

The Florida ‘Outpouring’ Revival A Melting Pot for Contemporary Pentecostal Prophecy and Eschatology?

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A decade after the neo-Pentecostal revivals of the 1990s a fresh wave of revival, characterised by miraculous healings and evangelism, became identified with what was colloquially referred to as the ‘Florida Outpouring’. Unlike the earlier so-called Toronto Blessing and the Brownsville revivals, that at Lakeland, Florida, was relatively short-lived. It became practically synonymous with the charismatic personality of the healing evangelist, Todd Bentley. This paper considers the Florida ‘Outpouring’ and Bentley’s prophetic role in forging revivalism within the framework of neo-Pentecostal eschatology and thus providing a sense of continuity with past and future revivals.

Pentecostalism has proved to be a multi-faceted and rapidly evolving Christian movement leading to the speculation that it now consists of numerous ‘Pentecostals’ (Robeck 1999). Nevertheless, certain core characteristics remain discernible among the movement’s various ‘streams’. This includes, as a universal mark of both ‘classical’ Pentecostalism and the latter-day neo-Pentecostals (charismatics), the enduring hope of a global revival and the mass conversion of unbelievers before Christ’s Second Coming. This hope was encapsulated throughout the 1990s – a decade which saw a series of revivals breaking out in North America that proved to have global significance, each carrying a notable eschatological narrative. Perhaps the most noteworthy was the well-known revival in Toronto, Canada, which became associated with the so-called ‘Toronto Blessing’ with its controversial range of ecstatic and esoteric manifestations typified by ‘holy laughter’. While the revival in Toronto had been under way for several months, a further revival broke out at an Assemblies of God church in Brownsville near Pensacola, Florida. In turn, these revivals were followed by smaller and frequently shorter-lived sites that Margaret Poloma has referred to as ‘hot spots’ of revival (Poloma 2003: 176-202).

While further revivals in the Western world, even a global revival, were prophesied by many Pentecostals and charismatics in headship positions (especially those within the mainstay cohorts of the movement associated with Toronto and Brownsville), the early years of the twenty-first century proved to be a fallow period, nullifying dominant eschatological speculations. However, beginning in April, and moving into the Summer of 2008, a Pentecostal/charismatic revival of considerable proportions broke out in Lakeland, Florida, seemingly fulfilling such prophetic expectations. Lakeland, as had Toronto and Brownsville, became a global location for hundreds of thousands of ‘spirit-filled’ Christians who pilgrimaged to experience the ‘outpouring’ of the Holy Spirit.

There was much that was integral to the ‘Florida Outpouring’, as it came to be known, marking a continuity with the earlier revivals. Yet it proved to be of a rather different genre. At Toronto the core focus was upon intimately encountering God (Arnott 1998; Richter 1996). Brownsville emphasised the call to repentance (Kirkpatrick 1995). At Lakeland divine healing became the dominant motive, alongside a considerable call to evangelism. While the revival displayed many of the ecstatic manifestations (not to mention the ‘hidden’ esoteric experiences claimed by those who attended, including visions and divinely-inspired prophecies) associated with its predecessors, there were numerous alleged miraculous healings and at least thirty claims to cases of resurrection of the dead. Furthermore, the Lakeland revival was predominantly headed-up by an individual of outstanding personal charisma and whose name became practically synonymous with the ‘Outpouring’: the healing evangelist Todd Bentley.

Prophetically, the fresh revival potentially held great eschatological significance with further ‘Last Days’ outbreaks of revival anticipated across the world as visitors to Lakeland returned with the ‘transferable’ outpouring of the Holy Spirit to their own congregations. In late August, however, the revival was forestalled as a result of the scandal associated with the moral failures of Bentley in his personal life. While the revivals at Toronto and Brownsville finally petered out with the loss of momentum, Lakeland was threatened with a premature demise. Nonetheless, the ‘Outpouring’ continued into early 2009 undergirded by the enduring and integral relationship between revivalism, eschatology and prophecy. By largely developing the work of Margaret Poloma, this paper will explore such a relationship and its implications for what she describes as an independent Pentecostal/charismatic ‘stream’ (Poloma 2003). Before doing so, the central role of Bentley in

lighting fresh revival fires may be briefly overviewed especially in the context of his charismatic/prophetic role.

TODD BENTLEY AND FRESH FIRES MINISTRIES

The concept of charisma can be viewed as one of Max Weber’s key sociological typologies, one connected to the psycho-social nature of authority. Charisma, according Weber, exemplifies the qualities of those who are believed to possess powers of leadership either by means of extraordinary personality traits and/or derived from some remarkable inspiration including a divine source, powers not bestowed upon ordinary people (Weber 1947). Charisma has an origin in an evocation or aura, and those who support the claims of the charismatic personality do so with certainty and passion. Charisma, whether inherent or acquired, is by definition unusual, spontaneous and creative. When acquired by an outstanding personality charisma is typically the result of undergoing some exceptional experience or involvement in practices which are equally extraordinary, characteristically attained through dedicated ascetic activities, and time spent in mystical contemplation or through altered states of consciousness. While there is not the room to fully overview his sophisticated typology at this juncture, we can at least acknowledge that according to Weber, charisma is *relative* and restricted to time and place, and undergirded by a particular cultural context. In short, the charismatic leader will only succeed if the level of commitment to his/her message is supported by a high degree of emotional fervour and receptivity according to the prevailing cultural and historical environment. Moreover, the charismatic personality frequently instigates a prophetic breakthrough, an innovating vision that constitutes its dynamic element in religious change particularly through prophetic utterances and predictions.

