

Juanita Bynum, Thomas Weeks Finalize Divorce

Both Thomas W. Weeks III and evangelist Juanita Bynum say they are moving forward with their lives and ministries after their public marriage ended June 20.



[] Thomas W. Weeks III and evangelist Juanita Bynum said they are moving on with their lives after their public and turbulent marriage ended June 20, roughly a month before the couple's sixth wedding anniversary.

Bynum said the divorce is "not a sad thing," the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported. "I always said that, 'This too shall pass,' and it just did."

Weeks said he will always have a "special love" for Bynum but is moving on with his life and ministry. "It feels like a new day—a brand-new life, a brand-new time," he told Atlanta media.

According to a 14-page divorce settlement, neither party will receive alimony. Weeks will maintain ownership of his international ministry and Global Destiny Ministries, the church the couple founded in Duluth, Ga. Bynum requested some antiques she had collected and agreed to pay \$40,000 in attorney fees for Weeks. Their bank accounts were divided, and each party will retain ownership of the debt and assets they had before marriage.

"It's an even-handed agreement where they can move on with their lives and each keep what they have," said Randy Kessler, Weeks' attorney.

Bynum and Weeks married in July 2002, nine months prior to a ceremony televised on the Trinity Broadcasting Network that included an 80-member wedding party and 10-piece orchestra. They separated in June 2007, but their troubles burst into national headlines Aug. 21 after Weeks was arrested for attacking his estranged wife in the parking lot of Atlanta's Renaissance Concourse Hotel.

Although Weeks maintained his innocence of spousal abuse, in

mid-March he pleaded guilty to aggravated assault. Weeks, who received three years' probation and 200 hours of community service, said he wanted to protect his wife from further scrutiny. "I wanted to bring closure [to the trial] so that she wouldn't feel that I was trying to make this just a public matter to publicize a whole lot of negative things that would have come out," Weeks told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

During the criminal trial, Weeks hinted that the couple was discussing reconciliation. But when those discussions broke down, Weeks re-released a tell-all book about his marriage titled *What Love Taught Me*. In it he includes chapters with titles such as "I'd Rather Push You Now Than Punch You Later" and "She Wanted to Be the Next Oprah at Any Cost."

In late April, Bynum revealed in a *Divorce Court* interview that she had battled with depression and thoughts of suicide after separating from her husband. Speaking with Judge Lynn Toler, Bynum said embarrassment and the fear of ending her ministry career made her reluctant to talk about her struggles as a victim of domestic violence. "You are trained in the traditional sense of religion to be the person that is always fine," Bynum said. "I found myself trying to live up to that. ... I didn't want to look stupid."

Bynum said she has been hired as a regular adviser on *Divorce Court* and was permanently added to the cast of the ABC Family series *Lincoln Heights*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported.

The case follows the split of another well-known pastoral couple, Randy and Paula White of Without Walls International Church in Tampa, Fla. Last summer, the Whites announced they were ending their 18-year marriage.

Jimmy Evans, founder of the Dallas-based ministry Marriage Today, said both couples' divorces are damaging to the body of Christ because people look to their leaders as examples and base a lot of their actions on what leaders do. "It's just like what a parent does or does not [do] is a model for their child and gives them permission to do the same thing," Evans said.

In Bynum's case, he thinks there is a great deal of sympathy

for her because she was abused. However, Evans doesn't extend that to the Whites, saying he senses "outrage" among many Christians because they didn't identify the reasons for their divorce.

"There's a culture of this among high-profile, charismatic ministers, and they get away with it," said Evans, former senior pastor and now senior elder of Trinity Fellowship Church in Amarillo, Texas. "They don't stop in ministry and don't submit themselves to counseling for reconciliation or restoration. It's devastating to the institution of marriage and the ability of ministers to uphold a standard to their flock."

Atlanta-area minister Cynthia Hale agreed high-profile divorces make her job tougher, but doesn't expect these two to have much impact on churches there. The real blow came last August when both incidents made headlines the same week, she said.

Hale, senior pastor of Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Ga., told her congregation last August that they had to pray for all spiritual leaders who are on the front lines. "This is kind of an aftershock," she said. "I'm not saying it will go by unnoticed, but I think people have pretty much moved on at this point."

Any time there is a scandal involving a minister it makes her job more challenging because people outside the church question what is different about being in Christ, she said. It also forces introspection among pastors, who must examine themselves and ask how they can live out the gospel when they have feet of clay, Hale added.

"We just try to address it as openly and honestly as we can: Here are the realities and God's power is still the greatest power—there's nothing like it," Hale said. "God can do anything and everything, but of course humans have free will and make choices." —**Ken Walker**