

Review: Julian Wilson, *Wigglesworth-The Complete Story*, Authentic Publishers, Milton Keynes, U.K., 2011

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Man of Incredible Faith

'Apostle of Faith' Wigglesworth (1859-1947) was a legendary Bible-Believing Christian:

“I believe in the Book from cover to cover, as the inspired Word of God.”

“The Word of God is full and final, infallible, reliable and up-to-date and our attitude towards it must be one of unquestioned obedience.”

Due to poverty he was at work age seven, saved age eight and after became a plumber's apprentice, then plumber. He began public ministry proper aged forty-eight. His healing ministry was unorthodox, including striking the devil inside the sick he healed.

Some of Smith's miracles performed:

*Tuberculosis-ridden man Lazarus raised from his deathbed.

*Man named Matthew raised from his deathbed.

*Lady with breast cancer that dropped out, then stored in a jar for meeting display.

*Lady with face cancer healed.

*Methodist preacher with throat cancer.

*Woman with consumption (who received a letter from her doctor validating the healing).

Wigglesworth had great opposition from Baptists, Lutherans, Medical

Associations and Atheists but pressed on undaunted. Cessationists had (and have) no option but attribute his deeds to Satan.

A vivid picture of Smith's life, personality, ministry, and relevant historical context is painted. In his own words:

“You take it [the Roman Catholic Church] does not rise again, the Roman power is always bloodshed and murder and always against the Holy Spirit...”

“Some people like to read their Bibles in the Hebrew, some like to read it in the Greek, but I like to read it in the Holy Spirit.” [This would have been the Authorized Version].

“Exaggeration is lying.”

“if there is anything about it to make you anything, it will bring you sorrow.”

“I'll only pray for you once; to pray twice is unbelief.”

“It's no use telling him [the devil] a second time, because if you do, he knows you didn't mean it the first time.”

“Put down your umbrellas of prejudice and come into the latter rain”

Nevertheless, some of Smith's doctrine seemed odd; he believed the Spirit of Christ and Holy Spirit were different, and that one is 'born into a new order by the Spirit of Christ.' He also left the Pentecostal Missionary Union after five years due to allegation of fornication from two women (which he strenuously denied).

The most moving part is Smith's journey to Australia from Britain; while on board he took opportunity to sing for the nightly entertainment, choosing the hymn 'Could I Tell It', which evoked sobs from the unsuspecting audience.

God truly uses the foolish and weak things-a barely literate plumber-to confound the wise, and the mighty. Wigglesworth's life will encourage the

believer to walk in faith and power of the Holy Ghost.

Introduction (pp. xiii-xvi)

Smith was illiterate until his mid twenties, having to work from age seven due to poverty. His forty year preaching ministry began age forty-eight when he was saved. Throughout life he is said to have been blunt and tactless.

The success of his ministry was based on close communion with God, and complete trust in the Bible [which was the AV during his day].

The Early Years (pp. 1-13)

Smith was born 10/6/1859 in Menston near Bradford. His father was an agricultural labourer which was insecure work. While attending a Methodist Chapel in Bradford age eight, Smith recounts his salvation by faith in Christ.

He attended an Anglican church where he was a choir member, and later was confirmed with the Bishop's laying on of hands.

In 1872 age 13, Smith found work in a woollen mill where a Plymouth Brethren man taught him plumbing and Bible doctrine. He was then baptised as a believer.

In 1875 William Booth visited Bradford and Smith began an affiliation with the Salvation Army

At age eighteen he sought plumbing work with the largest firm in Bradford, but after two years left for the port city of Liverpool. Moved by the plight of the poor he served with the Salvation army chapter there.

In 1880 (?) he was drawn back to Bradford and a Salvation Army girl Polly.

Polly (pp. 14-20)

Daughter of temperance Methodists, Mary Jane Featherstone was saved in a Salvation Army meeting with Wigglesworth in the audience. At that moment he felt she belonged to him.

'Polly' was commissioned an Officer by William Booth and began preaching and witnessing. Opposition to the Army was strong: rotten eggs, stones, dead animals, live coals and red-hot pennies in the collection plate.

In 1879 Smith left for Liverpool after Polly was transferred to Edinburgh due to their growing relationship.

After rumours of another relationship in Edinburgh, Polly quit the Army in 1882 and returned to Bradford. Wigglesworth also left saying God told him the movement had gone 'into natural things'. Wigglesworth and Polly were married that year, which lasted thirty years.