Todd Bentley displayed many of the classical characteristics of the charismatic personality within the context of Pentecostal/charismatic prophecy, eschatology and revivalism. While the Toronto and Brownsville revivals were not without their enigmatic leaders,¹ one of the distinctive features of the Florida Outpouring was the centrality of Bentley, his name becoming almost synonymous with the revival. Bentley’s rise to practically celebrity status was not, however, entirely unannounced, given that his ministry was increasingly in demand in Pentecostal/charismatic circles and his reputation preceded him. Born in 1976 in Sechelt, British

Columbia, Bentley by all accounts experienced a disturbed childhood and adolescence. At age 11, after his parents parted, he indulged in illicit alcohol and, four years later, was sentenced as a juvenile delinquent after allegedly sexually assaulting a minor. Aged 17, Bentley was unconsciously hospitalized after an overdose of amphetamines and hallucinogenic pills. His dubious past became the focus of concern for his critics, yet it nonetheless increased his charisma among those who recognised him as a ‘born-again’ evangelist, rising from anonymity for a divinely-appointed ministry.

Bentley is scarcely the epitome of the conventional American evangelist. Short, balding, tattooed and somewhat overweight, he energetically stomps the platform, against the backdrop of a ‘soft’ rock ‘worship team’, wearing jeans, over-sized tee-shirts and paramilitary-style jackets that often proclaim such slogans as ‘Jesus Loves My Tattoos’ or ‘Holy Spirit Special Corps’. During times of revival Bentley’s preference is for a modest trailer rather than expensive hotel rooms. Like other prominent American evangelists, however, he carries a remarkable charismatic persona that has endeared him to many in the Pentecostal/charismatic world and placed him in high demand on the healing ministry circuit.

After an alleged ‘road to Damascus’ spirit-filled conversion experience, Bentley is reported by his ministry as entering ‘an exciting new place of intimacy with the Holy Spirit’ and ‘supernatural encounters with the Lord’.² This included new revelations and the endowment of personal charismatic powers. During this time, the Holy Spirit is understood to have taken Bentley into five distinct ‘seasons’ of encounter with the supernatural and God’s bestowal of Pentecostal ‘giftings’: intimacy with the divine, the prophetic, repentance, healing and evangelism. He subsequently travelled internationally holding church services and crusades in over 55 nations. In addition, Fresh Fire Ministries, which Bentley has headed up since 1998 from his home church, Global Harvest Centre, oversees a Supernatural Training Centre in Abbotsford, British Columbia. It was events at Lakeland, however, that jettisoned him to a central place on the North American revival circuit.

Lakeland is a small but rapidly growing city located approximately midway between Tampa and Orlando. From April, 2008, it became associated primarily with the Florida Outpouring. Leading up to the outbreak of revival in Lakeland, according to the Fresh Fires web-site, Bentley ministered ‘prophetically, corporately and personally....sparking revival fires and equipping the body in power evangelism and healing Ministry’.³ Many of his campaigns involved evangelising meetings that were extended to last from one to two months, continuing on even after he had left

such events. The Lakeland Outpouring appeared to be a climax to these campaigns when Bentley’s visit to the city resulted in him holding nightly meetings, beginning on 2nd April, that carried on into the summer of 2008 with attendance rising from 700 to 12,000.

Bentley’s arrival in Lakeland coincided with a certain anticipation that great things would happen at the Assemblies of God church, the Ignited Church, where he held his early meetings before moving the revival to a larger auditorium close to the city’s airport. The Ignited Church was originally a subsidiary of the now obsolete but once prominent Carpenter’s House Church, founded by Karl Strader, which had promoted itself as a ‘transdenominational church’ in the 1980s. It became one of several sites of the Toronto Blessing in 1993 onwards. Ignited Church was founded and pastored by Strader’s son, Stephen who observed regarding Todd Bentley’s initial meeting that

... the Holy Spirit began demonstrating His power and glory in an unprecedented way. It has become known as the Lakeland Outpouring. None of us knew how long this would last, nor what it would. However, Ignited Church had a vision since the turn of the century to become an International Apostolic Center. We didn’t know that this would happen. Now we know! The Lakeland Outpouring has catapulted our vision forward.⁴

Earlier the Carpenter’s Home Church had encountered its own significant revival or, in the words of Karl Strader, it had ‘experienced a glorious move of God with Rodney-Howard Browne’.⁵ The latter healing evangelist, with others such as Randy Clark, had provided the indirect catalyst of the Toronto Blessing (Römer 2002). Hence, Bentley’s arrival coincided with a localised milieu and expectation of a further revival that he himself initiated.

It soon became apparent that the Lakeland revival had far greater significance than the impact of one particular ministry of a charismatic healing evangelist. Prophecy and expectation of further revivals following those of Toronto and Brownsville provided the context that helped forge Bentley’s acceptance in Pentecostal and charismatic circles. While the Florida Outpouring appeared to hold the promise of a further wave of revival, it certainly marked a continuity with those of Toronto and Brownsville. Bentley’s revival appeared to subscribe to the same eschatological paradigm as those of the earlier revivals. That is, it was widely prophecised - a prophecy endorsed by Bentley himself - that the revivals of the 1990s would be followed by others which would intensify in the ‘End-Times’ before the return of Christ.

