Bosworth Matters
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Todd Bentley, F.F. Bosworth, and the Downside of Some Revival Meetings

By Roscoe Barnes III, PhD
Author, *F.F. Bosworth: The Man Behind "Christ the Healer"*
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Todd Bentley

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If there's one thing that church history teaches us, it is the sobering fact that revival meetings, no matter how riveting or exciting, do not always end in the way they begin. Some, as seen in the life history of F.F. Bosworth, have ended in scandal, church splits, and lasting shame.

This point, which is supported by numerous examples, is what came to mind when I read about another scandal involving Todd Bentley. According to an Aug. 26, 2019 article in the *Christian Post*, Bentley has been accused of 'perverse sexual addiction' and preying on interns. Bentley, who is no stranger to controversy, has claimed to have a healing ministry along with special revelations directly from Heaven. He also boasted of having interviewed the Apostle Paul. In 2008, he was the focus of discussions during revival meetings in Lakeland, Florida.

Bentley's Revival and Scandal

Columnist J. Lee Grady, former editor of *Charisma Magazine*, wrote several articles that were critical of Bentley and his revival meetings. He noted the moral failure of the evangelist as well as his strange doctrine and outlandish ministry claims and practices. In his article, "What I Hope We Learned from the Lakeland Revival," Grady wrote the following:

> It has been four months since Canadian evangelist Todd Bentley fled the scene of Florida's Lakeland Revival amid rumors of a moral failure. When Bentley vanished in August, the crowds thinned, God TV stopped broadcasting services, the meetings eventually shut down and Bentley's worship leader took the popular music of the revival on the road.
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> Meanwhile, many people were left scratching their heads. Some were angry with Bentley for leaving his wife. Some were confused because their faith had been energized during the six-month long experience. Many charismatic ministry leaders defended the revival, saying that it was never supposed to focus on a man. Others blamed Bentley's critics for the revival's demise.

Whether the Lakeland Revival was legit is up for debate. Followers of Bentley would likely say it was a move of God. However, critics would strongly disagree. Bentley and others touted the meetings as a supernatural movement of the Holy Spirit. They suggested it was "the beginning of a worldwide healing revival" according to Grady in his May 28, 2008 article, "An Appeal for Unity in a Divisive Season." Even so, Grady acknowledged everyone in the Pentecostal/charismatic community did not agree with Bentley's claims. "Some say this is the last end-time revival while others maintain it is a demonic counterfeit," Grady wrote. "Cult-watchers and anti-heresy bloggers post Bentley's comments on YouTube as evidence of a theological scandal. Revival advocates respond by posting documented evidence of healings. It all begins to resemble a childish competition."

Whatever one chooses to believe about Bentley and his revival meeting, the fact is, after all of the hoopla, shouting, and media attention, the meetings ended in disaster, leaving a trail of shocking scandals that made national headlines. As noted earlier, these meetings do not always end in the way they begin.

Bosworth's Revival and Church Split

Bentley is not alone as a revivalist who led fervent meetings that resulted in some type of scandal or harm to the church. During the early part of the 20th century, F. F. Bosworth led revival meetings in Dallas, Texas that lasted about 10 years. His meetings attracted some of the biggest names in the Pentecostal movement. Evangelist Maria Woodworth-Etter came to Bosworth's church in 1912 and preached for five to six months. Bosworth, an able writer and promoter, regularly sent press reports about the meetings to newspapers and Christian magazines. Thousands of people from across the United States came to the meetings. Yet, after nearly 10 years, the meetings ended with a church split over the issue of evidential

tongues. I addressed this matter in my doctoral thesis, ***F.F. BOSWORTH: A Historical Analysis of the InfluentialFactors in His Life and Ministry*** (University of Pretoria, 2009):

> When Bosworth began his church-planting work in Dallas, the church was initially affiliated with C&MA (King 2006). However, it later became part of the AG (King 2006; Loftis 1992). Despite his success and growing reputation, Bosworth faced a crisis involving a doctrinal issue that resulted in his resignation from the AG (Sumrall 1995:4; Riss 1988). The AG believed that speaking in tongues was the initial sign that a believer had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Bosworth, however, disagreed and felt compelled to leave the denomination (Bosworth 1918b). The church he pastored eventually split over the controversy (Loftis 1992:10). "After pastoring the church for a number of years, Bro. Bosworth and Bro. Birdsall resigned in April, 1918, because they had accepted the Christian and Missionary Alliance teachings" (Loftis 1992:10). The split was due in part to personal attacks by a fellow minister. According to Sumrall: He received several letters from other ministers saying that he "had no right" to hold credentials with the Assemblies of God because of his nonbelief in evidential tongues. One minister split Bosworth's church and intentionally misrepresented him to the General Council of the denomination and to his congregation. Through all this, Bosworth's spirit still remained sweet and loving (Sumrall 1995:43).

Over the past few years, it appears that Bentley's life style has been anything but holy and exemplary. Unfortunately, based on news reports (including content on social media), his life has presented a pattern of disturbing images and claims that include immoral behavior and extra biblical revelations. I once blogged about him quoting F.F. Bosworth on the topic of healing. While he is apparently acquainted with Bosworth's book, *Christ the Healer*, it may prove helpful if he would also read about Bosworth's integrity, true revival, and all the things that can go wrong when people are misled – and sacrifice truth -- in revival meetings.

Further Reading:

Barnes III, Roscoe. *F.F. BOSWORTH: A Historical Analysis of the Influential Factors in His Life and Ministry* (University of Pretoria, 2009). See here.

King, Paul L. *Genuine Gold: The Cautiously Charismatic Story of the Early Christian and Missionary Alliance* (Word & Spirit Press, 2006).

Loftis, Carrie W. *First Assembly of God Dallas: A History of First Assembly of God- Dallas, Texas, 1912- 1992* (First Assembly of God, 1992).

Riss, R.M. 1988. Bosworth, Fred Francis, in Burgess, S M. & McGee, G B (eds) & Alexander, P H (assoc. ed), 1988. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.* (Regency Reference Library, 1988).

Sumrall, Lester. *Pioneers of Faith* (Harrison House, 1995).

Note: My book, *F.F. Bosworth: The Man Behind "Christ the Healer,"* can be purchased here with a 25% discount. Use the discount code: **bosworth25**.

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