

I love how history repeats itself

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No, history does not repeat itself. Yes, history is a human construct. Now, if you will all just work with me, take a gander at this longish quotation from the Introduction to *The Meaning of Prayer* (1916) by Harry Emerson Fosdick (pictured here...note the killer vestments). The Introduction was written by [John R. Mott](#). It could have been written last week.

These meditations and studies on prayer are most timely. Never have there been such extensive and such convincing evidences of the poverty and inadequacy of human means and agencies for furthering the welfare of of humanity; never has there been such a widespread sense of the need of superhuman help; never have there been such challenges to Christians to undertake deeds requiring Divine cooperation; never has there been such a manifest desire to discover the secret of the hiding and of the releasing of God's power. Interest in prayer is world-wide. This is shown in the prominence of this subject in addresses and sermons in all lands, as well as by the growing volume of books and pamphlet literature in different languages. The multiplication of Calls to Prayer and of Prayer Circles, and the formation of Prayer Bands and of Leagues of Intercession, constitute similar testimony. Among Christians everywhere, and even among those who would not call themselves believing Christians, there is being manifested an earnest desire to understand what prayer is and to engage more fully in its exercise.

...An alarming weakness among Christians is that we are producing Christian activities faster than we are producing Christian experience and Christian faith; that the discipline of our souls and the deepening of our acquaintance with God are not proving sufficiently thorough to enable us to meet the unprecedented expansion of opportunity and responsibility of our generation. These studies and spiritual exercises in helping men and women to form that most transforming, most energizing, and most highly productive habit - the habit of Christlike prayer - will do much to overcome this danger.

Sound familiar? 95% of Americans are "spiritual" and those books on prayer and spirituality are crowded on the shelves of virtual and physical bookstores alike. We've been here for a very long time. Likely two thousand years or more, but that's another post. It's simplest to say that history is not repeating itself, per se, but that the more things change...You get the point.

I'm working on a sermon for Sunday. I'm preaching about prayer (specifically of the liturgical sort) and Harry Emerson Fosdick's work from almost a century ago has been much on my mind. He delivered many sermons worth remembering. Perhaps his most famous was "[Shall the Fundamentalists Win?](#)" (1922). Another sermon worth knowing is "The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism" (1935). Though he was an outspoken opponent against Christian Fundamentalism, he wasn't interested in letting go of faith. Here's a quotation from the sermon which he delivered at Riverside Church in New York, NY (*Riverside Sermons*, 1958).

...the church must go beyond modernism. We have been all things to all men [sic] long enough. We have adapted and adjusted and and accomodated and conceded long enough. We have at times gotten so low that we talked as though the highest compliment that we could have paid the Almighty God was that a few scientists believed in him. Yet all the time, by right, we had an independent standing-ground and a message of our own in which alone there is hope for humankind. The eternally real is the spiritual. The highest in us comes from the deepest in the universe. Goodness and truth and beauty are not accidents but revelations of creative reality. God is!

Fosdick may have been trying to reign in what had been set loose many years previous. That much is likely. No matter. I'm just sitting here and thinking that it's all so damn familiar. We're still in this place, in this push-and-pull of modernism and faith or post-modernism and spirituality or nihilism and optimistic mysticism. We're still in this place where we know ourselves to be spirit(ual) and we're clamoring (?) for the means to live most deeply into this truth of humanity.

I'm working up a follow-up post, but in the mean, I would love your thoughts on moving beyond modernism...to God.

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