REVIVALISM, PROPHECY AND ESCHATOLOGY

The link between Pentecostal revival, eschatology and prophecy has been perhaps most cogently analysed by Margaret Poloma (2002). Poloma commences her survey by first recounting the link between Pentecostal prophecy and eschatology and in doing so quotes the words of D. J. Wilson:

... for most Pentecostals the future determines the present, their view of eschatology governs their view of current events. Their interpretation of prophecy has had a very significant effect on their perception of world historical events and on their political and social response to those events. On a smaller scale their eschatological views have affected their own history by stimulating evangelistic and missionary endeavors (Wilson 1988: 264).

Poloma advances by noting that most Pentecostals are pre-millennial *futurists* who expect the major realization of biblical prophecy to occur in the imminent future. She quotes Pentecostal historian Edith Blumhoffer to the effect that the early Pentecostals leaders worked during the early decades of the twentieth century to mobilize resources ‘for a brief and intense spurt of activity they thought would usher Christ's return’ (Blumhoffer 1993: 4). Put otherwise, revivalism. In the broad Christian tradition revivalism has come to have several distinct meanings (Aune and Walker 2003). However, since the birth of the movement it has meant for Pentecostals the fresh outpouring of the Spirit that they themselves experienced and was ‘itself a fulfillment of end-time prophecy’ (Wilson 1988: 264) and vindication of the words of the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32).

In further exploring the link between revivalism and prophecy Poloma states:

As the present millennium draws to a close, it appears that the prophetic is increasing in importance, bringing about notable differences as theological nuances about prophecy continue to proliferate within the many streams of the Pentecostal movement (Poloma 2002: 170).

For Poloma, prophecy, eschatology and revivalism constitute a worldview that amounts to a curious blend of pre-modern miracles, modern technology, and postmodern mysticism in which the natural merges with the supernatural (cf. Poloma 1989). It is a worldview that not only makes room for the prophetic, but one in which the prophetic is a central element or, according to Roger Stronstad, it offers a different ‘paradigm’ supplying a ‘narrative theology’ (Stronstad 1994 :145). In summary, Poloma insists that ‘underlying the Pentecostal understanding of prophecy is a biblical

hermeneutic which acknowledges the release of the prophetic during the “end-times” (Poloma 2002: 167). Poloma continues

While some Pentecostals join their evangelical and fundamentalist cousins who focus on interpreting the prophetic elements found in the book of Revelation, many more downplay the details of premillennial eschatology that has been foundational to much of Pentecostalism. These believers prefer a more practical, utilitarian and personal experience of the prophetic that is birthed through common experiences of the prophetic and nurtured by prophetic myths (Poloma 2002: 168).

Poloma explains that prophecy, although commonly regarded as involving ‘foretelling’ or ‘prediction’, must be understood in the context of a broader worldview. Those involved in the Pentecostal/charismatic subculture are likely to profess that prophecy, first and foremost, is an action of the Holy Spirit using a human vehicle to speak a divine word. Prophetic revelations may come through visions, dreams, impressions, ‘divine coincidences’ or verbal proclamations:⁶

Pentecostals have taken this stage of religious experience and further developed it to provide a subculture in which hearing the voice of God is normal spirituality. The Pentecostal movement is not only part of a revealed religion, but it is a movement that professes a belief that revelation is ongoing (Poloma 2002: 171).

Poloma utilizes the work of Rodney Stark (1991) which, in turn, resonates with Weberian undertones. Stark describes how mystical experiences apply well to an analysis of prophetic expressions in the Pentecostal movement: ‘Most episodes involving contact with the supernatural will merely confirm the conventional religious culture, even when the contact includes a specific communication, or revelation’ (Stark 1991: 242). For many Pentecostals the prophetic is a personal experience, often confirming some understanding of a biblical truth or some divinely inspired personal insight. As Stark (1991: 244) also notes, however, ‘genius’ often enters in the form of ‘creative individuals (who) will sometimes create profound revelations and will externalize the source of (a) new culture’. For Poloma, this process has occurred within each new Pentecostal wave, including The Latter Rain movement, the Charismatic movement, the Third Wave, and the current revivalism in process around the globe: ‘The prophetic once again is aroused, refashioned, and expanded by an increasingly vocal minority within the larger movement’.

Poloma (2002: 176) points out that the major forms of prophecy found in contemporary Pentecostalism are two forms: (1) a democratized *charism* available to all Spirit-baptized persons and (2) an ecclesiastical *office* that is being restored to Christianity, a conviction that is also integral to restorationist theology. The latter includes restoration of the ‘five-fold ministry’ listed in Eph

4:12-13. Three of the ministries, those of evangelist, pastor and teacher have popularly believed to have already been re-instated. As the second millennium drew close the remaining two, prophet and apostle, were understood to be in the process of restoration in the current move of global revivalism.

Poloma explores the four-level typology of prophetic office offered by Mike Bickle and Jim Goll. Level one, *simple prophecy* constitutes the democratization of the Spirit - an extension of prayer experiences including thoughts that God brings to mind and (less frequently) visions, pictures, or prophetic dreams, and functions to strengthen, encourage and comfort. The second level of *prophetic gifting* has the same function with an intensification of prophetic experiences (including clearer visions, words, pictures, and dreams). It is only with the third level of *prophetic ministry* that prophets in prophetic office are encouraged to give direction and correction to others. Bickle and Goll (1997: 33) describe such experiences as regularly receiving words, dreams and visions, having ‘open visions’ (angelic visitations, audible voices, etc.), and as often including detailed information, such as names, faces, dates, future events. Although the fourth level - that of the *prophet* - has ‘less authority than those who wrote the scriptures’, it functions ‘to provide direction and correction to those in church government, and often leaders in the secular world as well’ (Bickle and Goll 1997: 33).