Bradford And The Bowland Street Mission (pp. 21-37)

Between 1882 and 1896 they had five children. Smith focused on plumbing and Polly on preaching and teaching. She was acting as a pastor[!], with Smith praying with repentant sinners after meetings. A year in the mid 1880s Bradford cold weather led to burst pipes, and for two years Smith had too much work.

During this time Polly became the spiritual authority in the house which led to Smith's frustration. After some soul searching, in July 1893 he had a spiritual epiphany which launched his ministry: leading a pony in the streets to attract children, Saturday evangelistic meetings with police protection, door-knocking.

Smith became involved in a Healing Home mission in nearby Leeds. To his consternation many wore glasses despite their belief in divine healing. Polly found out about the meetings and she was baptised by immersion.

At a 'Keswick Convention', Smith was a reluctant, unprepared preacher. Nevertheless fifteen came forward for healing, including a man on crutches who was healed.

At a meeting with another healing minister, Smith was confronted about

his hypocritical use of laxative salts. By faith he was able to discard the salts.

A local Baptist minister's wife Mrs Clark was dying and he sought prayer from Smith. Mr Clark did not believe in divine healing and so his prayers were about bereavement. Smith prayed for Mrs Clark, saw Jesus standing at the foot of her bed, and she arose healed. This triggered the Wigglesworth's decision not to consult any but God in future for their health.

This commitment was tested shortly after when Smith found he had appendicitis for six months and was dying. A young man and elderly woman came to pray for him. The man struck Wigglesworth in the stomach shouting 'come out you devil, in the name of Jesus' and he was healed.

While praying for a girl with tuberculosis, Smith found the atmosphere of disbelief difficult. Praying from 1100-0300, Jesus appeared and the girl was healed.

On 13/2/1904 James Berry, the former Crown Public Executioner (from 1884-1892) entered the Bradford Mission. He thought he was possessed by the devils of all the murderers he hanged (134). Berry was exorcised and converted by Smith and became an evangelist and death penalty abolitionist.

Despite weekly street preaching, Smith struggled to preach from the pulpit.

Baptised By Fire (pp. 38-58)

Until 1907, Smith believed the Holiness doctrine from the Keswick Convention which was a second work of grace in the believer. This differed from the Pentecostal view which healed to tongues as well as healing.

In July 1893 there were reports of tongues at All Saints Anglican, Monkwearmouth, Sunderland. The Pastor was Rev Alexander Boddy (1854-1930) who afterwards visited both Wales, then Azusa Street, Los Angeles in 1904.

A Methodist Thomas Bell Barrat from Norway made the greatest impact on Boddy. En route to the US, Barrat visited Boddy's church and a number of Spirit baptisms occurred. Smith sent two former Bradford Mission members to inquire of the phenomenon and they warned him it was of the devil. Nevertheless, Smith went in person to Sunderland to receive the baptism.

Smith's visit was a disappointment as the meetings there weren't 'on fire' like at Bradford. While at Sunderland he visited the local Salvation Army hall, where the people urged him to avoid the Pentecostals.

After four days Mary Boddy laid hands on Smith and he was baptised in the Spirit (though not speaking in tongues yet), receiving a vision of an empty cross and Jesus exalted at the right hand of the Father. At a service Boddy and 49 others were also baptised.

One Stanley Frodsham received the same a few months later in the exact same spot also prayed for by Mary Boddy.

Wigglesworth took this doctrine back to Bowland till 1919, Boddy remained in Sunderland from 1908-1914, and Frodsham went to Bournemouth in 1909.

Travelling back to Bradford, Smith was plagued by satanic doubt. He resisted requests to demonstrate tongues as 'activities of the flesh'. One day while going to work he was speaking in tongues out loud, then stopped to wait till God gave him the interpretation which He did.

The baptism turned Smith into a preacher from the pulpit and after his first effort eleven at the Bowland Mission were on the floor, helpless with laughter.

Polly was soon also baptised in the Spirit and the two became Pentecostal missionaries, Polly speaking from the pulpit.

Smith visited a small village near Grantham, Lincolnshire upon invitation to heal a dying young man Matthew. He prayed for most of the night and after morning service in a local Methodist Church shut himself in the room

alone with Matthew. After touching him, Smith was on the floor 'in the glory' for a quarter hour during which time Matthew arose, healed.

When in Wales, Smith heard of a man who climbed a mountain and came down with a face that shone like an angel's. He decided to climb the same mountain and experienced a day with the Lord.

