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MY PERSONAL WORD ABOUT DR. DAVID HARRELL

By Oral Roberts

It was after I had met with Dr. David Harrell concerning his writing the history of my life as a pioneer in the healing ministry and as founder of the Oral Roberts University, I had for the first time a more open mind to the possibility of trusting a writer and opening my total self and organization to a relationship.

He came highly recommended as University Scholar and Chairman of the History Department at the University of Alabama in Birmingham and was a published historical writer for the university libraries of America.

I thought here’s a man who at least will give both sides of the life of a well known person, including a spiritual leader.

He handed me a copy of his “history of the founding of the charismatic movement,” which had come out of both the Pentecostal
movement and of the historical churches, including the Catholic church, truly an outgrowth of the full cross currents of the Christian church of the 20th Century.

Before our next appointment I read his book and was astounded at the prominent way he detailed the substantial part my ministry had played in the rise and phenomenal growth of this exciting move of God across the entire body of Christ. I didn’t know that much of my efforts were known. I was just happy to have been on both the founding, and more importantly, its formation and development over the years.

So next time, I looked at Dr. Harrell with new understanding. Several writers had previously approached me to do my story but having been “burned” a few times I had withdrawn and never expected anything of a fair nature would ever be attempted about my work and influence on the side of the gospel in my generation.

When Dr. Harrell, sensing my fear, said, “If you agree to allow me to do this book, it will go into all the libraries and public places and be available to those who have a genuine interest in scholarship and achievement.
“Next, I will not “puff you” or try to tear you down. I’ll go by the facts as I find them, no more, no less.”

How he knew that’s what I had been waiting for I didn’t know, but I replied, “You remind me of the detective movie on TV where the leading question was, “Just the facts, Ma’am.”

He smiled. “That’s all an honest historical writer wants.”

Integrity shone through his eyes. I believed him. After consulting with my family and my staff, and some spirited discussion, I told him, “All right, Dr. Harrell, I will trust you. I open everything and everyone to you with no restrictions, including my forebears where I grew up, and I will not read your manuscript before publication. Whether I am what I say I am, or done a great or lesser work than thought, readers of the book can have the first opportunity to make up their own minds on a writer they can trust...for I trust you.”

His book, all of it, named AN AMERICAN LIFE is just what he said he would write: the criticism, the praise, the mistakes, the shortcomings, the failures – without sparing, but also the things beyond my natural ability that any fair minded person would have to say was no accident, no happenstance.
Some things could not have happened except by the integrity of my life and my honesty and integrity at all times; to a clean life in my marriage to the same woman over 40 years at the time, the financial integrity through highs and lows; and giving God the glory while as my mother had counseled me, “Oral, stay little in your own eyes and always obey God.”

Ten years after AN AMERICAN LIFE came out in the book stores, I bought a copy and sat down and read it word for word. A substantial part of it gave in stark detail the detractors’ comments and stands against me, including the Harvard Divinity School saying I was not worthy of being a minister of the gospel, to solid results given from people who had been helped in virtually every walk of life.

Sure, there were parts that cut me like a knife, things I didn’t know about myself or my work, but it was as it should be. No matter how well I had done, I had made many mistakes, had wished I could do many things over, and had to face myself as a mere mortal, not exceptional at all but in one consistent way I knew that any good thing I had accomplished was due to a Higher Power working through my obedience as I understood it.

So, yes, I trusted Dr. Harrell with my life and I would do it again.
I am honored to know you, David, and esteem you as a gentleman and a scholar. No greater historian has been on the scene than you.

Finally, thank you for including me in your new history of the development of religion in America during the 20th century.

I hear you’re retiring. I can’t believe that. Despite a little age, you still have the gift! It won’t stay dormant!

God bless you, my friend and brother.