THE REVIVALS OF THE 1990S

Clearly prophets and prophecy have provided a core component in first foretelling and then confirming and directing the latest wave of the Pentecostal/charismatic revival. Prophecies given publicly prior to the Toronto Blessing and the Pensacola revival were matched with the events, creating a narrative that fed the prophetic enterprises already in motion. A key prophecy surrounding the former starting at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF) was given by Marc Dupont (then of Mantle of Praise Ministries) which singled out Toronto as the chosen city. However, the renowned Korean Pentecostal leader, Yonggi Cho prophesized nearly five years earlier (April 24, 1987) that ‘the last great move of the Spirit will originate in Canada, and....will be brought to the 210 nations of the Earth before Jesus returns’ (quoted in Riss 1987).⁷ Four years later in 1991, Cho gave a prophecy in Seattle that was said to foretell another revival beginning eighteen months after that of the TACF in Pensacola, Florida. This prophecy changed three times,

each time becoming more specific until it identified Pensacola as the city where a ‘great end-time revival’ would break out and spread throughout the world.⁸

Poloma argues that when a public prophecy comes to pass as it did at TACF it becomes both a hope and a model for increased prophetic activity (Poloma 2002: 184). Given the significant role that prophets and prophecy played in birthing and spreading the 1990s revivals, it should not be surprising that prophetic voices continued to direct and redirect their remnants. Complementing the more sensational predictive prophetic words, prophecies (often from unknown local prophets) appeared regularly on listserves and later on scores of websites devoted to revival news. Poloma suggests predictive prophecy which announces a fresh outpouring of the Spirit on particular locations comprises only a small part of prophetic utterances forwarded globally. What makes the selected few especially significant is the role they play in the myths that tell the narrative of revivalism. The accounts of those predictions that came true continue to nurture the belief that more of the same is to come.

Poloma conjectures that while it is not appropriate to debate whether there is any causal relationship between the predictive prophecies proclaiming religious revitalization and the actual events, it is within the realm of social science to note the perceived relationship between prophetic words and revivalism. Amidst the verbal expressions about a soon advent of Christ is the promise of an even more intense revival than that experienced in the 1990s. This revival will usher in a ‘great harvest of souls’ followed by the Second Coming. Poloma quotes the leading prophet Bob Jones:

(God) gave us Toronto bringing back the joy. He gave us Brownsville bringing back the repentance as he did several other things up here to keep you alive to bring you to this point. And now he is after the harvest and everyone of you is called to harvest....⁹

There is a reciprocal pattern to be observed here. Such statements made by contemporary prophets reflect an eschatological narrative. This eschatology continues to stimulate evangelistic and missionary endeavours as it has with earlier generations of Pentecostals.

THE PROPHETIC BASIS OF THE FLORIDA OUTPOURING

While the first decade of the twenty-first century constituted a barren period for Pentecostal/charismatic revivalism in North America, further revivals at least on the scale of

Toronto and Brownesville were expected and indeed prophesied. A number appeared to point, if somewhat vaguely, to a further revival in Florida, and others more specifically to Todd Bentley’s ministry. Prophecies can be found on a number of web-sites. The Unknown Prophet web-site, generally attributed to Wendy Alec, the GOD-TV co-founder and author of Christian fantasy ‘End-Time’ popular volumes,¹⁰ reiterates her prophecy of July 9, 2004.

And now it is to the East Coast of America that I would speak - Cry Out - Cry Out to the East Coast, says the spirit of the living God...this day I declare to you, that even as the East Coast has been targeted in this day and forthcoming hour by the powers and Princes of the regions of darkness - so too I declare to you America that in this coming day and in this coming hour you shall surely see the strong right arm of the Living God rise in the East - that so too the East Coast has been marked with a divine marking from the realms of Heaven itself...so I, the Lord God of Israel has marked you with a sovereign marking for revival...For in these next years and in this next hour, I tell you that the East Coast shall start to burn with the fire of my spirit - for the prayers of my saints and the supplications of my sent ones have not been in vain.¹¹

A second prophecy, recounted on Fresh Fires Ministry web-site,¹² was uttered personally to Bentley on March 8, 2008, and just before the outbreak of revival in Lakeland. It more than hinted at the global impact of the coming revival. The prophecy was given by New Zealand pastor Rob DeLuca of His Way Church, Auckland, at the Downpour Conference of the Gold Coast in Australia:

Todd, I saw a vision, and it's concerning 4 revivals that are going to take to place in the world...I saw a human boomerang flying out of Canada and it hit the nation of England, it hit the nation of Australia, it hit the nation of New Zealand, and it came spinning around...I saw Todd Bentley, you're name on the boomerang, but I knew that it was the Lord showing me that it was you and I saw it fly back around and it came and hit America. But...there was a bit more accuracy to it. It hit the state of Florida. The Lord is showing me that what took place in Pensacola & also what took place in Lakeland with Rodney (Howard Browne)¹³, your gonna bring something very strong to Florida. I see something BIG in Florida... Then I saw the Lord turning you into a human nail, you know, like a spike nail. I saw the hand of God, I saw the Father hit this hammer & it hit you & it went straight into the ground of Florida.

Yet a further prophecy, mentioned by Bentley himself in the context of a coming revival, in conjunction with the prophet and former member of the renowned Kansas City Prophet, Bob Jones¹⁴, was allegedly given by Jones on New Year's Eve, 2007. Although the accuracy is disputed,¹⁵ the story runs that Jones received a divine prophetic message that ‘the third wave is coming’ and that Bentley had asked him what this meant. Jones is believed to have replied that Toronto was the first ‘wave’ of revival, Pensacoloa the second, and that a ‘third wave’, a ‘Wind of

Change’, would constitute a global move of God ‘traveling with signs and wonders all over the world! The third wave is here!’

