions remain. Has Wigglesworth's prophecy about the Charismatic Movement actually been fulfilled? Was this Renewal the most glorious move of God ever seen? Has it eclipsed the days of the early Church? Or the Reformation? Or the Wesleyan revival? Or the classic Pentecostal revival? Arguably it has not. It is over 60 years since the time set by Wigglesworth for the beginning of the Charismatic Renewal and the indications are that although there was a delightful wave of the Spirit over denominational churches in the late 20th century, it has now waned and shows little evidence of burgeoning again. So is there still more to come? Or is that it? Conveniently, recent versions of the alleged prophecy describe it as beginning at the end of the 20th century and going on into the early 21st.

Perhaps even more to the point, does it matter whether a prophecy from Wigglesworth exists or not? And maybe we can go even a step further. To what extent does the expectation of revival hinge on whether or not Wigglesworth prophesied it at all? What if he did? Is that in itself sufficient to guarantee it? What if he didn't? Is that sufficient to stop it?

It is important to understand the nature of prophecy. Its primary purpose is always to bear witness to Christ—a point that Wigglesworth himself went to some pains to affirm.⁵¹ The fact is that if revival—or anything else—lies in God's sovereign purpose, it will happen anyway, whether prophesied or not. A prophecy may forewarn us of events but it does not in itself produce those events, nor does the absence of a prophecy forestall them. A prophecy cannot of itself create and hasten God's purpose; nor can the lack of a prophecy in itself deter or prevent it. As God himself has said, he knows the end from the beginning and what he says will happen: his purpose will be accomplished (Isaiah 46:9-11).

Revival is the New Testament coming alive and transforming individuals, churches and nations. Everything we need to inspire us to that is found in God's Word. It is by his Word that we live (Matthew 4:4). It is his Word that burns like fire and breaks rocks in pieces (Jeremiah 23:18). By the Word, the heavens and the earth were created (John 1:1-3; Hebrews 11:3) and by his Word they are sustained. The early Church grew when the Word grew (Acts 19:20). Whether it has been foretold or not, if we believe what the Scripture says, we will experience the blessing of God.

Perhaps we should be seeking more to discern what was spoken to us by the Son of God than what was allegedly uttered by a son of man—even such a great son of man as Smith Wigglesworth. It is in the name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit that revival comes (Acts 4:30-31; 1 Corinthians 6:11).

I have a sneaking suspicion that Wigglesworth himself would have agreed with that.

⁴⁸ Stringer, 2009, 72-73. Geographically Australia and New Zealand are globally diagonally opposite to Israel.

⁴⁹ When Pope Francis I, an Argentinian, was elected on 13 March 2013, he commented that the cardinals had gone 'to the end of the earth' to find a new Pope.

⁵⁰ The progression has been so strong that the exact words of the alleged prophecy are now being quoted as beyond question, as indicated in the quotation at the beginning of this paper.

⁵¹ Wigglesworth, 1971, 155, 159.

Writer's note: If any readers have further information of this subject, please contact me at barry@barrychant.com.

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