Two year's prior, two men from Wales visited the Bowland Mission and said Lazarus, their church leader, a tin miner and lay pastor, had collapsed, contracted tuberculosis and become a helpless cripple.

Lazarus had been in this state for four years and the Lord put on Wigglesworth spirit while he was on the mountain to go and raise him up. When he arrived, Smith found 'there was not an atom of faith there'. He fasted dinner and was awoken at 0500 by the Lord to not break bread till communion, then at 0600 stating Lazarus would be raised by the Lord.

At 0800, Wigglesworth and seven others (making eight) went to Lazarus' bed and joined hands, praying only using the name Jesus. Five times the power of God fell and lifted, then five times it fell and remained. The sixth time, Lazarus made confession he had been bitter toward God, then he was healed. This miracle spread throughout the whole district and many were converted.

Soon after this Wigglesworth went into ministry full time, although his business continued till 1942 under his eldest son Seth.

After reading Lk 14.13-13, Smith decided to hold a banquet at Bowland inviting all the poor and 'a ragged mass of diseased humanity thronged into the mission'. After healing testimonies, Smith announced 'who wants to be healed?'

*A young epileptic suffering eighteen years was healed with the laying on of hands.

*A young man bent double had a spirit of infirmity cast out.

*A boy in iron casing was anointed with oil and healed.

*The woman Smith wheeled into the hall earlier was healed and scaled up her own stairs.

First America, Then The World (pp. 59-68)

On New Year's Day 1913, Polly left the Bowland Mission and died of a heart attack. In one account, Wigglesworth brought her back but Polly said God wanted her so he let her go. After the funeral Smith laid on her grave and replied to God he would only go on if he received a double portion of the Spirit (hers and his).

'I sail the high seas alone. I am a lonely man.' said Smith.

On 22/3/1915 Smith's youngest son George died, age eighteen possibly in Flanders in WWI. Smith's only daughter Alice (1884-1964) filled the void somewhat. She left for the Congo in her early twenties to become a missionary, marrying a Mr Smith in 1911 who died shortly of disease. Alice remarried James Salter (1890-1972), a pioneer along with William Burton of the Congo Evangelistic Mission. The Salters were regular and continual partners of Wigglesworth.

Soon after Polly's death, Smith announced he was leaving for Canada and the U.S. The condition was God had to provide money for Bowland and for the trip, and help with his poor memory. Before boarding a ship in Liverpool, a man gave him a blank diary, and God prompted him to record every detail over the month. Afterwards he had a memory like an encyclopaedia.

Smith set sail 19/4/1914 and by June had successful meetings in Montreal and Ottawa. In six months, he then went as far south as New Mexico, east to Philadelphia, north to Toronto and Winnipeg in Canada, then down to Los Angeles by October.

In Cazadero, northern California, Smith attended camp site meetings led by George and Carrie Judd Montgomery. Alexander Boddy was one of the featured speakers. After three weeks of meetings a deaf man was healed. Wigglesworth returned to LA and preached at Azusa Street Mission.

Smith also visited Pisgah Home for the poor, established by MD Finis

Yoakum who after recovering from a serious accident became a divine healing proponent.

At Victoria Hall, Oakland, a lady with breast cancer was healed by Smith with the laying on of hands as he cast out the demon. The bleeding dried up and the tumour moved from its seat and in five days dropped out leaving a cup-sized hole. The lady held the cancer in a glass at two meetings in testimony.

Wigglesworth returned to Britain from New York in 1915, on board the Lusitania during which a drunk was delivered. Wigglesworth attended his Easter Convention in Bradford, then the Whitsuntide one where, according to a Donald Gee (1891-1966) he was the main event. He was then invited to chair the Easter Preston Convention, the largest gathering of Pentecostals in Britain, which he did till 1946.

As a chairman, Smith excelled in grace and wisdom.

Wigglesworth the Man (pp. 69-93)

Even at home, Smith was always immaculately dressed-double breasted suit, handmade polished shoes. He was also physically strong, 'lungs of steel', and had great stamina.

His speech was often ungrammatical and filled with malapropisms, but when interpreting his own tongues was grammatically perfect.

A David du Plessis, in 1936 described Smith as an 'explosive, often cantankerous old man'.

“Some people like to read their Bibles in the Hebrew, some like to read it in the Greek, but I like to read it in the Holy Spirit.” [This Bible was the Authorized Version-not the 1881 RV].

At Zion City, near Chicago, a prayer meeting for pastors had them on the floor on their faces for an hour. In NZ, 1922 the same thing happened and all had to leave the room but Wigglesworth.