As a sign that this wave would be released from the North-West, Jones allegedly shared that God had proclaimed to him that in the natural world there would be extreme ‘winds and storms’ out of Canada and the North-West of the USA in early 2008 (a prophecy seemingly fulfilled through the actual occurrence of storms in the North-West at the anticipated time). Jones predicted that these natural winds would be followed by a move of the Holy Ghost, where entire towns would be ‘shut down’ by the power of the Spirit with revival coming as a North-West wind. Jones is reported as prophesying that there would be twelve places (an ‘Elijah list’) where revival would first impact, listed in the order mentioned: Des Moines, Lincoln, Nebraska, Kansas City, Denver, Nashville, Lakeland, Ohio, Charlotte, Albany, Washington, and Reading, California. Significantly, several of these cities are the sites where sympathetic ministries are located. Bentley, is recorded as agreeing with the prophecy stating

We have known for some time that revival was on its way to Albany, and yet when I heard it declared by the prophets, it was a glorious moment. So for Albany and Oregonians, rejoice and get your heart ready.¹⁶

Also mentioned by Jones were countries where the ‘third wave’ of revival were prophesied to impact, firstly England, then Australia and New Zealand.

Apparently, Bentley elaborated on this prophecy which included a message posted on a supportive web-site¹⁷ after the Florida Outpouring had commenced and plausibly the prophecy was given retrospectively:

The third wave has begun! This wave promotes, prepares, purifies, pierces and inspires. We can expect to be changed by this move of God. The year 2008 will be the best of years for Christians and the worst of years for unbelievers, mainly due to their fears about the economy.¹⁸ There are doors now open in the spirit that will not shut! (The) move of the spirit of years ago is here for the second time and it won’t be stopped. This was a major healing move. This current move can be carried to other cities and countries. Wherever people move and are carriers of this glory, it will move, like the ark was moved from place to place.

Two much earlier prophecies that circulated the broad Pentecostal world are also worth mentioning in the context of the Florida Outpouring. One ‘prophetic word’ given common currency in the 1980s and 1990s, but cannot be attributed, was that a future revival would be ‘contagiously imparted; and carried by the nameless and faceless within the Body of Christ’. This prophecy was

often quoted during the Outpouring seemingly because Bentley had emerged from obscurity for a divine global mission. Another prophecy appeared to have particular validity for the Florida revival and was that attributed to Yonggi Cho, who predicted that ‘the last great move of the Spirit will originate in Canada, and....will be brought to the 210 nations of the Earth before Jesus returns’. Earlier, as explored above, this prophecy was given to refer to the Toronto Blessing but seemed to have greater validity to the Florida Outpouring since, unlike the Toronto and Brownsville revivals, Lakeland was televised, with GOD-TV broadcasting a nightly meeting to precisely 210 nations.

CONTINUITY AND DEPARTURE: REVIVALISTIC PHENOMENA

Given that Florida was widely prophesied to be the ‘third wave’ of revival, it might be expected that the Outpouring would display both some of the same characteristic ecstatic phenomena and also be framed within a recognizable eschatological narrative. If the Toronto Blessing was discerned as bringing together a range of charismatic phenomena familiar in Pentecotal/charismatic circles for a decade earlier (Hunt 1995; Richter 1996), the Florida revival appeared to be a melting pot for the range of revivalistic phenomena that had been observable during the Toronto, Brownsville and other revivals of the 1990s, taking them to a greater level of esoteric manifestations. ‘Soaking in the Spirit’, ‘holy laughter’, rigorous body convulsions, ‘blowing’ the Holy Spirit over emotionally-charged audiences, deliverance of demonic spirits, altered states of consciousness and angelical visitations were observed or claimed by Bentley in an ‘open heaven’ when the Spirit descended.

Beginning in 1998, as the Toronto Blessing declined, a new prophetic ‘sign’ began to sweep through a number of charismatic churches in the form of gold dust. This was the so-called ‘Golden Revival’, focusing on gold phenomena of one kind or another and, according to some accounts, the experience of revival gold surfaced when the popular revivalist, Ruth Ward Helfin, reported ‘golden glitter’ on a cancer patient who had earlier claimed a miraculous cure. Within a few months gold dust was being reported in diverse places (quoted in Sheflett 2000). Shortly afterwards claims were made to ‘dental miracles’ where amalgam fillings were reported to turn into gold or silver on the teeth of believers. After seeing ‘dental miracles’ in South Africa, John Arnott, senior pastor of the TACF reported 150 people claiming gold fillings ‘or other miraculous changes in their mouths’.

Claims to divinely gold fillings were fairly frequent during the Florida Outpouring. So were other gold ‘blessings’ as evident in one of Bentley’s ‘visions’:

Here’s what happened. At first I saw heaven open, and as I ascended a ladder into the heavens I saw full vibrant wings and feathers!...and then I saw the angel standing, having a body like a man with six wings. I knew it was the angel of finance....I saw a door called ‘treasure’ and the door was open. Without thinking or considering what to do, I found myself in a treasure room in heaven. The only item in this room was gold coins, and I began stuffing those coins into my pockets until they were falling out. Then, after filling up another pocket, I opened my trousers and started filling my trousers with gold coins. After that, I stuffed them into my suit jacket. I even opened my shirt and started stuffing gold coins down my shirt!¹⁹

While the emphasis on gold blessings marked continuity with earlier revivals, the claimed vision additionally vindicated a fresh departure. The charismatic prophet also brings innovation. Bentley placed a great emphasis on the prosperity gospel and brought it into the ‘melting pot’, thus cranking up a gear the eschatology and theology embraced. He therefore added to much that had been witnessed at Toronto and Brownsville and included teachings deliberately avoided by their leaders. During the Outpouring he unashamedly advanced divine prosperity teachings and in his Lakeland meetings commanded ‘financial breakthroughs’ and even dedicated particular evenings to the subject. This additional aspect resulted from a supernatural revelation: that personal wealth for the born-again believer was divinely sanctioned and that the Church as a whole would come to partake of the riches of the world.

The Florida Outpouring also brought a new emphasis. Although Toronto and Brownsville were not without their physical healing aspects, the Florida revival centred on healing miracles through ‘words of knowledge’. Terminally ill patients were brought to Bentley’s revival meeting for healing, while claims to ‘restorative’ miracles included the divine removal of medical artificial implants of one sort or another. During meetings Bentley would scornfully discard wheelchairs, walking sticks and such as ‘instruments of the devil’.

Bentley’s revival was at one with those at Toronto and Brownsville with its means of dissemination and international dimensions. At Toronto the point of departure was commonly designated to be the TACF situated in an industrial strip mall close to the runway of Toronto’s Lester B. Pearson International Airport. Pilgrimage played a not inconsiderable part in the international dissemination of the phenomena from this site. Indeed, the Blessing came to be known as the *Toronto* Blessing because its followers believed that it was to be found there in ‘major

concentration’. Not that the geographical site of the TACF was itself of great significance. Nonetheless, the disused warehouse that constituted the TACF church could claim to be of considerable relevance given the alleged spiritual manifestations occurring there. Some two million visitors pilgrimaged to the church by 1995 (Poloma 2003: 162).

What became known as the Brownsville revival overlapped with that at Toronto. This revival in Pensacola was a site for the relentless search for signs of revival and became yet another pilgrim centre. The Brownsville Assembly of God (BAOG), a southern old-style Pentecostal church, is located in a deteriorating suburb. Here the language was more about the coming wrath of God and the call to repentance. Yet it was not without its own esoteric phenomena earlier associated with the Toronto Blessing. Throughout the rest of 1995, over one and a half million visitors from the USA and many parts of the world surged to Brownsville for another alleged move of God.

The Lakeland Outpouring likewise became a global site for many and enhanced renewed expectations of world revival. In a very short space of time the Outpouring had ‘gone global’. Visitors arrived from all over the world. Recognizing the potential, Bentley moved the site of the revival from its initial auditorium to a specially constructed ‘tent’ that held 12,000 people. Resituated close to Lakeland airport, the revival became more internationally accessible as Bentley invited visitors from across the nations. He also made his own prophetic utterances that the Outpouring revival would be transferred to at least a hundred US cities, all stemming from his own ‘kingdom party’. His decision to hold evangelising campaigns in several major cities during the revival, and a further planned extensive international itinerary that was not ultimately fulfilled, at least pushed the prophecy in the right direction.

Bentley’s charismatic ‘powers’ could be shared to some measure including the fresh emphasis on physical healing. This meant a certain democratisation of the revival. Rank-and-file believers could not only partake of healing but pass on the ‘anointing’ themselves to their home churches. The anointing could be ‘imparted’ either by visiting Bentley’s revival campaigns or via his web-site or television coverage (viewers being encouraged to touch their TV screens for an ‘impartation’). ‘Wafting’ the Holy Spirit over the assembled during revival meetings, Bentley would typically loudly evoke an impartation of the ‘fire’ of the Spirit: ‘Reach out and grab it! Grab it, grab it! Kabang! Kaboom boom! More Lord, more! Fire! Fire!’ Bentley nevertheless remained the core ‘fountain’ of divine anointing and his ‘impartation’ to others for the miraculous strengthened rather than weaken his personal charisma.

ESCHATOLOGY

There was also an eschatological element to the Florida Outpouring. On more than one occasion Bentley claimed that ‘Lakeland has become an End-Time world revival’. He even saw his revival as a climax of those that had occurred over the previous century, stressing such historical antecedence as Azusa Street and the Welsh Revival. Bentley saw forerunners to his own revival in the ministries of earlier Pentecostal revival leaders and revivalist movements (but not exclusively so): the healing/latter-day revival of the 1950s generally associated with William Branham, the Californian Jesus People movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the Kansas City revival of the 1980s. Other revivals played tribute to included a diverse range such as those of as Jonathon Edwards, Aimee Semple McPherson and Billy Graham. As far as his own healing ministry was concerned, Bentley associated himself with Smith Wigglesworth, A. A. Allen, Katherine Kuhlman, Kenneth Hagin, and T. L. Osborne. In fact, Bentley’s ministry was seemingly inspired by notable others. While Bentley’s revival style is quite unique there are elements of it observably derived from a wide range of ministries that fed into these revivals originating in the USA including those of John Wimber, Rodney Howard-Browne and Benny Hinn. He was also eager to bring a sense of continuity with contemporary revivals identifying with those that have swept Argentina and Nigeria and identified the Lakeland Outpouring as a continuation with those of Toronto and Brownsville.