Social and racial distinctions were alien to Smith. He also severely dealt

with those who made private claims on his time.

Smith never read anything but the Bible from his mid-twenties (though he did read parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress*). His collections of sermons and teachings recorded were *Ever Increasing Faith* (1924), and *Faith that Prevails* (1938).

Smith would not touch food if he deemed its price was too excessive.

Lester Sumrall received a blessing from Smith before leaving for America in 1939. Smith prophesied there will be great revival on the planet with the dead raised. He would not see it but Lester would.”

Some quotes:

“Exaggeration is lying.”

“I'll only pray for you once; to pray twice is unbelief.”

“It's no use telling him [the devil] a second time, because if you do, he knows you didn't mean it the first time.”

“I don't hit them; I hit the devil.”

“Purity is vital to faith.”

“You cannot bind an evil power if there is any evil in you.”

“I have to die to what people think about me.”

[When served up pork] “Lord, if you can bless what you have cursed then bless this stinking pig. Amen.”

“I would rather have one soul saved than ten thousand healed.”

“You must always be above mentioning a financial matter on your side...never bring it to an assembly; if you do, you drop in the estimation of the assembly.”

Only Believe (pp. xiii-xvi)

In the 1880s and 90s Smith and Polly were influenced by Holiness Movement groups, which was a protest against growing worldliness of the Methodist Church. Those who separated from the Methodist Church sought to get back to John Wesley's early teachings of justification and sanctification.

The Keswick [non-denominational] Convention of 1875 (named after the town of Kendrick in Cumbria) was an offshoot of the Holiness Movement. The Keswick group was against tongues.

Another group was the Blue Ribbon Army led by 'Prophet' [Michael] Baxter and Elizabeth Baxter. There was also the Pentecostal League of Prayer, led by Richard Reader Harris QC. It published *Tongues of Fire*.

“Put down your umbrellas of prejudice and come into the latter rain”- Smith was one hundred percent Pentecostal.

Smith, though careful of denominationalism, obtained ministry credentials from the Assemblies of God in 1924.

Smith believed the body of Christ consists of all who are in Christ. His denomination was TSEWSA ('The Sect Everywhere Spoken Against').

Smith took communion every day, even if alone. He would attend 0700 morning prayers at the Salvation Army, Anglican Communion at 0800, then service at the merged Elim Alliance Church/Bowland Mission.

On the Bible:

“I believe in the Book from cover to cover, as the inspired Word of God.”

“The Word of God is full and final, infallible, reliable and up-to-date and our attitude towards it must be one of unquestioned obedience.”

On the Holy Spirit baptism:

“after anyone has received the Holy Ghost, there is no shaking and no

falling on the ground.”

Smith believed the Spirit of Christ and Holy Spirit are different, and that one is 'born into a new order by the Spirit of Christ.'

Smith rarely preached from the OT or Revelation and never prepared a sermon. In his 165 messages he was generally short and unstructured.

Smith preached at Aimee Semple McPherson's Angelus Temple in LA, 1927. He had the greatest anointing there of any place in the world.

Signs, Wonders And Miracles (pp. 109-128)

Smith claimed 90% of diseases were of satanic origin and top of the list was cancer, a living evil spirit destroying the body.

Cancer healings:

*Punched a wheelchair bound man with stomach cancer in the stomach, killing him. After ten minutes he revived and was healed.

*Man with rectum cancer.

*Man with oral cancer in Springfield Missouri.

Smith frequently anointed with olive oil and had his own bottle manufactured.

Smith once kicked a two year old with deformed feet off his platform into the audience after which it ran down the aisle.

Smith once caused a Church of England curate's legs to grow.

Smith in his late fifties was forced to wear glasses which he traced back to his criticism of the faith healer who also had to wear them. He also couldn't heal his daughter Alice's deafness.

Smith did not oppose medical treatment, but thought they should only be paid after they cured their patients. He was violently opposed to

vaccinations, believing the bacteria harmful.

Smith exorcised thirty-seven devils from a young girl.

Wigglesworth shunned worldly forms of entertainment as he believed these types of relaxation would leave him vulnerable to demonic attack.

Often when ministering demons cast out would fasten themselves on him, so that he had to deliver himself while on stage.

Opposition and Criticism (pp. 129-143)

Healing of a woman with cancer on the third request for her to stand up. A brownish-grey mass sprouting tendrils emerged from her and dropped on the floor.