Bentley advanced the prophetic ministry as a result of times of intimacy with the Holy Spirit which, according to his web-site

....naturally lead (Bentley) into a period of exponential growth in the gifts of the Spirit and the prophetic. As Todd cried out to know God more, he began experiencing many visitations from the Lord - dreams, visions and supernatural visitations.²⁰

Throughout the time of the Outpouring he claimed, as he had throughout his earlier ministry, that God would give him almost instant prophetic sermons out of revelation and messages into what He wished him to do in healing meetings regarding the people who attended, providing insights into their sicknesses or demonic bondages, in short, ‘words of knowledge’.²¹

Bentley also associated himself with the prophetic ministries that had developed from the 1980s. He thus came to embrace the ‘third level’ of the prophetic or *prophetic ministry*. Bentley linked himself to Patricia King of the Extreme Prophetic Ministry who allegedly helped bring him to develop his own ministry, as did other, better known prophets. While there was a continuity

shown by Bentley himself with the broad Pentecostal tradition, further connections seemed to endorse more controversial or deemed heretical antecedence that brought Bentley into prophetic circles.

Bentley developed a close association with Bob Jones, a controversial prophet in his own right. Thus through this connection the Outpouring came to have an indirect connections to the Kansas City Prophets. The KCP began with Mike Bickle, the church he founded (the Kansas City Fellowship), and the prophets who gathered around him during the 1980s, primarily John Paul Jackson, Jack Deere and Bob Jones. The most significant however was Paul Cain who developed his prophetic abilities as a young man during the post-war Latter Day Rain movement of the 1950s while travelling with the well-known healer of the time, William Branham, who had digressed into theological heterodoxy before meeting an accidental death from which his followers expected him to be resurrected. Cain became discredited as a result of his unfulfilled prophecy of ‘End-Times’ revival in the late 1980s, and Jones because of his alleged immoral lifestyle. Bentley’s words endorsed the connection with the latter:

I just spoke with Bob Jones again and he told me several things. First, he was not expecting that the glory would fall this soon. Second, Bob said the angel, ‘winds of change’, is bringing the change NOW, and that this outpouring would break out internationally. He said this outpouring, the very tangible healing anointing, is for the world and would go everywhere. (God told me that every night in the meetings I was to impart it to ministries, and as I write this, several hundred pastors, evangelists and ministries have already come). Third, Bob said, and I agree, we have never seen such notable miracles...Fourth, Bob said that our interns would become ‘doctors’, quickly, and take this to the world, and that our associates are needed to spread the fire.²²

Of all the claims to supernatural experiences it was Bentley’s reference to angelic visitations that attracted the greatest attention from friends and foes alike.²³ Featuring prominently has been one particular angel named ‘Emma’ a supernatural figure discussed as follows with Jones:

Now let me talk about an angelic experience with Emma. Twice Bob Jones asked me about this angel that was in Kansas City in 1980: ‘Todd, have you ever seen the angel by the name of Emma?’ He asked me as if he expected that this angel was appearing to me. Surprised, I said, ‘Bob, who is Emma?’ He told me that Emma was the angel that helped birth and start the whole prophetic movement in Kansas City in the 1980s. She was a mothering-type angel that helped nurture the prophetic as it broke out. Within a few weeks of Bob asking me about Emma, I was in a service in Beulah, North Dakota. In the middle of the service I was in conversation...when in walks Emma. As I stared at the angel with open eyes, the Lord said, ‘Here’s Emma’. I’m not kidding. She floated a couple of inches off the floor... Emma appeared beautiful and young - about 22 years old - but she was old at the same time... She glided into the room, emitting brilliant light and colors. Emma

carried these bags and began pulling gold out of them. Then, as she walked up and down the aisles of the church, she began putting gold dust on people....²⁴

The prophetic revelations outlined above indicate the close connection Bentley developed with the restored office of Prophet. He also legitimated likewise the restored office of the Apostle. During the ‘Outpouring’ Bentley frequently played tribute to apostolic ‘generals’ and prophetic networks of the End Times; ‘The apostles are gathering, the prophets are gathering!’ This not only legitimately his revival and associated it with leading Pentecostal figures of the present, but shrouded it in eschatological significance.

SUMMARY

By the Autumn of 2008 the Florida Outpouring appeared to be on the wane. It might be said that it was the revival itself that was losing momentum: that it was becoming less spontaneous and subject to more structure during revival nights, repeating the established pattern of long periods of worship, followed by testimonies and then Bentley’s appearance on stage to minister to the gathered thousands. There were signs that Bentley was personally facing what might be called ‘revival fatigue’. In short, the demands for his ministry and ‘giftings’ were taking their toll. He began to take periods of rest. He was later to explain during Lakeland revival meetings that he was taking a day off each week to recuperate.

The ‘Outpouring’ had its many detractors. Some were from the established Christian denominations. For instance, an Anglican Bishop in the UK attempted to have Bentley’s visit to Birmingham cancelled. Bentley was attacked for his association with evangelist and prophets as Branham, Cain and Jones. His technique of attempting to cure cancer by kicking tumours out of bodies with his biker boots came under scrutiny, as did episodes of his past including allegations of child abuse. In the end, however, Bentley’s demise resulted from a very human failing: it was announced in early August that he was to divorce his wife who he had hitherto often brought up on stage during revival meetings as a shining example of married life. More revelations followed revealing that Bentley had entered into

...an unhealthy relationship on an emotional level with a female member of his staff.... In light of this new information and in consultation with his leaders and advisors, he agreed to refrain from all public ministry for a season to receive counsel in his personal life.²⁵

As a result of this disclosure Bentley’s international itinerary planned for such places as Kampala, Malibu, Istanbul and Jerusalem was cancelled.

The broad Pentecostalism/charismatic movement had potentially found a new lease of life in the Outpouring after the disappointment of the Toronto and Brownsville revivals in that no global revival followed. The Florida revival was significant, not only because of its global potential but because, set in a developing eschatological and prophetic mould, it calibrated together many of the core elements of earlier revivals and offered a way forward. This is not to say that the revival did not have its own distinguishing features. As noted above, those caught up in the revivals of the 1990s differentiated between that of Toronto where intimacy of God was emphasised; Brownsville where repentance was the dominant motive; and Lakeland where divine healing and evangelism was central. The latter was also distinguished by its greater level of Internet exposure and television coverage via GOD-TV.

The question remains as to whether the hope of future revival in the broad Pentecostalism/charismatic movement has been seriously damaged by Bentley’s demise. The answer is that it probably has not and that the movement will undoubtedly survive the scandal surrounding a single individual despite his considerable personality. The movement can also survive the more serious dynamics of routinization and the dampening down of charisma. The possibility of the routinization of contemporary Pentecostal/charismatic revivals has been brought into question by Martyn Percy (2005). Percy found that routinization and any matter of repairing cognitive dissonance that resulted was not an issue for those involved in the Toronto Blessing. The avoidance of the problems associated with potential routinization was partially overcome by a sense of continuity expressed in a narrative of a particular Pentecostal/charismatic worldview: ‘on-going story of struggle’ and the rhetoric of revival continued (Percy 2005: 167). Interestingly, as the momentum waned it was necessary for the TACF leaders to allude to the great revivals of the past in order to bring a sense of historical continuity. The fallow years which followed became part of the great spiritual adventure in which future revivals were anticipated. Similarly, there is little indication that the demise of the Florida Outpouring has undermined the narrative of even more future revival, ensuring that the intimate relationship between eschatology, prophecy and revivalism will endure.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Including John Arnott, Marc Dupont and Randy Clark at Toronto, and John Kirkpatrick and Steve Hill at Brownesville.
- ² <http://www.freshfire.ca/> (accessed 2/7/08).
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ [www://karlstrader.com/](http://www.karlstrader.com/) (accessed 17/11/08). The inside story of the Florida Revival is recounted in Stephen Strader's recently published book, *The Florida Outpouring: The Inside Story* (2009).
- ⁵ [www://karlstrader.com/](http://www.karlstrader.com/) (accessed 17/11/08)
- ⁶ Here Poloma cites the writings of several prophetic ministries headed by James Ryle (1993; 1995); Marc Dupont (1997); Graham Cooke (1994); Cindy Jacobs (1995) and Rick Joyner (1996).
- ⁷ Senior pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church, believed to be, with a membership of 750,000, the largest church in the world.
- ⁸ new-wine@grmi.org: June 27, 1996.
- ⁹ www.revivalnet.net/prophecy/jones.
- ¹⁰ <http://hubpages.com/hub/Prophecy-and-Revival-in-Florida> (accessed 16/1/09).
- ¹¹ <http://unknownprophet.dynamicone.cc/LatestPropheticWords2.html> (accessed 16/1/09).
- ¹² <http://freshfire.ca/index.php?Act=read&status=prophetic&Id=41&pid=954&bid=915>.
- ¹³ Howard Brownes' ministry, renowned for initiating 'holy laughter', has also been identified as an influence on the Toronto Blessing (Hunt 1995).
- ¹⁴ Elija List Ministries, 'Todd Bentley and Bob Jones 'The Third Wave is Here!' 12 Places for Healing and Revival to Start are mentioned - but THIS TIME IT'S GLOBAL', April 23, 2008, http://www.elijahlist.com/words/display_word/6383 (assessed 23/0/08). Elija List Ministries was founded in the early 1990s by Steve Shultz.
- ¹⁵ A certain amount of confusion seems to exist in respect of Jones' and Bentley's account of this prophecy. See <http://endtimespropheticwords.wordpress.com/2008/04/27/todd-bentley-bob-jones-proclaim-the-third-wave-is-here/>
- ¹⁶ Elija List Ministries, *ibid*.
- ¹⁷ Elijah List Ministries, *ibid*.
- ¹⁸ Several prophecies regarding economic disaster had been prophecies by Pentecostals, charismatic and non-charismatic web-sites since the year 2000. See, for example, 'Woe! To The Money-Loving Christians, Economic Disaster is coming', Bible Prophecy Revealed web-site, <http://www.bibleprophecyrevealed.us/> (accessed 18/1/09). Even before the economic downturn several Christian books have been published on the subject including that by the Church of God minister and self-assigned prophet Ronald Weinland (Cincinnati, OH: the end-time com, 2006).
- ¹⁹ <http://www.reachouttrust.org/articles/deception/ToddB.htm#four> (assessed 2/9/08). Those such as Benny Hinn and Howard-Browne that feed into the Toronto Blessing, came to play down their health and wealth gospel. It had also been denounced by John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement, which TACF had formerly been a part.
- ²⁰ http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/life/The_Florida_Outpouring_With_Todd_Bentley/31710/p1/ (accessed 18/7/08).

- ²¹ This distinctive utilization of a ‘gift of the spirit’ is not unique to Bentley. It is a form of ministry developed by those within the Pentecostal/charismatic movement including William Branham, Paul Cain and John Wimber.
- ²² www.freshfire.ca (accessed 27/8/08).
- ²³ Such claims are also very reminiscent of those of Branham and Cain.
- ²⁴ <http://www.reachouttrust.org/articles/deception/ToddB.htm#four> (assessed 2/9/08).
- ²⁵ The Fresh Fire Ministries Board of Directors, <http://www.freshfire.ca/> (assessed 2/9/08).

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