The Pentecostal movement was subject to intense and bitter opposition-in England where it began in the Church of England with Alexander Boddy, he remained a staunch Anglican. In Bradford many of his adversaries would secretly request prayers for healing under cover of darkness.

His Bowland Street Mission was never a true Pentecostal church. In 1919, elders (and opponents of Pentecostalism) stole the building out from under him.

He was also blackmailed by people claiming damages from his healing methods.

In Switzerland, 1920 he was imprisoned twice for praying for the sick without a licence.

In Stockholm Sweden, 1921 the Lutheran State Church and medical profession joined forces (also lobbying the King of Sweden) against Smith and his visa extension was denied.

The tabloids in Britain largely ignored him but in Christchurch, New Zealand 1922 there was a scathing report about him. In 1923 the *New Zealand Baptist* took up persecution describing Smith as 'very illiterate'.

In 1920, due to allegations of fornication by two women, Smith resigned from the Pentecostal Missionary Union (Smith joined it 1915).

Campaign of the 1920s (pp. 144-178)

In Geneva, Switzerland a young woman dying of consumption was healed with her doctor issuing a letter to that effect.

A woman with face cancer returned the night after having been prayed for and the cancer was gone with new skin formed over the top.

In another service in Switzerland a blind man (from birth) was anointed and prayed for before receiving his sight.

Once, a dentist suspecting Smith of hypocrisy due to his perfect teeth for a sixty year old was confounded (Smith had all his teeth up to his death aged eighty-seven).

Once three insane people were planted in his meeting but he rebuked the demons inside them and they were silent.

In April, 1921 Smith visited Philadelphia Church in Stockholm which became the largest Pentecostal Assembly in the world by the 1930s.

In 1921, a Danish Missionary Fullerton in Henan Province was burdened to intercede for New Zealand, that it would have an imminent Pentecostal revival.

One of the pioneers of Pentecostalism in Australia was Janet (or 'Mother') Lancaster, leader of the Good News Hall assembly in Melbourne. Smith's Australian tour began in a Baptist Church January 1922 arranged by a member Dr R. H. Fallon (who did not know Smith was Pentecostal). Smith healed a wheelchair-bound lady to the consternation of a stone-faced congregation.

Self-abasement: “if there is anything about it to make you anything, it will bring you sorrow.”

In Brisbane at the Town Hall, The *Dominion* reported he healed fifty until

retiring from exhaustion.

Another night at the hall, while recounting a tale of raising a woman in her room, it appeared as brass. The whole hall itself then became brass!

Moving to Wellington, a most memorable healing was an eleven year old boy with infantile paralysis, whose twisted legs were healed. Smith concluded the second New Zealand tour in December, 1924.

Smith ministered in Holland, Belgium, Italy, even Palestine and Egypt.

Triumphing Over Trials (pp. 179-193)

In 1930, Smith began developing kidney stones. Despite extreme agony for two years, he continued to heal people. Denying medical treatment, he eventually passed huge stones.

On healing: "I never healed anyone...but I have seen the power of God work through men and heal."

In 1936 he ministered in Wynberg, Cape Province, South Africa in arduous conditions. He also delivered a prophecy to David du Plessis ('Mr Pentecost') (1905-1987) that:

*Through old-line denominations would come revival eclipsing all of history.

*Du Plessis would see this fulfilled if he would only be humble and faithful (du Plessis thought this inconceivable due to their being virtually apostate).

Du Plessis preached the gospel in fifty-six countries, but in 1952 disturbingly began a relationship with the World Council of Churches. He also had discussions with Catholic Clergy at Vatican II, 1964. Also their was an audience with the Pope Paul during the fifth session of the Pentecostal-Roman Catholic dialogue.

According to George Stormont, there was another prophecy from Smith:

*First a restoration of the gifts of the Spirit.

*Second, a revival of emphasis on the Bible.

*The combination would bring about the greatest move of the Church in history.

And Then He Was Not; For God Took Him (pp. 194-204)

1939 and WWII ended Smith's campaigns abroad. In his eighties, he would sit immaculately dressed on a bench in gardens above the railway station. In Manningham Park, 1944 Smith suffered severe sunstroke but by Spring 1945 he had made a miraculous recovery.

In March, 1947 after Britain's severest Winter, Smith died at his friend Wilfred Richardson's funeral. True to promise, no knife ever touched Smith's body (no post mortem as performed).

Epilogue (pp. 205-206)

Smith founded no movement, wrote no books, had no official doctrine and seeded the Pentecostal Church of New Zealand.